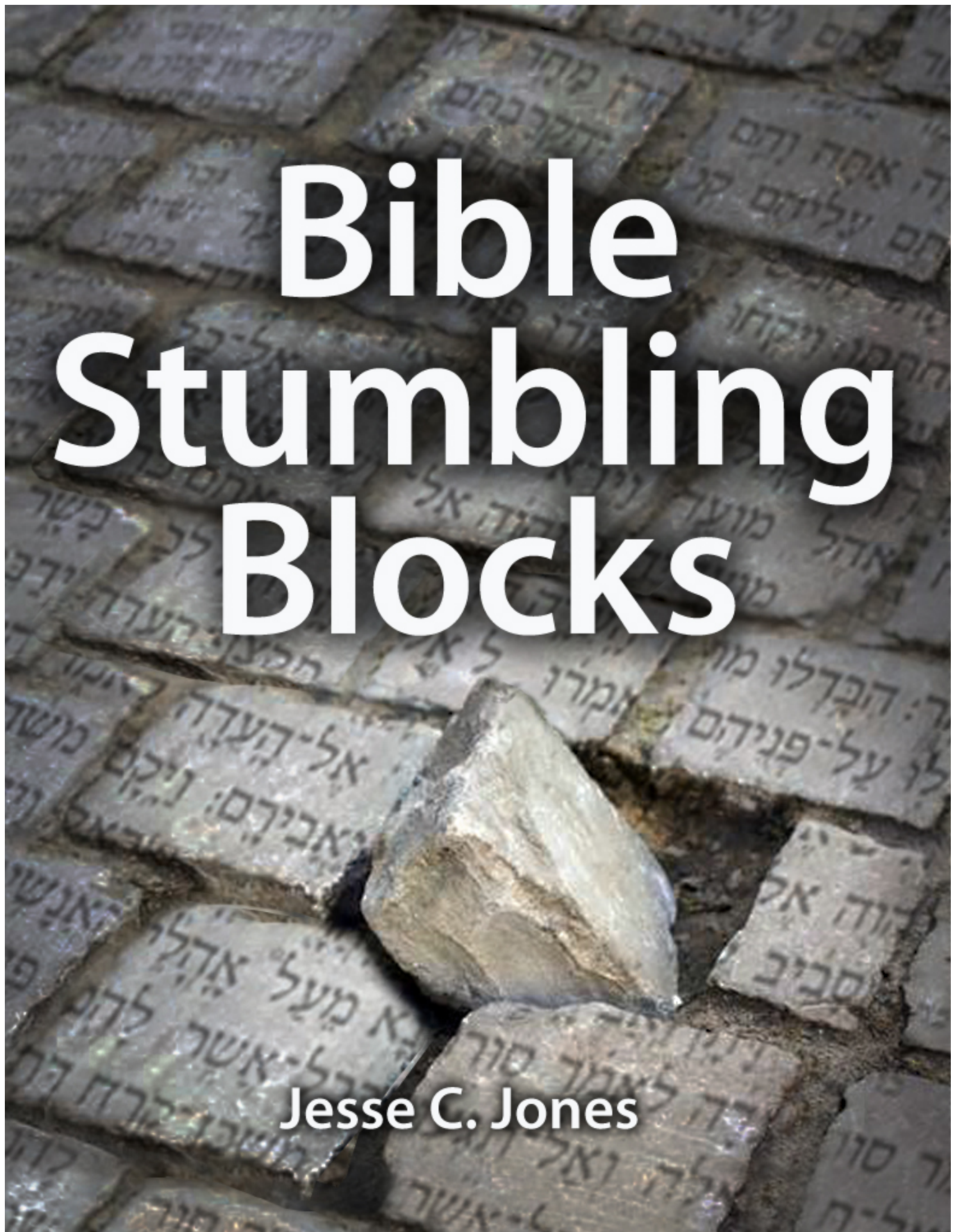




Bible Stumbling Blocks



Jesse C. Jones

About the Cover Art

Cover art for this project was a special gift from Rex Morache.

In life we all encounter a plethora of rocks along the path. They can break the glass or pave the way. It depends on what we do with them.

If you think about the stumbling blocks articulated in this book, you may begin to see that it all depends on your perspective whether a 'thing' you are struggling with is a stumbling block or a stepping stone. Consider a poem by R. L. Sharpe called "A Bag of Tools".

A Bag of Tools

by R. L. Sharpe

Isn't it strange
That princes and kings,
And clowns that caper
In sawdust rings,
And common people
Like you and me
Are builders for eternity?

Each is given a bag of tools,
A shapeless mass,
A book of rules;
And each must make,
Ere life is flown,
A stumbling-block
Or a stepping-stone.

R. L. Sharpe, *Masterpieces of Religious Verse*, edited by James Dalton Morrison (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1948), p. 964.

R. Lee Sharpe was born in the 1870s and died in the 1950s. For years he worked with his father, Edwin R. Sharpe, who owned The Carroliton Free Press and a printing shop in Carroliton, Georgia. In his later years he traveled a lot, mostly freelancing for magazines of the 1920s and 1930s.

There is a wonderful rendition of this poem on youtube by Dame Margaret Natalie Smith (aka Maggie Smith) here:

[Bag of Tools - R. L. Sharpe \(by Maggie Smith\) - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhg2OtLO-qA)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhg2OtLO-qA>

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Preface

When I started writing in the mid-1990's the subjects I began to work on were the ones I felt that God led me to. This all started as my wife of 40-years drew near death from Alzheimer's disease: I had many reasons and considerable time for prayer, even though I was still working. When I look back at that time I realize God began revealing subjects from His Word for me to write about just as 1 Corinthians 2:9-12 promises. I don't know why this came about, other than the fact that I had received the Holy Spirit, and I did love Him: the two necessary requirements identified in this passage of scripture. I began to talk to God about things going on in my life, and He often replied by telling me things He wanted me to do. The first writing task He encouraged me to undertake was a book about the seven churches of Revelation. I resisted this urging for some time by responding that I didn't know anything about the seven churches, and was not equipped otherwise to write anything meaningful on that subject, or any other subject. After this went on for several months I came across a book that had been written on the seven churches, and I felt

that I had my “aha” moment. Much to my chagrin I learned that God has the tendency to turn a man’s “aha” moments into His own “ha-ha” responses.

When I mentioned it to God He did what I should have known that He would do: He enlarged the original writing task, saying He now wanted me to write a commentary on the entire book of Revelation. I felt that if I was ill-equipped to write a book on the seven churches I was even less equipped to write anything on the entire book of Revelation, so I continued to argue even more-so about this. As I should have expected, God eventually prevailed, and I agreed to take on this (to me) overwhelming task, but only if He gave me the guidance I needed to write about things for which I had essentially no knowledge. I don’t remember how long it took, but I finally completed “A Layman’s Commentary on the Revelation of Jesus Christ”; and, as a result, I learned a lot about the book of Revelation, and even more importantly, about God Himself.

I was “hooked” after this first project, for it seemed that God continued to introduce new subjects, and I began to actually anticipate each new task. After writing several books I actually began to feel uneasy if the next project didn’t appear on my radar screen shortly after I finished a project. This has continued on to the present, and I have written ten books on various biblical subjects, with great, and absolutely essential, help from God.

This brings me to the purpose of this writing. I have not received any new assignments from God, so I felt led to review all the things I have written in the past that have not been included in books previously completed. The chapters in this book are about eight different subjects that seemed to me worth collecting into this volume:

- believing or not believing what the Bible says about God;
- Jesus taking our sins;
- biblical forgiveness;
- temptation(s); and
- the rapture/resurrection of God's elect.
- when does God give the Holy Spirit.
- strongholds.
- the old and the new nature (dead or alive).

Although I know that God has led me to write on many different subjects, and has given me guidance and insight in the writing, I do not know if others can, or will, accept this writing as truth from God's Word. I have attempted to accurately interpret what the KJV of the Bible records on the subjects God has led me to, but in many cases what I have written differs from accepted Bible exposition. I hope that readers will be led to check everything I have written

against God's Holy Bible. If they do, this writing will certainly have achieved one of God's purposes in putting me on this path. God has taught me much about Himself during this time, and that may be the purpose He had in convincing me to undertake this task: I have been greatly blessed by doing His will in this effort.

I have used many different reference materials in all the things I have written, including Hebrew and Greek Bibles, and dictionaries and lexicons on both the OT and the NT. My main source is the KJV of the Bible, and scripture references are from the KJV unless noted otherwise.

Chapter 1

Can We Believe What God Says About Himself?

There are many passages in the Bible that seem to indicate that God did not know what certain men were going to do before they actually did it. God may know the plan or purpose man has, but not every instantaneous decision that will be made on the way to fulfillment of that plan (see Ge. 6:6-7; Ex. 4:1-9, 13:17; 1 Sa. 15:11, 35; 2 Ch. 32:31; Jer. 26:2-4; Eze. 12:3). God also frequently changes His mind (Ge. 18:20-33, 27:27-40; 2 Ki. 20:1-20; Jer. 18:7-11, 26:2-3, 13, 19; Jon. 3:10). God's decision to give believers free will implies that He gave up knowing in advance what they might do in any particular situation. The whole idea behind God's testing of believers is to determine what they will do in stressful situations: will they listen to His guidance and act accordingly, or will they choose to respond as they often have in the past (Ge. 22:1-19; Ex. 16:4). To believe that God already knows what believers' responses will be seems to invalidate the test: why proof test something to see if it will withstand the

pressure if you already know that it will. I realize that there is some value in **our** knowing that we have passed a certain test, and that we are prepared to go on to deeper things, but I believe our Maker and Builder is also vitally interested in seeing His chosen stand up to the test and become more like Christ. An excellent example of this in the OT is the test of Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac. Genesis 22:11-12 records what happened when Abraham raised the knife to slay Isaac on the altar: *“And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said Here am I. And he said, Lay not your hand on the lad, neither do any thing unto him: for **now** I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thy only son from me”* (emphasis added). I do not believe the text would have included the phrase *“now I know”*, if God already knew that Abraham trusted and feared Him completely.

The Bible is filled with the failures of God’s chosen (individuals, nations, and bodies of people). In many of these cases God recorded in scripture the great things He planned for them to achieve. To believe that He already knew they would fail seems questionable, at best. God’s selection and later replacement of king Saul is a good example of this. God’s anger was so aroused with the Israelites on occasion that He swore to Moses that He would destroy them entirely. Is it reasonable to believe that God would express such emotion if He

already knew they would do these things? He was so angry at the evil in man that He destroyed the earth by flood, and then repopulated it through Noah's family. Is it reasonable to believe that God knew beforehand that His creation (man), would be so consumed by evil that He would have to destroy him and start over? The Bible records the fact that God changes His mind when the situation warrants it. The stories about Jonah and Nineveh, and Hezekiah's fifteen year lengthened life are good examples of this. In Jeremiah 18:8 and 26:3, God tells Jeremiah that if the people of Israel will turn from their evil ways He will change His mind about the disaster He pronounced against them. We know from this that God can change His mind. In fact, this is one of the purposes of intercessory prayer, as evidenced by the first intercessory prayer recorded in the Bible: Abraham's appeal to God about Sodom and Gomorrah. The OT records many instances in which God expressed disappointment with Israel. The church (Christ's body) has failed in many ways to represent Christ in the present-day world, and I cannot help but believe that God is heart-broken at our failure. After all, He has given us His very self in the person of the Holy Spirit so that we might have power over evil in the world: but evil seems to be winning. Of course, we realize that God knew evil would ultimately flood His creation, for He prophesied about this in the book of Daniel and

other OT prophetic books, in the Gospels, and in the book of Revelation.

Nevertheless, I believe He is grieved, and greatly disappointed when He sees our lack of success in spreading His love throughout the world. The fact that God's agape love is greater than evil makes our failure even more inexcusable.

Psalm 139 is probably the most informative single source in the Bible regarding God's foreknowledge about our thoughts and actions. I would like to suggest an interpretation of this Psalm that recognizes God's omniscience, and conforms to the relationship He established between Himself and man. God clearly knows our heart better than we ourselves, thus He knows the motives for our actions which we often do not clearly perceive. He also knows when we act: our *downsitting* and our rising up. He is aware of our thoughts, so we cannot escape His oversight when we are tempted to entertain some lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, or pride of life (1 Joh. 2:16). He has a plan for the life of every believer, and He chastises and corrects us when we stray from the path. He knows us better than we know ourselves and thus, He is aware of what we are likely to do, or not do. He hears all the words that come from our mouths, and we know that what comes from our mouths is really coming from our hearts. The one thing I see here that He seemingly does not know for certain is what action we will, or will not take, based on the guidance He provides

through the Holy Spirit, and the worldly influences that drive our will. He offers us guidance to do the right thing, but we must act on it (Ph'p. 2:13). We may have a thought or an idea about something (which God will know), but in many instances we fail to carry it to fruition, or we may act in an entirely different and unexpected manner, with a purpose or aim not previously thought out. I believe that these are the things God does not know until we actually carry them out through action: they are spontaneous. Webster defines the word spontaneous as, "acting in accordance with, or resulting from a natural feeling, impulse, or tendency, without any constraint, effort, or premeditation". In other words, these are actions that we do not think through before we take them, or actions for which we do not follow our plan of thought. Until a thought or action "exists" it has no reality, and I do not believe that God concerns Himself with unrealities.

The definition of faith, given in Hebrews 11:1 may help in understanding this philosophic concept: things hoped for are brought into reality through faith. If we are hoping for something serious with great intensity it draws God's attention. If the thing hoped for is consistent with God's plan for our lives He will provide faith (persuasion), which results in belief, and the thing hoped for will be realized. The frivolous things hoped for never come into

God's view, but when the importunity level reaches the threshold, God's interest focuses on the need, and responds appropriately. Not always in accordance with our desire, but always better in the long run.

To return to our example of Abraham, I believe that God was reasonably sure that Abraham would act as he did, and be totally obedient. God knew Abraham's ways and his thoughts, so He would have expected him to sacrifice Isaac on the altar; however, until Abraham raised the knife, and was poised to slay Isaac there was a slight chance that he would change his mind at the last moment. Abraham was certainly overcome with grief, and if he allowed his personal emotions to guide his action, he could easily have withdrawn the knife and cried out to God in despair. When the angel of God said "*now I know ...*", He was recognizing the fact that Abraham had totally submitted to God's will, and this was what He was looking for: a man that would be obedient even unto the death of his only promised son, a man that would do the Father's will (desire). This entire story foreshadows the crucifixion of Jesus some 1900 years later, and gives us some insight into how God the Father felt about the crucifixion of Jesus.

There are many examples supporting the above argument throughout the Bible, some possibly better than those mentioned here. Those who assume the

“anthropomorphic” manner of interpretation of the Bible believe that God caused it to be written in human terms so that we could fully understand and identify with the text. Anthropomorphism comes from two Greek words: *anthropos* (man) and *morphe* (form). Biblical anthropomorphisms refer primarily to God, who (in truth) may not exhibit human characteristics. Thus, it is assumed that God caused the Bible to be written depicting Himself with human characteristics, so that man could identify with the events described therein. Thus, when God says that he changes His mind, repents, exhibits surprise, sorrow, anger, grief, disappointment, or any other expression or feeling reflecting something He did not previously know, He is being factitious: “not natural, genuine, or spontaneous; forced or artificial” (Webster’s New World Dictionary of American Language). This is a very difficult concept for me to accept: I cannot believe God would describe Himself falsely in the Bible, even for what might be seen as a valid reason. In fact, I would argue that the Bible uses terms like the above to accurately depict God’s feelings, emotions, lack of knowledge, etc. We are made in His image; thus, the characteristics we exhibit are patterned after His own: He made us like Himself, and we have no valid reason to assume otherwise. Tim Challies’ book “The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment” says this about truth, “God is the source of truth. We know of

truth and we know of God through the Bible. The Bible was given to us to guide us to Jesus Christ, and the Bible is a book that speaks primarily of his work. We know the Bible is true because it is the revelation of God, who is true and is unable to lie. There can be no imperfection in the Bible because there is no imperfection in God.”

The story in Genesis 6:5-7, about God’s grief in seeing the wickedness of man provides one of the many examples of the difficulty I have in accepting Biblical anthropomorphism. In this passage God repents of His decision to create man and decides that He will destroy him, as well as the beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air. But Noah found grace in God’s eyes, and God saved Noah, his family, and two of every living thing on the earth. Here, God repents (feels regret and dissatisfaction over past action) and decides to destroy man and beast. Then He changes His mind and decides to save Noah and his family, and two of all living creatures. Does it make any logical sense to assume that God knew all along that mankind was going to think evil continuously, and that He would think about destroying them, and then change His mind and save a remnant? I believe that God really felt regret, actually made a decision to destroy man and beast, then felt compassion and love for Noah and his family, changed His mind, and provided a way of salvation. If Biblical an-

thropomorphism is correct in leading us to believe God did not really experience these feelings He could have saved a lot of words in narrating this story. In his book “Escape from Reason” Francis Schaeffer coined the phrase “true truth” to describe the authenticity of the Bible. He maintained that the Bible does not contain exhaustive truth, but the “true truth” of the Bible allows us to know true truth about God and man. Anthropomorphism insists that the “true truth” about God provided in the Bible (especially in the OT) is not really true.

To consider this logically it comes down to this: either believe that the Bible uses fallacious characteristics to describe God’s thoughts, feelings, and actions (especially in the OT); or believe that the thoughts, feelings, and actions attributed to God are “true truths”. To believe the latter we must accept the fact that God’s omniscience does not include actions or thoughts that have not occurred, nor been thought of, and thus have no reality. Of course, we know the Bible contains many scriptures about future events: the book of Revelation is a prophecy entirely about the last seven years of Satan’s rule on the earth. But we know any commitment made by God will always be fulfilled, whether it be a covenant, a pledge, a prophecy, a plan, etc., for His promises are always “*yea and Amen*” (Ro. 15:20). Isaiah 46:9-11 says, “. . . *I am God, and*

there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: . . . I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.” Obviously God knows all the future events that He has committed Himself to by prophecy, covenant, oath, etc.

With the knowledge and wisdom of God He knows that our world is headed for disaster, and He has shown us His plan for dealing with it in the book of Revelation. The need for God to send His only Son, Jesus Christ to die for our sins, and the church's failure to continue the work of Christ (M't, 25:31-40; Lu. 4:18-19), after His death and resurrection, have broken God's heart, I'm sure. He knows man's heart, and is well acquainted with our shortcomings, so He knows that He will have to cleanse the world of its filth for the second time. But He made provision for those who are in Christ, for He has promised to take believers out of the world before He pours out His wrath (1 Th. 5:9; Re. 16:1-21). He also knew that His plan would require the death of Christ: He knew this when He sent Jesus into the world (Joh. 8:29, 42). At the same time I believe it when He says He didn't know, that He repents, that He hates evil, that he changes His mind, that He is a jealous God, that He feels agape love, that He can be angry, etc., for we have those same feelings. He has these emo-

tions just as we do: after all we are made in His image. The Theological Word-book of the Old Testament by Harris, et. al., says that “God’s image obviously does not consist in man’s body, which was formed from earthly matter, but in his spiritual, intellectual, and moral likeness to God, from whom his animating breath came.”

In talking to several people about this subject after this chapter was originally written, I realize there is another way of looking at the Bible’s description of God’s feelings and actions, especially in the OT.. Some with whom I have discussed this maintain that they have no problem accepting as a fact that God describes His true feelings and actions in the OT, and yet, is fully omniscient, knowing even thoughts and events that have no reality, are not yet planned in any one’s mind, and may never occur. This is obviously in disagreement with basic logic, but I think it is fair to say that those who believe this way feel that God will clear up any confusion in this regard when they meet Him in heaven. This raises a question: “Is God constrained to operate within the laws of logic that control the actions of mankind?” I think the answer to this question is obvious. After thinking this whole subject over I realize that I probably felt this way myself before I began to seriously consider this question. I believe this describes most Christians: they haven’t really considered the dissonance

raised when ascribing feelings and lack of knowledge to God on the one hand, and believing in His total omniscience on the other. I'm can't say there is anything wrong with this if the conflict doesn't raise any confusion in your mind.

Chapter 2

How About Sin?

What is Sin?

Sin is a most difficult word to understand. Those who tend to minimize the seriousness of sin may opt for the definition that says sin is “missing the mark”. At the other end of the spectrum you might find fire and damnation preachers such as Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), who would probably have defined sin as “red-handed mutiny against God”. Edwards preached one of the most powerful sermons of all time entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”. Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language gives the definition of sin as: “The breaking of religious law or moral principle, especially through a willful act”. The Hebrew word interpreted as sin in the OT is *hata’*, which is the root word used to mean miss, miss the way, sin, incur guilt, forfeit, purify from uncleanness. This word is seldom used in the OT, but five derivatives meaning sin, sinners, sin or sinful thing, sin or sin offering are used with some frequency. The Greek word *hamartia* is used to define sin in the

NT. “The literal meaning of this word is ‘a missing of the mark’, but this meaning is largely lost in the NT, where it is used to mean: a principle or source of action, or inward element producing acts; a governing principle or power; a generic term that includes concrete wrongdoing; and a sinful deed or act of sin” (Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words). The NT use of this word conveys the meaning of a “course of sin”, or “sin nature” as opposed to the OT use of derivatives of *hata*’ as “acts of sin”.

I believe the difficulty in grasping a clear understanding of the word sin comes down to the fact that we tend to appropriate a meaning most favorable to the lifestyle we have adopted. God made it relatively easy to identify temptations to sin that come our way: 1 John 2:16 says, “*For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.*” When believers are faced by a decision in regard to questionable acts we usually resort to some excuse such as: 1) this is not really a sin since it not identified as such in the Bible; 2) my intent in doing this is not to sin; 3) the Bible guidance on this is obviously for extreme cases (M’t. 5:29); speaking out for Christ wasn’t appropriate; 4) God doesn’t expect me to be perfect (M’t. 5:48), 5) he is not really my neighbor; 6) I don’t really have the time or money; ad infinitum. I think there are three warning signs that can be relied on to

help us determine when an act or thought is considered sinful by God: 1) the Bible is God's Word, and it is absolutely the most reliable resource for defining the boundaries of sin; 2) the conscience of believers **into** Jesus Christ have been cleansed by His blood (Heb. 10:22), and thus provide a valuable check on sinful acts and thoughts; and 3) the believer **into** Jesus Christ is both **in** Christ, and has Christ **in** him (Joh. 17:21-23), thus Christ is with him in **all** the actions and thoughts to which he is enticed. I find that these last two warning signs are very helpful in my life.

Sin and the Cross

Jesus took the sins the believer committed during the time they were under the influence of their sin (Adamic) nature when He died on the cross. In this He fulfilled the OT ceremony of Atonement: when the Israelites' sins were cast on the head of the scapegoat, and it was led into the wilderness to die. From this we might be led to believe that our sins were cast on Jesus before He was arrested, tried, condemned, and led to Golgotha, which represented the wilderness, to die. However, this seems doubtful in view of the many things (healing of Malchus' ear, His encounter with Pilate, the beating and ridicule He received, Pilate's attempt to release Him, utterances from the cross, etc.), that occurred following Jesus' prayer time in the Garden of Gethsemane. In trying

to resolve the question as to when Jesus took on our sins two events stand out that give us some guidance. While Jesus was on the cross darkness covered the earth from 12 PM until 3 PM. Jesus cried out at that time “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” According to the Bible, when God does something momentous on earth He often marks that event by causing the sun to darken. The sacrifice of God’s Son in taking on this burden of sin was possibly the most important event that ever occurred, and it would certainly warrant some notable action by God. At the end of the three-hour period of darkness Jesus cried out as a result of what we surmise was the Holy Spirit leaving (forsaking) Him. If this was the time when the burden of sin was placed on our Lord this would also be the time when He **became** sin (1 Pe. 2:24; 2 Co. 5:21). The Holy Spirit left Him at this time, for God cannot behold evil, neither can He look on iniquity (Hab. 1:12-13). His pure and unsullied conscience undoubtedly received the guilt associated with that sin, and His godly nature was replaced by a sin nature. He had to suffer all these afflictions so that believers could be born again and conformed to the image of Christ. Specifically, this is what Jesus Christ does for sinners as they by saving faith join Him on the cross:

1. He took all their past sins by washing and shedding His blood for them (Eze. 36:25; Joh. 3:5; 13:8, 10; 15:3; Heb. 10:22).

2. He replaced their sin nature with His own godly nature (Eze. 36:26; Eph. 4:21-24; Col. 3:9-10), thus providing a defense against future sins.
3. He removed the guilt of past sin from their consciences (Eze. 36:26; Heb. 10:22), thus we can go to God directly for prayer and guidance.
4. He provided the sacrifice for sins committed after salvation (Eze. 36:27, 1 Joh. 1:7-9), but we must confess our sin, and see sin as God sees it (1 Joh 1:9).
5. He gave the Holy Spirit as comforter (Eze. 36:27, Joh. 14:16) to guide and correct us when we do succumb to enticements.

The Power of the Blood

The OT story of the release of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt as a result of the final plague is very symbolic of our “release”, or forgiveness of sins by the shed blood of Jesus. God instructed the Israelites to paint their doorposts with the Passover lamb’s blood. He did this to protect their firstborn from the death angel, who *passed over* (exempted them from the plague) when he saw the blood. In the same way Satan must *pass over* us when He sees the blood of Jesus “painted” on the doorposts of our hearts. The Lord’s Supper was ordained by Jesus for this very purpose. When we take the wine during the Lord’s Supper we symbolically renew the blood on the doorposts of our hearts, received when we first believed **into** Christ. When Satan sees the

blood he passes over just as the death angel did in Egypt during the first Passover. Of course, we must participate in the ceremony worthily (1 Co. 11:27), recognizing that the bread and wine represent the very flesh and blood of Jesus that produce His life within us (Joh. 6:53-58).

Sins of the Believer

I now want to expand on what happens within us when we become believers, when we receive this wonderful blessing that Christ died for. Romans 3:23-25 says, *“For all have sinned, and come [fall] short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past [because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime], through the forbearance of God.”* Bible expositors do not agree on the interpretation of this passage of scripture. The main point of disagreement is the phrase relating to past sins: some argue that this refers to sins of the OT saints that occurred before the advent of Christ, while others hold that this refers to all past sins of Jews and Gentiles alike, before they receive salvation. To me the latter interpretation seems most logical: the blood of Jesus expiates our past sins and we are pardoned by God through the propitiation of Jesus Christ. The word “propitiation” relates to the place (mercy seat) in the Holy of Holies

in the Temple where God met with the High Priest on the day of Atonement to expiate the sins of the Jewish people. In this passage this word refers to the reconciliation of God with those whose sins were cleansed through the blood of Christ.

After this believers essentially have a clean slate with God, they are innocent but not holy: they are totally free to choose between God's will and the worldly way they have known in the past. But what about sins believers commit after they have been born again? We know there are several scriptures that state that Christ died for the sins of many, as well as those that state that He died for "us", and for "all". Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible argues that any confusion here can be explained by the fact that Jesus died for all sins, every act of sin, and every type of sin, but only those who receive salvation through faith in the blood of Christ can claim access to this forgiveness. We also know that in addition to our individual sins, Jesus took our sin nature when we joined Him on the cross. Thus, as a born again believer we no longer have a sin nature, so we are not by nature a sinner, i.e. we do not have an overriding tendency to sin. When a believer sins it is not a result of his/her nature, we do not have a habit of sinning. Christ has already died on the cross for whatever sins we commit; therefore, we need to go to Him with repentance (feeling

guilty and contrite), and confess our sin: He is faithful and just to forgive our sin (Ac:3:19; 1 Joh. 1:9). Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible says: "A man that truly confesses his sin is one that the Spirit of God has convinced of it, and has shown him its exceeding sinfulness, and filled him with a godly sorrow for it." I have also heard that the word "*confess*" in this verse carries the implication that we agree with God's assessment of the sin, and determine to turn in the exact opposite direction when confronted by this temptation in the future.

It is absolutely necessary to accept the forgiveness of sins provided by Jesus' death on the cross to become a believer. I recently came across a statement relative to this that I believe to be true, although I cannot find a Bible scripture that says it exactly: "The man who has not accepted his own forgiveness cannot extend forgiveness to his brother". We know the Bible says that when we fail to forgive, God cannot forgive us (M't. 6:14-15). This is a very important principle, for there are many believers that seem to be unable to forgive others for offenses that occurred prior to their coming to Christ. Also, some have difficulty accepting forgiveness for their own sins which, from this scripture, would seem to keep God from being able to forgive them. This is not a case of God refusing to forgive, but actually being unable to forgive. If we refuse to accept forgiveness for our own sins we are basically refusing to believe in the efficacy

of the blood of Christ, and therefore, cannot be cleansed: a requirement for salvation (Ti. 3:5).

Can we be perfect?

I have long deliberated over the meaning of scriptures such as Matthew 5:48 and Ephesians 4:13, that seem to indicate we should be or become perfect. What bothered me about this is the many scriptures that mention believers sinning, and never totally able to put sin out of their lives. After studying this subject I was surprised to discover that the Greek New Testament (GNT) does not use the word “perfect” in Ephesians 4:13. In Matthew 5:48 the consensus seems to be that the word “perfect” is limited to that level of perfection in God’s love that mankind is capable of manifesting. In considering this word as used in the Bible I could find no justification for the understanding that man can be perfect as God is perfect. The common meaning in both the OT and NT of the word “perfect” seems to be that of being “complete”, with reference to a single trait or characteristic.

The observations of Oswald Chambers in *My Utmost for His Highest* on the subject of sin, and our responsibility in dealing with it in our lives, is most helpful to me. I have selected some pithy comments from his analysis on vari-

ous scriptures below in the hope that they may offer guidance and clarification to others in their walk with our Lord.

Galatians 2:20 - “What Our Lord wants us to present to Him is not goodness, not honesty, nor endeavor, but real solid sin; that is all He can take from us.”

2 Corinthians 5:10 - “The penalty of sin is confirmation in sin.”

Romans 6:6 - “Am I prepared to let the Spirit of God search me until I know what the disposition of sin is - the thing that lusts against the Spirit of God in me? Then if so, will I agree with God’s verdict on that disposition of sin - that it should be identified with the death of Jesus?”

Isaiah 53:3 - “If sin rules in me, God’s life in me will be killed.”

Isaiah 6:5 - “A man will say easily--‘Oh, yes, I know I am a sinner’; but when he gets into the presence of God he cannot get off with that statement. The conviction is concentrated on - I am this, or that, or the other. There is never any vague sense of sin, but the concentration in some personal particular.”

John 3:9 - “This scripture does not mean that we cannot sin; it means that if we obey the life of God in us, we need not sin.”

2 Corinthians 5:21 - “Sin is a fundamental relationship; it is not wrong doing, it is wrong being, deliberate and emphatic independence of God.”

Chapter 3

Biblical Forgiveness

“But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your [heavenly] Father forgive your trespasses”. (Matthew 6:15)

When I originally began this study on forgiveness I made the mistake that many others make regarding this subject: thinking that I understood the meaning of the biblical word “forgive”. I have even less excuse for this than other expositors of God’s Word: as an engineer by education and experience I am very sensitive to the need to understand the details when trying to solve any engineering system problem. I failed to realize that this fundamental rule of engineering also applies to trying to understand difficult biblical principles. Consequently, I started writing without having a thorough understanding of the meaning of the biblical word “forgive” (or “forgiveness”). I became aware of my oversight when I read a book entitled: “From Forgiven to Forgiving” by Jay E. Adams. This book provides a very detailed explanation about individuals

learning how to forgive one another God's way. I would recommend it highly for anyone wanting to learn more about biblical forgiveness.

Having learned my lesson about the need to understand the details regarding any biblical subject you expect to understand and clarify, I want to provide what I believe to be a proper biblical understanding of God's intent regarding the believer's need to forgive others, including brothers and sisters in Christ, as well as those outside the body of Christ. In doing this I need to start by looking at the use of the words "forgive," and "forgiveness," in God's Word, the Bible.

In the NT we first encounter the word "forgive" in Matthew 6:12: *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive [also have forgiven] our debtors."* The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised by Harold K. Moulton defines the word "*debt(s)*" in this verse as: "a delinquency, offense, fault, or sin." Vine's Complete Expository of Old and New Testament Words indicate that this word means "(a) literally, of that which is legally due, Romans 4:4; (b) metaphorically, of sin as a 'debt,' because it demands expiation, and thus payment by way of punishment, Matthew 6:12." Romans 4:4 says, *"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt"*. Since Matthew 6:12 is included in the pattern of prayer given to us by Jesus Christ, we infer that the word "*debts*" as used in this verse refers primarily to sins (metaphorically), for which we are asking God to forgive by

His grace. We will discuss this interpretation when we turn our focus to Matthew 6:14-15. However, I want to briefly consider what the Bible teaches in regard to monitory debt.

Monitory Indebtedness

Teaching about monitory debt and debtors in the Bible is found in Proverbs 17:18, 22:26-27; Ezekiel 18:5, 7; and Matthew 18:23-35. The passages in Proverbs warn against making yourself responsible for another person's debt, and against striking (shaking) hands to consummate any monitory transaction. Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible comment on Proverbs 17:18 says, "A man void of understanding striketh hands, . . . with his friend's creditor, and becomes surety for him; and thereby acts a very unwise part, and shows himself to want understanding, by taking such a step, which may prove the ruin of himself and family: for though a man may and should love his friend at all times; yet he is not obliged, under a notion of friendship, to injure himself and his family, or to run the risk of it; if he does, it is a plain case he wants wisdom and discretion." Ezekiel 18:5, 7, describes a just man as one that treats his debtors kindly by restoring needed property provided as collateral for a loan; and Matthew 18:23-35, records a parable given by Jesus that describes a wealthy lord who forgave a servant's large indebtedness, but then reversed his decision after that servant

refused to forgive a small debt owed him by a fellow servant. The lord was “wroth”, and delivered the first servant to the “*tormentors*” for not showing compassion to his fellow servant.

Luke 6:32-35 also mentions lending by asking several questions: “*For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if you do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies and do [them] good, and lend, hoping for nothing again [never despairing]; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for He is kind to the unthankful and and to the evil.*” Gill’s comment on this verse says the meaning is: “that such who from principles of grace, and with right views do such acts of kindness and beneficence to their fellow creatures and Christians, shall be made manifest, and declared to be the children of God; since they will appear to be born of him, and made partakers of the divine nature, and bear a resemblance to him, by their imitating him.”

We have a somewhat mixed message from God’s Word on the subject of lending money to either friends or “enemies.” I hope to clarify this somewhat by the personal experiences described below:

Several years ago I loaned money to two individuals and one couple. One of the individuals and the couple (who were not close friends), subsequently failed to meet their agreed to commitments to repay the loan. The other individual was a close, personal friend, who needed a significant amount of money, but was probably least able of the three to repay the loan. After having had experience with the first two, I gave my friend's request some serious thought. As I considered his need, which was related to sending an adopted son with severe conduct problems, to a distant training program to hopefully improve his character, I began to reflect on the fact that if my friend never paid me back, our friendship was worth more than the money he needed. I loaned him the money and sure enough, over the next several months, he paid back every cent he had borrowed.

The individual and couple mentioned above were not personal friends, although they were certainly not what I would call enemies. I do not feel that I loved them in the sense that God refers to above: they were friends, but not bosom friends. This kind of (agape) love, is best described in 1 Corinthians 13. I fully expected repayment according to the schedule they themselves proposed when the two loans were made. When they defaulted my feeling for them was certainly not one of love, nor was it hatred. Obviously, I cannot ex-

pect God's "*reward*" here since I failed on two accounts: lack of love and expecting repayment. However, I do not believe God considered my actions sinful: neither of these loans involved interest and they were helpful to the two debtors to meet needs they had at that time. Since the couple were members of the body of Christ, I tried to follow God's guidance for dealing with a brother in Christ who trespasses against you (Matthew 18:15-20), but I was not successful in "*gaining thy brother*."

The individual who failed to repay me was a distant relative to my wife, and I did not know her well. She had borrowed money from me one time before, and I did not have any reason to think that she would default this time. She lived some distance from where I lived, but we met at a family reunion and she paid me a little less than half of what she owed. I complemented her, and told her that God would bless her for returning what I consider to be His money. She never paid another cent of what she had borrowed, and I did not follow God's guidance by trying to collect, due to her distant location, and my lack of knowledge about her spiritual relationship with God. In this case I believe God would advise against granting the loan.

For the loan to my friend I did what God expects, and did not necessarily expect repayment. According to Luke 6:33, I should not expect "*thanks*", since

I loved my friend, and he loved me. However, I do admit to some relief when he paid me back.

In today's business world we commonly borrow and loan money bearing interest. The Bible doesn't have anything good to say about charging interest on loans, but in today's world I do not think God would consider such transactions sinful; however, God always looks on the heart of man, and if you mistreat your debtors with a mean and spiteful heart (charging excessive interest, being abusive and unkind, etc.) you are likely to find yourself in serious trouble with God.

Forgiving Trespasses

Philip Yancy, in his book entitled: "What's So Amazing About Grace" has this to say about forgiveness, "In the final analysis, forgiveness is an act of faith. By forgiving another, I am trusting that God is a better justice-maker than I am. By forgiving, I release my own right to get even and leave all issues of fairness for God to work out. I leave in God's hands the scales that must balance justice and mercy." He goes on to say that he never finds forgiveness easy, and only rarely does he find it completely satisfying. Most of us would probably agree with much of what Yancy says in his assessment of this difficult act. Jay Adams in his book entitled "From Forgiven to Forgiving," describes forgiveness

as a promise. I have also heard that forgiveness is a decision. It may be that all of these various definitions in some way describe what forgiveness is, but I am going to offer another way of describing forgiveness as being a covenant: a binding and solemn agreement between two or more individuals, parties, etc. to do or keep from doing a specified thing. I hope to validate my definition as we proceed.

Matthew 6:14-15 says, *“For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* Vines indicates the meaning of the word “trespasses” in this verse is: “a trespass, fault, offense, or transgression”. Webster’s New World Dictionary gives the following definition of the word trespass: “to go beyond the limits of what is right and moral; commit a transgression; transgress; offend.” For transgress Webster gives the following definition: “to overstep or break a law or commandment.” Possibly the best explanation of this passage is given in Vincent’s Word Studies in the NT, which says that the word “trespasses” is just another word for sins. He adds that the Lord uses several different words expressive of different aspects of wrong-doing when using this word. He goes on to say, “it is a conscious violation of right, involving guilt, and occurs therefore, in connection with the mention of forgiveness (Ro. 4:25,16; Col. 2:13;

Eph. 2:1, 5). Unlike transgression, which contemplates merely the objective violation of the law, it carries the thought of sin as affecting the sinner, and hence is found associated with expressions which indicate the consequences and the remedy for sin (Ro. 4:25, 15, 17; Eph. 2:1).” We will now turn our attention to the word “trespass” and “trespasses” in the remainder of this chapter.

I have often pondered Matthew 6:15, and wondered what the meaning is, exactly. The wording is clear enough: our Father in heaven will not forgive our trespasses if we do not forgive others their trespasses. But several questions surface in my mind when I read these words. Does this refer to all trespasses, or does it refer to just those trespasses of others against me? If it refers to only those trespasses against me, does this mean that I should forgive freely, without the trespasser doing anything to recognize that he has treated me wrongfully? What exactly goes on in my life that keeps God from forgiving me when I do not forgive? Am I in some way yoked to those I refuse to forgive? If God does not forgive my trespasses according to this verse, am I in danger of losing my salvation? Does this required forgiveness apply to all people, or just to those in my particular part of the body of Christ? There are many scriptures about the believer’s need to forgive others’ trespasses. Matthew 18:21 tells about Peter coming to Jesus asking how many times he should forgive his

brother's sin against him. The version of the Lord's Prayer recorded in Luke 11:2-4 uses the words: "*And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive everyone indebted to us*". Luke 17:3-4 says that the trespasser must repent if he is to be forgiven, which could be interpreted to conflict with other scriptures that do not mention the need for the trespasser to repent. In Luke 23:34, Jesus asked for those that crucified Him to be forgiven, and in verse 43, Jesus forgave one of the two thieves on the cross. Repentance does not seem to have been involved in either of these instances.

This subject of forgiveness of sins seems to be very confusing. We must look for God's guidance in trying to sort this out, for He is not the author of confusion. 2 Timothy 3:16 GNT says, "*Every scripture is God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*" He provides the necessary wisdom, we must supply the effort to understand how what He has provided applies to our particular need. In some way we are no longer "clean" if we allow unforgiveness[sic] to develop a stronghold in our life. God will then initiate action (trials, temptations) to cause us to change our minds and forgive, thereby restoring our relationship with Him.

It seems clear from these verses that it is God's intent for believers to forgive members of their own body of Christ, as well as members of the universal

body of Christ. In Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus adds the stipulation that we should also love (and forgive) our enemies, that we may be “*perfect*”. Gill’s Exposition of the Entire Bible says: “Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father,... such, who profess God to be their Father, ought to imitate him, particularly in their love to men, . . . so ought they to love all men with a natural affection, and hate no man, no, not their enemies: for he that loves only his friends, and not his enemies, loves imperfectly; he does not take in the whole compass of objects his love is to extend unto; and as God loves sincerely, and without dissimulation, so should they. To be ‘perfect’, is to be sincere and upright: in this sense is the word often used, . . . and the sense is, be ye sincere and upright in your love to all men, as your heavenly Father is hearty and sincere in his affections to them.” Oswald Chambers gives us a pithy comment on repentance, and it’s importance to holiness, in his *My Utmost for His Highest*, “The entrance into the Kingdom is through the panging pains of repentance crashing into a man’s respectable goodness; then the Holy Ghost, Who produces these agonies, begins the formation of the Son of God in the life. The new life will manifest itself in conscious repentance and unconscious holiness, never the other way about. The bedrock of Christianity is repentance. Strictly speaking, a man cannot repent when he chooses; repentance is a gift of God.”

Forgiveness of our own past sins is a very important aspect of our coming to Christ. These are sins that result in a guilty conscience. Jesus not only rendered the sin nature we inherited from Adam powerless, but He also took our past (and future) sins upon Himself in shedding His blood on the cross. I believe the scripture in Matthew 6:14 applies to our own trespasses, as well as other's: if we cannot forgive them our heavenly Father cannot forgive us. If we cannot accept forgiveness of our own sins won by Christ's work on the cross we basically refuse salvation. It is not that God refuses to forgive us, but it is impossible for Him to do so because we have refused to be washed clean, which is necessary for us to receive the Holy Spirit: we must agree with God and accept His forgiveness for our sins.

Matthew 5:23-24 says, *"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee; Leave thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."* This strongly implies that God will not receive our gift if a brother has something against us. This scripture does not absolutely distinguish where the fault lies, with the offended brother or us: our brother could have a valid or invalid complaint against us. The procedure for resolving a harmful offense committed against us by a brother was described before, and this scripture seems to (pos-

sibly) extend that to cover disagreements for which we are not at fault. The point I want to make here however, deals more with God's response to a disagreement between brothers. The person bringing his gift to the altar may be coming for worship, prayer, to repent, or just to converse with God; but God seems say that we cannot gain an audience with Him if a brother has a grievance against us. We seem to be yoked, in some way, to those with which we have quarrels, even those for which we are not at fault. We know that God through the Holy Spirit cannot come into our abode (body) until we are clean, inside and out. It may be that unforgiveness[sic] in our hearts grieves the Holy Spirit, keeping us from having fellowship with Him. In the situation in which we are the innocent party in a dispute, God's teaching on this subject seems to indicate that we should try to heal the breach. God will look on our heart in these situations and if our heart is right, and if we have made attempts to resolve the dispute, I believe He will welcome us back into full fellowship.

I believe that even a cursory understanding of the Bible would lead any believer to the fact that repentance is necessary for salvation, and receiving the Holy Spirit. In the NT the definition of repentance is to change your mind about a sin which you have committed, and to turn from that mind-set to accepting the mind of Christ regarding the particular transgression. I have found

that many who identify themselves as Christians do not consider it necessary to repent for sins committed after salvation. In that regard I would like to draw your attention to Romans 3:25, which says that Christ Jesus' shed blood was given to forgive our **past** sins. Hebrews 9:15 also refers to Christ's death *"for the redemption of transgressions that were under the first testament"*. This means that when we repent and receive Jesus at salvation the sins we have committed up to that time are obliterated, and we are made "clean," prepared to receive the Holy Spirit and enter sanctification, whereby we will be made holy (conformed to the image of Christ). If we sin after we become believers that sin must be dealt with by following a procedure similar to that followed in salvation. However, Christ has already made the sacrifice for your sins and that will not be repeated. What we must do is confess our sin: God will then cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). This sounds very much like the definition of repentance given above: confession is recognizing and admitting the transgression, repentance includes acting on this recognition by doing what Christ would in that regard in the future. Gill's comments on 2 Timothy 2:25 say this about repentance, "If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth: repentance here designs a repentance of errors in principle, a change of mind upon conviction, and such as issues in a free and

ingenuous confession, and acknowledgment of the truth before opposed; and such a repentance is the gift of God: it is he that opens the eyes of the understanding, and works conviction in the mind, and leads into all truth, as it is in Jesus; and induces men to repent of their errors, confess their mistakes, and own the truth; even as repentance of evil practices is not owing to the power of men, nor to the bare influence of means, but to the efficacious grace of God, it being a grant from him.”

The law of forgiveness also seems to apply to offenses against others in which we as individuals are not directly involved. The Bible says that we should forgive “*men*” in one verse, and “*everyone indebted to us*” in another. The verses in Matthew and Luke describing the Lord’s prayer follow a pattern that I have recognized before in other narratives in the gospels. One book seems to say that we need to forgive **all** men, and the other book narrows it down to **just those** indebted to us. I think the Lord does this purposefully, to insure that we get the full meaning He intends to convey. If this is the case, the interpretation here is very clear: the law of forgiveness applies to offenses committed against us as individuals, as well as to those offenses against others or society as a whole, offenses I refer to as “general offenses”. I believe the need to forgive general offenses, or sins, in other believer’s lives is related to the

command not to judge. We are not directly involved in these misdeeds; nevertheless, we need to obey the injunction in Luke 6:37, which says, *“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven”*. This of course refers to judgment of the person (Romans 14:10), and not his words, which we are told to judge, or discern (1 Corinthians. 6:2, 14:29). The Lord Jesus Christ is the only rightfully appointed judge of an individual’s spiritual condition: if we judge others in this way we usurp the delegated authority of Christ. However, I have detected this tendency in myself, manifested most often by mentally categorizing people I meet as worthy of my interest and time, or not, depending on their appearance and demeanor. I think this borders on the judgment God is talking about when He says to not judge so that you will not be judged. Oswald Chambers, in his “My Utmost For His Highest” says, that if you have been shrewd in finding defects in others, God will do the same in judging you. He adds that the reason we see hypocrisy, fraud, and unreality in others is because we have these same faults in our own hearts. As a believer I represent Christ, and I should respond to people I meet just as Jesus did during His life on earth: with appropriate respect, genuine interest, and a nonjudgmental heart. Within the body of Christ we need to remember that God honors those we think to be less honorable, and gives abun-

dant comeliness to the uncomely members, for the comely members of the body have no need (1 Corinthians 12:23-24).

One way in which our need to exercise forgiveness for general offenses occurs is when a member of the body of Christ acts in a manner we consider to be contrary to God's word. I recently experienced a situation like this when a member of the body of Christ to which I belonged at the time tried to get authorization to construct a casino on land that his family owned. I questioned him on this and his response surprised me. He did not see anything wrong with gambling, and for him to make money in this way in no way conflicted with his walk with the Lord, nor with anything in the Bible. In an attempt to bolster my argument with him on this, I searched the scriptures for references to gambling. Although I could find no specific reference to gambling in the Bible, there are many scriptures pertaining to how we are to use our time wisely, and how we are to treat others, that I believe should cause a believer to pause before getting involved in such an endeavor. When we acknowledge that everything we have actually belongs to God, it would seem difficult to justify such an endeavor. In the final analysis his proposal was not accepted, and I gave up trying to convince him that it was wrong for a Christian to benefit from the operation of a casino.

I reflect on this incident and remember that this as an area in which I have received discipline from God in the past. I had a small-time gambling habit when I was younger, and God brought my attention to the fact that I needed to repent through one of His “engineered coincidences”. Obviously, the brother mentioned above had received no such enlightenment, and saw nothing wrong with gambling, nor with making money in this manner. I certainly cannot harbor unforgiveness [sic] in my heart for this brother, so I turned it over to God. I prayed for my friend and asked God to touch this area of his life, **if** he needs correction. Disagreement with others cannot be allowed to creep in and create a schism in the body of Christ. Members are to care for one another, and if one member suffers, all the members should suffer with them; or if any member is honored, all the members should rejoice with them (1 Corinthians 12:25-26).

The question as to whether I should forgive a brother for an offense against me when he shows no remorse, nor any indication of repentance, introduces several other questions. Luke 17:3 clearly states: “*If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him.*” This scripture surely implies that if our brother does not repent, then we should not forgive him, but many other scriptures about forgiveness do not add the stipulation requiring repentance. I

have read and heard opinions on this subject maintaining that repentance is not required, since it is not mentioned in many Bible references. However, I am inclined to accept the guidance in Luke 17:3 on this. The Bible refers to the necessity of repentance for salvation many times, e.g. in Luke 13:3 Jesus tells the people “. . . *except ye repent, ye shall all . . . perish*”, and in Acts 2:28 Peter tells the crowd gathered at Pentecost that they need to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. We know that one of Christ’s primary tasks in His role as Mediator of the New Covenant is to keep us spiritually “clean”, and free from sins that beset us. 1 John 1:9 gives us guidance on cleansing from sins committed after we have believed: “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*” When we consider what Matthew 16:19, 18:18; and John 20:23, say about binding and loosing others from their sins and offenses against us, we realize the awesome responsibility we have in acting for Christ on earth, and the absolute need for us to follow His guidance by helping the one who has sinned to repent of his wrongdoing. In view of what these verses tell us about our speaking for Christ in this regard it seems obvious that we cannot forgive others for sins that have not been confessed and repented of. Bible scriptures about forgiveness that do not include a need for repentance simply recognize that needless repetition of an idea in a

different word, phrase, or sentence is unnecessary (this is known as tautology).

So the question that remains is: should we withhold forgiveness if our brother

does not repent? First, we need to understand the meaning of the Greek word

interpreted “*rebuke*” in the Luke 17:3. This word means to “admonish strongly,

enjoin strictly, to charge with wrongdoing.” The parallel scripture in Matthew

18:15-17 embellishes on this passage as follows: “*Moreover, if thy brother shall tres-*

pass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear

thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he shall not hear thee, then take with thee one or

two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established.

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the

church let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican”. In Matthew 18:23-35,

Jesus relates a parable about a king who forgave one of his servants a large

debt, but this servant immediately went out and found a fellow servant who

owed him a small debt which he refused to forgive. The wicked servant subse-

quently cast his fellow servant into prison until he paid the debt. When the

king found out what the wicked servant had done he was angry and “*delivered*

him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him”. Jesus goes on to

say that our Father in heaven will do the same with us if we refuse to forgive

our brothers their trespasses.

From the above there seems to be little doubt about how we should react when a brother in Christ commits an offense against us. However, let me hasten to point out that I know of no church body that practices this. We have become a society in which the pledge “to do no harm” (interpreted: hurt no one’s feelings), is more important to us than the “*truth* [that] *came from Jesus Christ*” (John 1:17). I tried to apply this scriptural wisdom to an offense referred to earlier with little success, and I believe it is a good example for our discussion. A couple in the church we attended at the time borrowed money from me, and agreed to a schedule for repaying the loan. They failed to do what they said they would, and after several subsequent renegotiations and additional broken promises, I felt impressed to follow the Lord’s guidance in Matthew 18. I met with the wife (who handled their finances), and confronted her with what they had done, and she seemed repentant. She wept, and said they would begin making payments again, so I felt that I had successfully gained a brother (and sister). Unfortunately, they again failed to meet their commitment, so I proceeded to the next step in God’s Word. Since I was no longer in the same church body, I contacted the pastor of the church they attended by letter, and asked if he would be willing to meet with this couple and myself about this subject. I never received an answer to my letter; however, I

did receive one more payment shortly thereafter, so I surmised that the pastor had at least mentioned my letter to this couple. I have not heard anything further from the pastor, nor the couple, and it has been some years now. I decided that I had done everything that I could do as a good steward over what I consider is God's money, and I do not believe He expects any more from me in this situation. It is obvious that this was not an effective application of God's guidance in Matthew 18. If God's guidance had been followed in this we quite possibly could have been successful in restoring this couple to a right relationship with God, and I believe this is the purpose of Matthew 18:15-17.

Now the question arises, "Have I followed God's guidance regarding forgiveness with this couple"? I'm not sure about the answer to this question. I haven't forgotten about the unpaid debt, and if I should see them I would immediately be reminded of it. However, I have given up trying to get them to meet their obligation, and I feel no animosity toward them. I do not believe they can "clean their slate" with God on this until they live up to their commitment and repent, but their failure is no longer a burden to me. However, I haven't forgotten the offense, as God does when He forgets our forgiven sins. I do not know whether my reaction to this offense satisfies the full meaning of biblical binding, or loosing. I do not seem to have the kind of control over my

“forgettor”[sic] that would allow me to just decide to forget the incident.

However, I do not think about this incident, nor do I refer to it (other than herein). This is an extremely important question, for the reasons given above.

In trying to understand exactly how biblical forgiveness (or lack thereof) feels, other questions arise in my mind. Is God’s refusal to forgive me when I fail to forgive a repentant brother focused on the same trespass for which I failed to forgive? If this is true I should be on the lookout for difficulties of the same kind, and if they come, I should immediately go to God for guidance, and be ready and willing to do whatever is necessary to repair my broken relationship with Him. On the other hand it may be that I have done what God intended for me to do in the particular situation and God has brought about spiritual binding or loosing. This would be an ideal time for my stubborn “forgettor” to go to work. I believe God helps us in this regard. Concerning the case of the couple mentioned above, if I interpret God’s Word correctly I cannot forgive them since (to my knowledge) they did not repent, but if I withhold forgiveness do I carry this burden within my body, possibly causing serious consequences, spiritually and physically. To this I say no! I have followed God’s guidance to the best of my understanding, and He has “had my back” in withholding forgiveness in this situation. Nor do I carry any burden of “unfor-

giveness”(sic) in my heart for this couple. I am only sorry that they did not listen to God in this situation.

Summary

I would like to close this chapter by trying to concisely summarize this rather lengthy analysis of biblical forgiveness.

- 1.** Do not co-sign, or otherwise provide security for a loan. If you do this for someone close in spite of God’s warning, you must be willing to suffer the loss by considering it as a gift to one whose relationship you value more than the monetary loss.
- 2.** If you loan money to a brother or close family member or friend, be willing to consider it a gift. You will feel blessed if you are reimbursed, but not greatly disappointed if you are not repaid. For business loans involving interest, treat your debtors fairly and with respect in all transactions.
- 3.** I believe it is important to recognize that the act of forgiveness is actually a covenant between the forgiver and the forgiven. When the wrongdoer confesses his trespass and repents (changes his mind) about what he has done, and the injured party forgives (pardons and gives up all claim to anger and punishment) you have a covenant (binding and solemn agreement) between two parties.

4. If a Christian brother trespasses against you, or offends you in some way, follow the guidance given in Matthew 18:15-17, and try to gain your brother. First approach him alone and try to get him to repent of his misdeed, and if he does, forgive him and you will have gained your brother. If he refuses, take one or two members of the body with you, and again try to get him to repent. If he still refuses, take him before the entire body (the church), and try to get him to repent. If he refuses, treat him no longer as a member of the body of Christ. The GNT says treat him as a tax collector, which I would interpret in today's language as an IRS agent. Matthew 18:18 adds this: "*Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*" If we have followed God's guidance delineated in Matthew 18, God will honor the decision in the spiritual realm.

5. If we compare Matthew 6:15 with the parallel passage on the Lord's prayer in Luke 11:4, we might be inclined to believe that the biblical focus is on believers forgiving other believers; however, other scriptures on the act of forgiving expand this to include all men and all trespasses.

6. The Bible is clear about punishment for those that cause offenses. Luke 17:1-2 state that such a one would be better off if he/she were cast into the sea

with a millstone around their neck. I believe this applies to offenses for which there has been no repentance.

7. Luke 17:3 provides guidance when a brother in Christ trespasses against us: we should rebuke him/her, but the overall message in the NT is that the believer must make every attempt to resolve all offenses if he is to abide in Christ and maintain unencumbered fellowship with God. We must not allow unforgiveness(sic) to become a stronghold in our lives.

8. What causes God to withhold His forgiveness from believers when they refuse to forgive? Although there is no specific answer to this question in the Bible, it is obvious that something happens in a person's heart when they harbor unforgiveness[sic], and this unforgiveness[sic] blocks God's forgiveness.

When I take on the burden of offenses committed against me it is somewhat like taking on another person's sin and making it my own: the Lamb of God is the only One worthy of bearing and destroying a man's sins. Jesus went to the cross for each believer's own sin, not for the sins of others that a believer takes on through unforgiveness[sic].

9. Matthew 18:18 states that God binds in heaven what we have bound on earth, so theoretically, we could keep God from treating the offender with correction and grace when we do not forgive. This verse could logically be inter-

puted to particularly apply only when the entire church body “binds” or “looses,” but there are other passages (Matthew 16:19, John 20:23), that seem to extend this to individual believers. The Bible goes on in Matthew 18:35, to add that God will also deliver the unforgiving believer to the tormentors, so there seems to be little doubt that we are yoked to the one who trespassed when we refuse to forgive. I believe this teaching implies that we should bind and loose only in accordance with God’s will.

10. If God does not forgive my trespasses in accordance with Matthew 6:15, am I in danger of losing my salvation? In Matthew 23:34-35 God says that He will deliver the unforgiving believer to the “*tormentors*” until they pay all that is due. I believe we could interpret this to mean that God will chastise believers regarding their unforgiveness[sic] until they are brought to the point of forgiveness. God’s tests can come in many ways and are usually very painful, but I do not believe they include loss of salvation.

11. Does the requirement to forgive only apply to those within my particular body of Christ? We have seen that it is important for us to forgive all men, but our responsibility to those in the body of Christ (including our own body as well as the overall body of Christ) is greater than to men in general. The steps given in Matthew 18:15-17 specify how we are to respond to offenses against us

by a brother in Christ. The purpose of this is so that the brother can be restored to a right relationship with God. For those outside of the church body we are to rebuke them (admonish and enjoin them).

12. Possibly the greatest difficulty in the life of a Christian is to love your enemies, as we are advised to do in Luke 6:35, if we want to receive the greatest reward from our Father in heaven. Luke 6:36 sums up this teaching by saying, *“Be ye merciful, as your Father is also merciful.”*

13. It is absolutely necessary for the one who is drawn to Christ to accept His forgiveness for sins they (themselves) have committed in the past, as well as for sins against them by others that have not been forgiven. This is a primary reason Christ went to the cross, and if you fail to believe that His sacrifice was sufficient for the forgiveness of such sins you cannot receive salvation. You must be “clean” by having your heart sprinkled with clean water, be washed through regeneration, and have your heart purified by the blood of Christ (Ezekiel 36:25; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22).

14. Trespassers (sinners, transgressors) must repent if they expect to receive forgiveness from a believer. God will look on their heart to insure they have truly turned away from their sin, and hate it with a godly hate; He will then give them faith to repent.

Chapter 4

Temptation(s)

The word “*temptations*” is used in the New Testament (NT) to mean “tests” or “trials”: it is the English word used to interpret the Greek word “*pierazo*”. Other words from this same root word, such as “*tempted*”, “*tempter*”, “*tempteth*”, and “*tempting*” are used to identify the one being tested, or the one doing the testing. The singular form of this word, “*temptation*”, comes from the Greek word, “*peirasmos*”, which means “*trial*”. Ceslas Spicq’s Theological Lexicon of the New Testament gives this moral and religious definition: “temptation, is a trial of virtue by means of affliction or adversity, or even by Satan’s intervention.” In today’s vernacular the word “temptation” is often confused with the word “enticement”. I believe this occurs as a result of the fact that trials (temptations) often include some sort of enticement to ascertain whether the subject can prove victorious. We have a very common saying that goes something like this: “I am tempted to believe such and such”, by which we mean that we are inclined, induced, enticed, or drawn to believe something. James

1:14 states that when a man is tempted (or tried) it is his own lust that draws him away through enticement.

In the OT the Hebrew word interpreted “*temptation*” is used only once, in reference to the Israelites being tempted (tried), in the wilderness. The Greek word *peirasmos*, which is interpreted as temptation in the NT, is used 15 times. In every case it denotes a trial or test, or “to put to the proof”. From this we understand that temptation itself is not good or evil; it is simply a test revealing where we stand in the process of sanctification, and who we really are in Christ.

To adequately understand the full meaning of the word temptation(s), I believe we need to first investigate Jesus’ experience of being tempted by Satan in Matthew 4:1-11:

“Then Jesus was led up of the spirit [Spirit] into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. Then the devil taketh Him up into the holy city, and setteth Him on a pinnacle of the temple, And sayeth unto Him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. Again the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain,

and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things I will give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

This experience of Jesus in the wilderness, following His baptism in the Jordan river by John the Baptist, is difficult for me to understand. I wonder how the Son of God could be tempted to do anything that interfered with His purpose in coming to earth to reconcile mankind to God. After all, He was sinless: He was not conceived in sin, but by the Holy Spirit coming upon Mary, and the power of the Highest overshadowing her (Lu. 1:35). Because of this, He did not have a sin nature at birth, as do all of those born subsequent to Adam’s act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Philippians 2:7 says that Jesus “*emptied himself*”, when He came to earth. We might conclude from this that He was somehow rendered susceptible to enticement, as we ourselves are. However, James 1:13 indicates that God cannot be tempted with evil. Jesus was God in the form (or likeness) of a man. He did not have a sin nature; thus, He could not be enticed with evil. Jesus could not have been the perfect sacrificial Lamb if He had sin in His life.

The biblical meaning of the word temptation helps us to better understand why the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted (or tried). The three appeals Satan used in his attempt to entice Jesus were also used to tempt Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life . These three seem to encompass all the susceptibilities of mankind, and, accordingly, all of Satan's plans for the destruction of man are focused on the use of weapons that appeal to these three areas of enticement (1 Joh. 2:16). Satan found that Jesus was not a slave to strong desire (lust), nor was He prideful, so He was not enticed by any of Satan's wiles. So why was He exposed to these tests? I believe there are at least four reasons, given below.

1. To Fulfill All Righteousness.

When Jesus came to be baptized by John the baptist, John protested that he was not worthy, but Jesus said, "*Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness*" (M't. 3:15). Jesus was alluding to OT prophecies in Psalms and Isaiah that refer to events that were to transpire at His baptism. He also was aware of the Hebrew purification ceremonies and customs related to spiritual cleansing: He undoubtedly wanted to fulfill these as well. Also, Jesus was about to begin His earthly ministry, which ended in His death on the cross. It is through His death and resurrection that baptism gets its full meaning.

As it was necessary for Jesus to be baptized, it was also necessary for Him to be tempted. He is our shepherd, we are His sheep. He can comfort us in our trials, for He has been tempted in all points as we are, yet He did not commit sin (Heb. 4:15). It was necessary for Jesus to be tested just as we are, for He is our role model, our forerunner: He is the One who insures that believers make it into the Kingdom of Heaven. He took our sins on the cross through His death and resurrection. He is the first fruit of many believers will that will follow Him into heaven. Jesus had to be tempted to fulfill all righteousness.

2. To Prove His Readiness.

Many of us have difficulty in truly understanding the meaning of the phrase “*He emptied Himself*”. It is troubling to attribute any of the frailties of man to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, the Bible clearly states that He “*made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*” (Ph’p. 2:7-8). Vincent’s Word Studies in the NT indicates that the word *likeness* in this passage “states the fact of real resemblance to men in mode of existence: *fashion* defines the outward mode and form.” Jesus was, from all outwardly appearances, a man; but He was also like man in His everyday life, and how He reacted to the world

around Him. This explains why the disciples did not fully grasp the meaning of who He was until after the resurrection. He looked and acted like a man. He resembled them with a real likeness; but this likeness did not express His entire self, for He had a divine nature within, He had the Holy Spirit “*without measure*”.

Before Jesus received the Holy Spirit He was in many ways like we are, but without sin. Like us, Jesus needed the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome Satan. Like us, Jesus had to allow the will of God to direct His thoughts and actions. The test in the wilderness proved that He would do just this. The Father’s statement at Jesus’ baptism: “*This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased*”, was validated by Jesus’ actions when tempted by Satan. Jesus was able to act on God’s guidance rather than on the need of His body for sustenance. He was also aware of God’s plan for His life, and he was not willing to accept any of Satan’s shortcuts to its fulfillment. He proved that He was ready to go to the cross for the salvation of mankind.

3. To Aid Those Who Are Tempted

Hebrews 2:18 says “*For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted*”. The word *suffered* here apparently means "to be affected by" or to "endure" (Analytical Greek Lexicon by Harold K. Moulton).

Jesus also *suffered* death, which probably refers to His suffering on the cross to deliver us from sin. Webster defines the word “*succor*” as “to give assistance in time of need”, which seems to convey the meaning here very well.

Hebrews 4:15 says “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin*”.

As mentioned earlier, the three weapons of enticement that Satan uses in tempting man are: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. I believe these three include all of the “*wiles*” of Satan, and that this passage of scripture alludes to this when it says Jesus “*was in all points tempted as we are*”.

Jesus was not tempted in the wilderness with sexual lust, but He was tempted with lust of the flesh (extreme hunger), lust of the eyes (strong desire), and pride (power), which gives rise to many of the same strong emotions, desires, and feelings that we as men/women often experience.

In these temptations Satan appealed to Jesus in areas he assumed would entice Him into sin. What happens as a result of temptation depends on what is inside of the one being tempted. After forty days of fasting Jesus did have a strong desire and hunger for food, and this is the first need that Satan attacked. He then turned to Jesus’ natural revulsion of becoming a sin sacrifice and dying on the cross: Satan offered a shortcut to prove He was the Messiah, a way to

evade the cross, one that Satan thought would appeal to His pride. Finally, Satan tried to appeal to Jesus' lust of the eyes by offering Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. These were approaches that Satan assumed would appeal to needs or desires in Jesus' nature. This implies that Satan knows our areas of weakness, which I believe to be true, but it is obvious that he does not know how we will react to his overtures.

Satan did not appeal to sexual lust to entice Jesus into sin. We know from Job's experience that God the Father places limits on Satan's freedom in testing those that belong to Him (Job 1:12, 2:6), and it may be that God restricted Satan in this regard. I believe Satan knew it would be a waste of time to test Jesus in this area, for he knew Jesus did not have a sin nature, and was therefore not subject to sexual lust: such an appeal would have been fruitless, and possibly even dangerous to Satan himself. I believe Satan introduced mankind to sexual lust in the Garden of Eden, when he was given authority over the nature of Adam and Eve. When the sin (carnal) nature came into their lives they immediately recognized they were naked, and they tried to cover the parts of their bodies that were the focus of sexual lust, to hide them from God. After this disobedience they were permanently removed from the Garden of Eden. Later, "... Adam knew his wife and she conceived ..." (Ge. 4:1). I believe this

was the first time Adam and Eve came together as man and wife, although this conclusion is a subject of some disagreement among biblical expositors.

Thus, Jesus, who did not have a sin nature was nevertheless tempted through appeals to lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride, all of which are related to strong desires within man that demand satisfaction. Jesus is able to succor us in **all** our temptations, for He has been tempted by Satan's full repertoire of enticements. Jesus knew the perfect rebuttal to Satan's overtures, and He is now within us.

4. To Teach His Followers.

There are so many lessons to be learned from Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness that I cannot help but believe that this may be the primary reason for its inclusion in God's word. Jesus' temptation provides great teaching as to the methods and wiles of Satan, and gives us an understanding of the areas of weakness in our own lives through which he tries to entice us. We noted above the three areas of enticement Satan uses to appeal to, and entice us. ¹ John 2:16-17 says, *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* In His temptation Jesus acted in accordance with the will of God: He responded to

Satan's suggestions with applicable scripture from God's word. Satan was forced to throw in the towel and leave, but he did not leave forever, for Luke 4:13 says, "*And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him **for a season***" (emphasis mine). Jesus used the best possible defense against Satan. He withstood Satan by quoting applicable scripture from God's Word (the sword of the Spirit).

We see from Our Lord's experience the three ways that Satan can attack us, and we learn the most effective way to defeat him. This is an extremely important lesson, for if we know who our enemy is, and what tactics he will use against us, we are well positioned to win the battle. However, we must let the Holy Spirit (who has the power to defeat Satan) lead us. If you have received the Holy Spirit, and He is in the process of renewing (sanctifying) your mind, you are well positioned to receive His guidance. The only question is, will you will act on it?

Let us now turn to consideration of these three temptations and try to determine what God wants to teach us:

Lust of the Flesh

The word lust in the NT is actually the Greek word for desire or longing, and depending on the particular form of the word used can mean earnest de-

sire, ardent desire, irregular or violent desire, cupidity, or impure desire. In 1 John 2:16-17 it is used metaphorically to mean the object of desire, or whatever enkindles desire. Lust of the flesh is desire that resides in the flesh, and gratification of the desire results in some sort of pleasurable reaction in our emotional or physical makeup. It is not the same as lust of the eyes, which we will address below. I believe that lust of the flesh includes such things as hunger, health, comfort, sexual gratification, emotional peace, affluence, safety, etc. God intends for us to exercise control over all the desires within, and to maintain a proper balance in their gratification. We can only achieve this balance if we have a strong sense of God's presence in our life, and realize that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Remembering that we are in Christ and He is in us so important when temptation comes: after all, He has already defeated Satan's enticements, and knows the perfect weapons (scriptures) to use in our defense.

Challenges related to lust of the flesh may come in the form of an insatiable appetite, poor health, lack of means, inordinate sexual desire, emotional instability, personal vulnerability, etc. If we know that God is in control of our lives we need to rely on Him in the midst of the challenge, and follow the guidance

we receive. Some challenges may require professional help, but, when this is necessary, it should be done in a way that gives us peace in our heart.

Two principles were involved in Satan's tempting of Jesus to satisfy His hunger by turning stones into bread: 1) Satan wanted Him to use the power He had to meet His own bodily need, and 2) he wanted Jesus to break His fast and satisfy His hunger without waiting on God. Jesus responded by telling Satan, *"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"* (M't. 4:4). Jesus was ready with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God (the Bible): the perfect response. This is the sort of response we need to make if we expect to be successful in thwarting Satan's plans, and passing the tests we encounter.

I believe the two principles involved in Jesus' first temptation apply to many of the tests in our own lives. We are often inclined to use the talents and gifts that God gives us for our own benefit, without much thought as to what He might want us to do. We are also very poor at waiting on God, and this often results in being overly concerned about satisfying our own needs and appetites, which may cause us to miss a great blessing from God. Satan probably had his eyes on the real reason Jesus came to earth, and figured that if he could entice Him to use this shortcut he would succeed in thwarting God's plan to save

mankind, but Jesus was well prepared to endure hunger and wait upon God to provide.

Possibly the greatest problem with lust of the flesh in today's world is out of control sexuality. We are confronted by sexual emphasis in clothes, television, magazines, movies, advertising, language, business, computer pop-ups, social mores, and relationships, every day of our lives, and this doesn't include the hard-core, explicit sexual material available at the mere touch of a computer key. I am so glad that instant pornography was not available in the 1940's and 1950's when I was a young man of high school and college age, for I doubt that I could have resisted this great, and so readily available, seduction. Although I considered myself a Christian I did not have a personal relationship with Jesus, and thus, did not have His nature, nor did I have the Holy Spirit in my life. The Bible provides some wonderful guidance on sexuality from a Godly perspective:

1. Modesty and virtue are the adornment of a noble woman. Proverbs 31:10-31 is probably the most beautiful description in the Bible of a righteous woman. Verse 30 in the NIV closes this passage of scripture by saying, "*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised*".

2. The NT Greek word interpreted by the English word fornication is “*porneia*”, from which we derive our English word pornography. The meaning of the word fornication is “illicit sexual intercourse”, and the Bible makes it clear that **all** intercourse outside of marriage is illicit. Scriptures that allude to fornication include: John 8:41; Acts 15:20, 29, 21:25; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; and Revelation 2:21, 9:21. I believe the most arresting scripture in this regard is 1 Corinthians 6:16-18, which warns fornicators that joining themselves to a harlot in some way joins them as one flesh, which is the relationship reserved for a husband and his wife. We are also warned that committing fornication is not like other sins, which are outside the body, but is a sin against one’s own body.

I have not found satisfactory biblical exposition on the meaning of these two great mysteries: becoming one flesh, and sinning against one’s own body. I believe my wife (now deceased) and I were able to reach the lofty goal of becoming one flesh only after we had a personal experience with Jesus Christ and believed **into** him. I know how that felt, we really became as one physical and spiritual body: it was an Ephesians 5:21-33 union. If this is the meaning of this scripture, the consequences of living your life while somehow remembering the

influences and feeling the guilt of past fornication partners would be sobering, to say the least. To sin against the body which was formed by God, and is the temple of the Holy Spirit, must refer to soiling this marvelous gift (the body) we receive from God. If we are in Jesus, and He is in us we would take Him with us in this act, which is unthinkable. I assume that Jesus would then leave us to satisfy our own sinful lusts, and suffer the consequences that result.

3. Adultery is an especially heinous form of fornication. Adultery is defined as “unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another”. In the OT adultery was punishable by death from stoning. In the NT when a woman taken in adultery was brought to Jesus for judgment He told her accusers that whoever among them that was without sin should cast the first stone. The accusers then left one by one, convicted by their conscience. The NT teaching on adultery is stated in Hebrews 13:4: God will judge both fornicators and adulterers.

4. Ephesians 5:22-33 describes God’s plan for the marriage union. Husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. The husband is to represent Christ in the marriage, and his love should be such that he would die to care for, and protect his wife. Wives are to submit themselves to their husbands because the husband represents the Lord. God has provided a great mystery in the marriage union that is compared to the union between

Christ and the church: the church body represents Christ, they are one spirit (Eph. 5:32-33). In a similar way, as a man and his wife are joined they are to become one flesh. The husband should get to the place where he loves his wife just as he loves his own body, and nourishes and cherishes her like Christ does the church. A husband is to sanctify and cleanse his wife by the washing of the Word. If he does this Ephesians 5:27 implies that his wife will become spotless and without wrinkle, holy, and without blemish.

5. Hebrews 13:4 says, “*Marriage is honorable in all, and the bed undefiled. . . .*” Sexual relations between a husband and wife are a very important part of coming together in one flesh. Sex within the bounds of marriage is encouraged by the Bible. 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 advises both husband and wife that they should not “*defraud*” each other by refusing to come together in sexual relations, for this opens the door for Satan to test them due to “*incontinence*” (lack of self-control). I believe that the word *defraud* is used here in reference to the covenant relationship that exists between husband and wife when they come together in a Godly marriage union. 1 Corinthians 7:4 says “*The wife hath not power of [over] her own body, but the husband: likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife*”.

Lust of the Eyes

This temptation is described in Matthew 4:8-10. The devil took Jesus up into a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. He then said to Jesus, I will give you all these things if you will fall down and worship me. Jesus answered him by again quoting scripture saying, “*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve*”. In this temptation Satan tries to get the Son of God to bow down and worship him. His appeal seems to have been along the line of offering Jesus the world without having to endure the cross. Jesus again used the sword of the Spirit to pointedly state that God only is to be worshipped.

Vincent’s Word Studies in the NT says, “The desire of the eyes does not involve appropriation. It is satisfied with contemplating. It represents a higher type of desire than the desire of the flesh, in that it seeks mental pleasure where the other seeks physical gratification”. There are many mental pleasures that are acceptable: recognizing the beauty in a work of art, enjoying the beauty of mountain grandeur or any of God’s creations, or even a man enjoying the beauty of an attractive woman. It is the word *contemplation* that leads into difficulty. Contemplation is defined by Webster as “the act of looking at something intently; thinking about something intently; study; consideration; a looking

forward, expectation or intention". For men sexual contemplation is undoubtedly one of the most prevalent outcomes from lust of the eyes in today's world. Possibly the most difficult scripture relating to this is in Matthew 5:28, which says, "*But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart*". Men have within themselves a natural attraction to a beautiful face and a well-proportioned female figure. It seems obvious that God made us this way for a purpose. Without this attraction the world would have a significantly lower population, and there would be few marriages. This scripture appears to condemn this natural attraction that we know God gave us. Since we know that God is not the author of confusion I believe that we need to search for an understanding of Matthew 5:28 that does not conflict with any of the other traits that God gives us. James 1:14-15 says, "*But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished [full-grown], bringeth forth death*". First, we need to understand the meaning of the word "*lust*" in this passage. We noted earlier that the NT Greek word interpreted *lust* means desire, and in this usage an accurate rendering of the above would be, "But every man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own **strong** desire". Note the use of the word strong, for it implies something

more than just an admiring glance. The next important word in this passage is “*enticed*”. The root of the Greek word for enticed is “*deleazo*”, which means “to entrap, take, or catch with a bait” (Analytical Greek Lexicon by Harold K. Moulton). It is used to mean allure, entice, or delude in James 1:14. Thus, we could interpret this scripture in this way: “But every man is tested when he is entrapped (or deluded) by his own strong desire”. It is at the beginning of the testing process that we must draw the line, and go no further. If we move from an admiring glance to indulging contemplation, we have opened the door to enticement. Once a man has been deluded he is hooked (has taken the bait), and is ready to take the enticement to the next level. He is ready to take his strong desire to conception, or fulfillment, which leads to sin: a purposeful act of disobedience to God. Finally, the scripture says that when the sin is full-grown (full stature or measure), it brings spiritual death. I believe the word fullgrown used here could be interpreted as “adopting the sin as a lifestyle” or as a “stronghold”.

This particular temptation is fraught with danger, the ultimate consequence of which is spiritual separation from God. Many leaders in the church have fallen into this pit, and many lives have been destroyed as a result. I believe we can get a feel for the power of this appeal when we reflect on the number of

men that have fallen victim to its allure. The ultimate end of these victims is often absolute degradation.

The Pride of Life

This temptation is described in Matthew 4:5-7. The devil took Jesus into the Holy City and set Him on a pinnacle of the temple and said, if you are the Son of God, cast yourself down, for the angels will bear you up, lest at any time you should dash your foot against a stone. Jesus answered and said, “*It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God*”. In this encounter Satan was attempting to get Jesus to show the world that He was the Son of God. He was asked to perform a miracle for no reason except to demonstrate who He was. Satan made the mistake of assuming that he could appeal to Jesus’ pride, but we find no support in the NT for the view that Jesus had this kind of pride. Philippians 2:6-7 says, “*Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God [counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped]: But made himself of no reputation [emptied himself], and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men*”. Jesus, who was the second person in the Godhead before coming to earth, did not think His former station was something to be grasped. He made Himself of no reputation and came to earth in the form of a servant. Undoubtedly, Satan did not understand this, for

when he was in heaven in ages past he had a high position, and he wanted more. He wanted to be equal with God: he thought equality with God was something to be grasped.

In many ways I believe pride is the most vulnerable area of our lives for Satan's attacks. Pride is very closely connected to our individual id, which Webster defines as, "that part of the psyche which is regarded as the reservoir of the libido and the source of instinctive energy: it is dominated by the pleasure principle and impulsive wishing, and its impulses are controlled through the development of the ego and superego". This sounds like a very good description of the old sin nature we receive at birth from our ancestor Adam. Romans 5:12 tells us that sin entered into the world through Adam, and death by sin. Death was then passed on to all men, for they all have sinned; but Jesus Christ came to undo what Adam did, and offer us eternal life. Receiving Christ does serious damage to the id, and thus to our pride. Both the id and our pride reside in the biblical heart (which includes the mind): Proverbs 21:4 says that a proud heart is sinful. Proverbs 4:23 says that the heart is the wellspring of life. This sounds very much like one of the definitions of libido: "the driving force behind all human action". Ezekiel 36:26 says that God gives us a new heart when we receive Christ, so there is good scriptural basis for the argument that

receiving Christ can result in the slow death of pride - if we let it. Until we are *in Christ*, and the Holy Spirit begins to renew our minds, the id is the driving force behind all human action. As we accept the Holy Spirit's reprogramming (sanctification), the id gradually diminishes in authority, and we become more Christlike. We gradually give up control of our lives to God. Romans 8:29 says, "*For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate, to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*" This is the plan that God has for our lives - He wants us to give up our right to ourselves (the id and our pride), and let Him make us more like Christ. Becoming more like Christ will assuredly make us more humble, more like servants than masters. This may be scary but, "when you are so possessed with the living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted over this peculiar, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, you will have found the vestibule of heaven" (from *The High Calling*).

Closure

I believe the following points summarize the teaching that God has for us on this subject:

- I.** The three approaches that Satan uses in trying to destroy us are: 1) appeals to satisfy the natural appetites of our bodies in an unbalanced or undisciplined

manner, 2) luring us through things we see which can result in contemplation, leading to ungodly thoughts and/or deadly plans, and 3) stirring up the id (or pride) so that we insist on exercising *our right to ourselves*.

2. Out-of-control sexual lust is one of the principal frailties of mankind. The only effective defense against Satan in this area of weakness is the power of the Holy Spirit within us. Jesus taught that if the eye offended us we should pluck it out. This points out how difficult it is for a man to control the lust of his eyes. Fortunately, we have Christ within us and we are *in Him*.

3. Overweening pride is the other big problem that men have. Our lives are somewhat like a balance scale: we start off totally weighed down with pride, with little or no humbleness. As the Holy Spirit is successful in renewing (re-programming) our mind, we gradually begin to move the scale in the other direction. If we learn the lessons that God tries to teach us through the trials to which we are exposed, the scale eventually becomes tilted in favor of Christlike humbleness. Of course, He wants to take us to the full-tilted position, corresponding to the servant nature of Jesus Christ. There is no room for pride or id here; this is a zero sum situation: to receive more of Christ we have to empty out some of ourselves. This is exactly what Jesus did when He came to earth as a man: He emptied himself. This is a very difficult thing for men to do, nat-

ural man is full of pride inherited from Adam. God gives us a new nature when we believe *into* Christ, but He doesn't erase all of the memories we stored prior to that time. These memories were shaped through the Adamic sin nature that operated in our lives at that time. This is the area of focus during the mind-renewing (sanctification) process.

4. Jesus was led into temptation **after** He received the Holy Spirit at baptism. He needed the Holy Spirit's power to defeat Satan. In this He is like us: we need the Holy Spirit to resist and defeat Satan. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit we have Jesus Christ within us, and He has already defeated Satan. If we rely on Him we have nothing to worry about.

5. The biblical word *temptation* means a trial or test. God gives Satan access to us in the areas of our lives that need to be strengthened, areas that are out-of-balance or out-of-control. He does this for our own good as part of the sanctifying process, to conform us to the image of Christ. Of course, Satan does not see it this way: He hopes to drive us away from God by appealing to our lust and pride. Ephesians 6 describes the armor that God has provided for us to resist the wiles of the devil. We don the armor that God makes available as we allow Him to renew our minds. "*Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*" (Eph. 6:16).

6. The four reasons for Jesus being tempted in the wilderness discussed above are: 1) to fulfill all righteousness, 2) to prove His readiness, 3) to aid those who are tempted, and 4) to teach His followers.

Chapter 5

Rapture: If, or When?

Meaning of the Word “Rapture”

The word rapture comes from the Latin word *rapare*, which means to "seize", "snatch" or "take away." This word is used to refer to believers **into** Jesus Christ being taken up to meet Christ in the clouds when He comes to gather His elect, as described in Matthew 24:27-31. Note that I have used the preposition **into**, as opposed to the common expression **in** Jesus Christ. In many versions of the Bible the Greek word *eis*, which means “into”, or “one”, is often interpreted incorrectly by the word “in” (Greek word *ev*), meaning within, or among. The comment from the Recovery Version of the NT on John 3:16 is helpful in understanding the importance of the preposition into in this scripture. “Believing into the Lord is not the same as believing Him. To believe Him is to believe that He is true and real, but to believe into Him is to receive Him and be united with him as one. The former is to acknowledge a fact objectively, the latter is to receive a life subjectively.”

The rapture is described by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, *“For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up (raptured), together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord”* (parenthetical expression added).

It is difficult for me to understand, but there are those who consider themselves Christians who do not believe in the rapture. Some denominations believe in a rapture only in the sense of a general final resurrection. They do not believe that a group of people will be left behind on earth for the Great Tribulation period after the events of 1 Thessalonians 4:17. Others hold that we are presently in the period known as the millennium, and that any event resembling the rapture must have occurred at an earlier time. Sadly, many others, who think of themselves as believers, do not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible, and thus, consider events described therein that are beyond their earthly experiences as being too far-fetched.

By-and-large I think that most avowed Christians believe in some form of the rapture. Those who look for a coming rapture fall into one of the following four categories based on the time they believe Christ will return for His elect: 1) pre-tribulation; 2) mid-tribulation; 3) pre-wrath; or 4) post-

tribulation. We will attempt to analyze these four groups in the following discussion, but first, we need to correct some basic assumptions that lead to considerable confusion.

Tribulation?

To understand the timing of the events that occur during the last days it is important to start with the vision given to Daniel some six centuries before Christ. In Daniel 9:24, he was informed by the angel Gabriel that, *“Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy”*. The “*weeks*” referred to in this vision are widely understood to mean “weeks of years”: in other words, one of Daniel’s weeks corresponds to a period of time equal to seven years. Thus, Daniel was told that in a period of 490 years (70 x 7, not necessarily concurrent), that the transgression of man on earth would be completed, that sins would be brought to an end, that iniquity (wickedness) would be redressed, that everlasting righteousness would be introduced, that vision and prophesy would be brought to an end, and that Christ would be anointed as king on earth. The time that has expired since the vision was given to Daniel must approximate some 2600 years: Daniel received the vision about

600 years before Christ, and we have just entered the 21st century (~2000 years after Christ). God seems to have inserted a period of time into Daniel's vision that could best be described as the "church age", for almost immediately after the rejection of Christ by the nation of Israel, the focus turned to the Gentiles and the establishment of the New Testament church. This pause extends from the crucifixion of Jesus to the point of time in the future when God determines that the cup of transgression, mentioned in Daniel's vision, is almost full, and that His work with the church is nearly completed. At that future time He seemingly restarts the clock, and the events foretold in Daniel's vision will recommence. The final week that completes the 70 weeks determined on Daniel's people, the Jews, will then start. God divided the 490 years prophesied on the nation of Israel into periods of 49 years, 434 years, and 7 years. It is as if He were trying to show us that the 490 years is not a concurrent period of time. The vision was for Israel, but because we (the church) have been *grafted* in, the prophecy affects us as well.

The period of seven-years duration in the future is the time during which God will cleanse and reclaim the earth. This period of time should rightfully be identified as the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy, not "tribulation", which is often used in designating the various times of the rapture. In Daniel 9:26-27

the prophesy describes a “*prince*”, known to us as the antichrist, who rises to world power at the beginning of the seven-year period. For the first several years his rule over Israel is peaceful, and he allows the Jewish people to reinstitute the OT practice of sacrifice and oblation in the temple. In the middle of the seven-year period he will force the Jews to cease the sacrifices, and he orders the erection of the “*abomination of desolation*” (M’t. 24:15), in a wing of the temple. The Jewish people rebel at this, and a period of severe persecution, properly identified as the Great Tribulation will be initiated.

The first three-and one-half years of Daniel’s 70th week should properly be referred to as a time of “*birth pangs*” (Mic. 4:9), or the “*beginning of sorrows*” (M’t. 24:8). The Great Tribulation begins at the mid-point of the seven-year period and continues through the time that the wrath of God is poured out on the earth (Re. 6:17, 15:1). This time of wrath culminates with the battle of Armageddon, after which Jesus will establish His Kingdom on earth. At that time Jesus will assume His throne in Jerusalem and rule the world for 1000 years (Re. 20:4). For a more detailed description of these events I would recommend Chapter 8 of [“A Layman’s Commentary on the Revelation of Jesus Christ,” available at no cost at the website SCRIBD.](#)

As noted above, three of the four groups looking for a future rapture are identified by the timing of this event relative to the tribulation. The word *tribulation* is used in the KJV of the Bible 22 times, three times in the OT and 19 times in the NT. Of these citings, five clearly have to do with *the great tribulation* that occurs during Daniel's 70th week (De. 4:30; M't. 24:21, 29; M'r. 13:24; Re. 7:14). Revelation 2:22 uses the phrase "*great tribulation*", but the Greek word in this verse is actually interpreted "*great affliction*" in the GNT, and "*great suffering*" in the NIV. Thus, this leaves us with five clear references to *the great tribulation* that begins at the mid-point of the last seven years. Other citings of the word "tribulation" in the KJV of the Bible without the introductory adjective phrase "the great" have nothing to do with the end-times last seven years, nor with the rapture. Thus, using this word to define the time of the rapture is incorrect and misleading; nevertheless, we will discuss the various beliefs using these terms for the sheer lack of any other widely acceptable descriptive term.

Disbelief

There are several denominations and groups that believe either: 1) the events in the Bible that prophesy a rapture of God's elect have passed, or 2) no

such event will occur. Several denominations (Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Reformed Christians) do not believe in a rapture per se, other than a final resurrection after Christ has returned to defeat Satan's hordes at the Battle of Armageddon. Another group of people identified as Preterists believe that the book of Revelation is a prophecy of events that occurred during the first century, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple in 70 AD by the Roman army. There are two different Preterist beliefs: some believing that all prophesied events occurred in the past, and others believing that some, or most, of the events have already happened.

I find it very difficult to find any justification for these positions. Christian historians attribute the authorship of the book of Revelation to John, the Apostle, in the year 95 or 96 AD, during the reign of the Emperor Domitian. Notable Christian historians such as Irenaeus (130-200 AD) who was a pupil of Polycarp, a friend of John's, and Justin Martyr (100-127 AD), as well as many others all testify to the authorship of John, the Apostle. No serious expositor of God's Word would argue that John did not write the book of Revelation as it was revealed to him by Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega (Re. 1:11). The future meeting between Jesus and John that resulted in the book of Revelation was alluded to in John 21:21-22: *"Peter seeing him (John) saith to Jesus, 'Lord, what*

shall this man do'? Jesus saith unto him, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee'? follow thou me" (parenthetical added). In this scripture Jesus implies that John will remain on earth (tarry), until He comes, apparently to receive the Revelation prophecy. Since the book of Revelation was prophesied to John by our Lord Jesus Christ in mid-90 AD, to show His servants the things that must come to pass during the last seven years of Daniel's prophecy, Preterist beliefs seem to be without merit.

Preterism holds that the contents of the book of Revelation document a prophecy (actually a vision), of events that were fulfilled in the past, and during the 1st century, beginning with the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 AD. There are so many world shaking occurrences documented in this wonderful book that it seems inconceivable that anyone could be drawn to this belief; however, Preterists tend to write the book of Revelation off as descriptive of Roman persecution of Christians, and focus on scriptures other than the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation, and information related to the last seven years of Daniel's prophecy contained in the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, Matthew, and Thessalonians, make it very difficult to believe that all this has already transpired. In addition to the evidence from the book of Revelation, many other scriptures attest to the fact that Christ will return near

the end of the Great Tribulation to gather his elect from the earth. (M't.

24:27-31; M'k. 13:26-27; Lu. 17:34-37; I Th 4:16-17; 2 Th. 2:1-3)

Possibly even more difficult to believe is that we are presently living in the millennium, and Jesus is ruling the earth from Jerusalem. Many passages in the Bible attest to the fact that at this time the Israelites will be regathered and restored to their ancient land. They will be spiritually restored and will have a privileged place over that of the Gentiles. This will be a time of unparalleled spiritual life since Satan is bound in the abyss and universal knowledge of the Lord is realized. Isaiah 11:6-8 describes this time in this way: *"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrices' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Pre-tribulation Rapture

Most people who identify themselves as Christians believe that the rapture, as described by the Bible, will occur at some point prior to the beginning of

Daniel's last seven years. As described earlier in discussing the prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:24-27, we noted that the prophecy was divided into periods of "seven weeks" (49 years), "sixty-two weeks" (434 years), and "one week" (seven years), not necessarily concurrent. Folks that believe in a pre-tribulation rapture are convinced that Jesus will return to gather His elect at some time prior to the beginning of Daniel's last "week", or seven years. There is so much predilection in support of this viewpoint and so few real solid facts that offer confirmation that I find it difficult to understand. I am inclined to think that support for this belief is an outgrowth of the present-day liberal church movement that preaches the love of God, but refuses to consider the hard teachings of the Bible given in scriptures such as, Matthew 5:11-12, Luke 9:23-25, and Romans 8:17-18. The Bible certainly does not support the view that God's elect will be spared the sorrows of the Great Tribulation. When questioned by the disciples about the end of the world, Jesus replied with the remarkable narrative given in Matthew 24. Verses 21, and 22 of this Chapter include the statement: *"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not seen since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should be no flesh saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened."*

The Great Tribulation referred to in this passage is widely accepted as beginning near the mid-point of Daniel's prophesied last seven years, and it is initiated when the man of sin (the antichrist) erects an image of himself in the Jewish temple, and thus "reveals" himself (2 Th. 2:3; Re. 13:14-15). In this passage of scripture our Lord and savior Jesus Christ states that the elect will be on earth for some of the time identified as the Great Tribulation. The only question that might be raised about this interpretation is, "Who are the elect?"

Election refers to God the Father choosing (predestinating) those that would be regenerated, saved, and sanctified. By choosing certain people God commits Himself to doing what is necessary to insure that these chosen ones are "called" to Jesus Christ. The word "elect" is used in the OT three times, all in Isaiah. Two of these references pertain to God's election of Israel, and one refers to the coming Messiah. The word elect (elected, election, elect's) is used 22 times in the NT, 21 of which refer to the election of those in the body of Christ (the church), and one to elect angels (1 Pe. 1:2; Ro. 9:11; Re. 17:8). Thus, we see that the word "elect", as used in this verse, refers to all believers into Jesus Christ, and not just to Israelites, although they are the ones primarily being addressed in this passage.

As mentioned above, many of the arguments made for a pre-tribulation rapture do not focus on supporting that belief alone. Nevertheless, I will list the arguments made in defense of this belief as given in “The Pretribulation Rapture”, by Todd Strandberg, and focus on those that tend to argue for a pre-tribulation rapture only:

1. The Unknown Hour - This is an argument citing a conflict about the statement in Matthew 25:13, that no man knows the day nor the hour of the rapture, and Revelation 12:6 which gives a time for the Israelites to wait for Christ's return. There are several rebuttals to this argument, one of which is the fact that the remnant of Jews left on the earth when Jesus returns for the battle of Armageddon are safely protected by God from the serpent (Re. 12:14). In Matthew 24:36 Jesus states that only His Father in heaven knows the timing of the rapture, but He said this while still on earth. As the Son of God and Mediator of the New Covenant in heaven He returns to earth to give John the vision of the last days for the very purpose of showing His servants those things which must come to pass during the last seven years that they might be prepared for these coming events, including the rapture.

2. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb - This argument does not defend a pre-tribulation rapture uniquely, and the implication that Jesus will come

unannounced is not correct (see M't. 24:28-29). In the Jewish tradition when the father was satisfied with the wedding chamber he would tell the bridegroom to go and steal his bride away from her family. The groomsmen would run ahead of the groom, sound a ram's horn trumpet (shofar), and shout that the groom was coming.

3. What They Didn't Teach You in History Class - This is an argument against the Preterist belief.

4. The People of the Millennium - This is an argument stating that if Christ returns after the tribulation there will be no people left during the millennium.

I see no merit in this argument.

5. The Saint U-Turn - This an argument against a Post-tribulation rapture during which the rapture and Christ's return to earth for the battle of Armageddon occur simultaneously.

6. "Come Up Hither" - This is an argument that the trumpet call for John to come up hither (to heaven) in Revelation 4:1 is a prophetic reference to the pre-tribulation rapture, when saints' immortal bodies rise from the grave to join their spirit/soul with Christ in the clouds, not heaven. John was immediately in the spirit after this call and saw a vision of the throne room of God, but none of the raptured saints were there. This should be compared to

Revelation 7:9-17, when John was given a vision of the throne room and he saw those that had been raptured out of the Great Tribulation. I believe God gives us a clue here: in John's first vision of the throne room the raptured saints were not there; in his second vision a great multitude of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes. I could not think of a better description of the raptured saints than that. It seems obvious that this is not a valid argument for a pre-tribulation rapture.

7. Armies in Fine Linen - This is an argument identical to number 5, above, and is another good argument against a post-tribulation rapture, but not a good defense for a pre-tribulation rapture.

8. The Time of Jacob's Trouble - This is another argument against a post-tribulation rapture. Although it is not absolutely clear in the Bible, Jacob's trouble seems to be coincident with the Great Tribulation and Gentile believers will be persecuted along with the Jews.

9. "He" That is Taken Away - This refers to 2 Thessalonians 2:7 in which Paul refers to "*he*" who restrains revelation of the antichrist, and thus delays the coming rapture. If the "*he*" in this passage is the Holy Spirit, as proposed in this argument, then He would necessarily have to return to earth to provide a

path to salvation for those saved during the tribulation. There is no mention in the book of Revelation that the Holy Spirit continues to act as “comforter” in men’s lives after the rapture, nor is it clear that the Holy Spirit is the “he” referred to in this verse. I believe a good argument could be made that the “he” referred to is actually the body of believing Christians led by the Holy Spirit. When they are removed by rapture, the Holy Spirit’s work as comforter to men on earth is finished, and there is no spiritual power left on earth to restrain the antichrist. This is a good argument for a later rapture.

10. War or Rapture - This refers to Jesus coming for the rapture at the same time He comes for war. This is another argument against the post-tribulation rapture, but it does not necessarily support a pre-tribulation rapture.

11. The Five Foolish Virgins - This refers to Matthew 25:2-13 when five of the ten virgins waiting for the bridegroom to return did not obtain oil for their lamps, and when the bridegroom delayed his coming their lamps went out. This obviously refers to Christians who fail to let the Holy Spirit guide their lives, and renew their minds. When the Lord comes they will not be ready. Difficult to see how this supports the pre-tribulation rapture belief. The reference to the bridegroom (Christ) delaying His coming certainly does not argue for an early rapture.

12. God Hath Not Appointed Us to Wrath - Many scriptures in the NT assure believers that God will not pour out His wrath on them. This is an excellent argument for a pre-wrath rapture, not so much for a pre-tribulation rapture.

13. The Salt of the Earth - Jesus described the believer as salt of the earth in Matthew 5:13. When believers are removed the earth will be plunged into spiritual darkness and the antichrist will be free to rule the earth. This could be considered to be an argument supporting a pre-tribulation rapture since the antichrist seems to come to power at the beginning of the last seven years.

However, there is no limit stated by Jesus on the duration of our responsibility for salting the earth, and a later rapture would provide spiritual influence during the time that the antichrist is winning converts (the first 3 1/2 years), which would seem more like God.

14. God Takes an Inventory - This refers to Revelation 7:3, when an angel of God descends to earth and seals 144,000 Jewish men. It is another argument against a post-tribulation rapture, which would occur at the same time, and which it identifies as nonsense. This argument supports all the earlier raptures.

15. Noah and Lot as Examples - This refers to Jesus statement in Luke 17:28 that righteous believers were removed from an evil world, and the unbelievers

were judged. In all the various beliefs about the rapture believers are removed and unbelievers are judged.

Mid-Tribulation Rapture

The mid-tribulation rapture position argues that the rapture will occur at the middle of Daniel's seventieth week: 3 1/2 years into the 7-year period. Most of the arguments for this timing are the same as arguments for the pre-wrath rapture position; e.g. God promises in many scriptures that He will not pour out His wrath on those that belong to Him. Since the mid-tribulation occurs before God's wrath is poured out (see Re. 16:1-21), this argument supports a mid-tribulation rapture.

There are at least two other passages of scripture that could argue for a mid-tribulation rapture. Daniel 9:27 says that in the middle of the week (last seven years), the antichrist will cause the sacrifice and oblation within the Jewish Temple (that he had previously authorized at the beginning of the seven-year period) to cease. Then he will erect an image of himself (the abomination of desolation) in the Temple and order (on penalty of death), all people to worship the image. Daniel 12:1 says that at this time (mid-seven years) there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation (of Israel), and Daniel 12:7 adds that there are 3 1/2 years remaining to

until all these things are finished. Matthew 24:15 also refers to this time saying, when you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place then those living in Judea should flee to the mountains. This is the beginning of the Great Tribulation, which is a time of great persecution for the Jewish people, as well as other believers dwelling on the earth (Re. 13:14).

The events that occur near the mid-point of the seven-year period are tumultuous, to say the least. The antichrist is proclaiming himself to be God, and ruler of the earth, and he knows that he must make this proclamation from the very place that Jesus Christ is prophesied to rule during the millennium. Thus, many believers see this as a time that God will take His elect from the earth to save them from the antichrist's death decree. However, there are many events referred to in the scriptures that happen after the middle of the seven years, e.g. the Israelites are told to leave Judea immediately, and Revelation Chapter 12 indicates that they will be nourished for 3 1/2 years (until the end).

[Note: I believe that a mid-tribulation rapture comes short of the correct interpretation, that of a pre-wrath rapture, which we will discuss next.]

Pre-wrath Rapture

Those that believe that the rapture will occur just prior to the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth, as described in Revelation Chapter 16, make up this group. The book of Revelation is organized into periods identified by the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven vials. God's wrath begins when the first of the seven vials is poured out by the first of seven angels. We can approximate the timing of the rapture and the subsequent pouring out of God's wrath from the Word of God, given in several books of the Bible. Possibly the most organized presentation of these events is recorded in Matthew 24:4-31, as Jesus answered the disciples questions about the signs of His coming, and the end of the world. Jesus said that a period of time characterized by deception, betrayal, wars and rumors of wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes, known as the *beginning of sorrows*, would occur first. Matthew 24:14 prophesies the end of this period by announcing that the gospel message will be preached for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come. Revelation 14:6 also records this announcement at a time that seems somewhat later. Jesus then continues in Matthew 24:15-16 by warning those living in Israel that when they see the abomination of desolation,

prophesied by Daniel the prophet, to flee to the mountains. Daniel prophesied that this would occur at the mid-point of the seven years, and from what Jesus has added in Matthew Chapter 24, we know that this occurs at the end of the period known as the “beginning of sorrows”.

Jesus continues with His response to the disciples by announcing the beginning of the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:21. He says that this time is characterized by “*great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.*” We can determine the length of time of the Great Tribulation by referring to Revelation Chapter 12, which describes how the remnant of Israel will be saved when Christ returns. The remnant will flee to the wilderness, where they will be protected for 1,260 days (Re. 12:6). This occurs after the midpoint of the seven-year period, at the end of *the beginning of sorrows* and the beginning of the Great Tribulation when *she* (Israel) is in travail (persecution). The situation in Israel (and we assume the rest of the world), gets so bad that Jesus says in verse 22, that unless the days before the rapture should be shortened, there should be no flesh saved. He goes on to say that those days will be shortened. This is the statement that makes it clear that no one knows the exact time of the rapture (but God), for the Bible provides no information as to the number of reduced days.

In Revelation 24:27-31 Jesus announces the His coming in the clouds to gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. His coming for the rapture will be announced by signs in the heavens, and the sun and moon will be darkened. He will send His angels with the sound of a great trumpet, and they will gather His elect. This is the time that believer's immortal bodies will rise from the earth to join their spirit/souls, which have accompanied Jesus as He returns to gather His elect. His returning to gather His saints is clearly described in the scriptures (M't. 24:27-31; 1 Co. 15:51-52; 1 Th. 4:14-17), but scriptural support for the spirit/souls of the dead saints returning with Him in the clouds may be less evident. I will attempt to justify this conclusion below:

1. Hebrews 12:1 describes a "cloud of witnesses" that surround believers. St. Augustine saw these witnesses as the saints of the Church, which is Christ's body, spread as a vast fertilising cloud over the whole world.
2. Jesus is said to return in a cloud to gather His elect (1 Th. 4:16-17), and Matthew 24:30 adds that He is comes with power and great glory. This cloud could possibly be the spirit/souls of dead believers described as having power and great glory. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 says, "*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*" This is a clear

statement that Jesus brings the spirit/souls of the dead saints with Him when He returns for His elect.

3. The elect that Jesus comes to gather includes the bodies of both the dead and living saints. ¹ Thessalonians 4:16-17 says the dead shall rise first, followed by those that are alive and remain. ¹ Corinthians 12:52 says that “*the dead* (bodies) *shall be raised incorruptable, and we* (the living) *shall be changed*” (parenthetical expressions added). The spirit and soul which join these immortal bodies are very closely entwined. Hebrews 4:12 says, “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*” Comments on this verse from Vincent’s Word Studies in the NT says that the soul and spirit cannot be separated in any sense such as this, and the joints and marrow are not in contact with each other. The meaning is that the Word of God is very powerful, even penetrating to the soul and spirit. Because of this interconnection the soul and spirit actually accompany each other to heaven or hell at the death of the body (Ps. 86:13; ¹ Ki. 17:21-22; Ec. 12:7; Job 34:14; Eze. 18:4; M’t. 10:28; Re. 6:9). I should also note in the OT the belief was that there were only two parts of man: the inner man (soul/spirit), and the outer man (the body).

4. Matthew 24:28 says, “*For wherever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together.*” Luke 17:36-37 clarifies this somewhat by saying, “*Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto him, Where, Lord? And he said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together.*” This passage of scripture describes events that follow “*the day when the Son of men shall be revealed*” (Lu. 17:30). Given the context of this passage I do not see any reasonable interpretation other than when Jesus returns for His elect, the spirit/souls of the dead in Christ accompany Him. Wherever the bodies of the dead in Christ are located, there the “*eagles*” (the spirit/souls), will be gathered to join them, and thus become (once again) tripartite beings. The only difference is that the body is now incorruptible, and immortal. The human spirit and soul were formed directly by God, and are already that way.

At this point we are ready to discuss the scriptures that give us additional information as to the timing and sequence of the rapture in the book of Revelation. First, we must realize that the events in the book of Revelation are not given to us in a totally chronological order. In other words, the sequence of chapters does not always represent the order of the catastrophic events that John witnesses, although we know God does organize the periods and events

described. We know that the number seven is significant in God's original work of creation, and in the book of Revelation He pours out His judgment and wrath in segments of sevens. He uses the number seven to indicate something being complete, e.g. the creation story, which was completed in seven days, including His day of rest. We note in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, that seven churches were addressed. These two chapters appear to address typical problems characteristic of latter-day (contemporary) churches, as well as problems existing in churches of the first century. We also note that God first deals with problems in the churches, both then and now (1 Pe. 4:17).

In Chapter 4 and 5, John, while in the spirit, was given his first view of the throne room of God. It is important to note here that John sees no evidence of raptured saints before the throne in this first vision of God's throne. We also note that the Lamb (the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Root of David) was the only One worthy to take the book of God's judgment and wrath from the hand of God. In Chapters 6 and 7 we read about the opening of the first six seals on the scroll in the Lord's hand. Events ascribed to the breaking of the seals seem to be like a forecast of things to come, to set the stage for what is ahead, and possibly prepare John for what he is about to witness. Until the seals are actually broken and the book is opened, God does not begin to judge

the earth and pour out His wrath. Thus, the opening of the first four seals presage a period of time referred to as the *beginning of sorrows*, described in Matthew 24:4-14, which span the first 3 1/2 years of Daniel's last seven years.

With the breaking of the seventh seal in Chapter 8, God's book will finally be opened, and the outpouring of His judgment and wrath will begin.

Revelation 8:1 records the fact that with the breaking of the seventh seal, there will be silence in heaven for about a half-hour. This undoubtedly acknowledges the monumental changes that are about to begin as God reclaims the earth, and imprisons Satan.

In Revelation Chapters 8 through 11, John witnesses the sounding of seven trumpets, which release God's judgments in the period identified as the Great Tribulation, which spans the final 3 1/2 years of Daniel's last seven years.

Finally, in Revelation Chapters 15 and 16, John witnesses the outpouring of seven vials, which constitute the filling up, or completion of God's wrath.

Thus, we see that the book of Revelation is organized into periods identified by the **seven churches**, the **seven seals**, the **seven trumpets**, and the **seven vials**. If the rapture occurs early during the Great Tribulation, which is the period during which the seven trumpets and the seven vials are poured out, we should be able to find evidence to support that contention in

the book of Revelation. I believe the Bible clearly identifies the raptured Christians of all nations, kindreds, people, and tongues clothed with white robes, with palms in their hands before God's throne in Revelation 7:9. This multitude, which no man could number, were said to have come out of Great Tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus, the Lamb of God, is identified as their shepherd in verse 17. Although John's vision of this multitude is recorded in Chapter 7, before the seventh seal is opened and the Great Tribulation begins, we need to remember that Chapter 6 and 7 are previews of things to come, the real action begins near the middle of the seven years, with initiation of the Great Tribulation. The important clue here is the fact that the great multitude came out of Great Tribulation (Re. 7:13-17), so we know that they were raptured during the Great Tribulation (M't. 24:21-22).

The second clue as to the timing of the rapture that I recognize in the book of Revelation is given in Chapter 10:7, "*But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.*" The mystery of God is defined as Christ, God, the gospel, or the Holy Spirit, and/or the kingdom of God within the believer (M'r. 4:11; Ro. 11:25, 16:25; 1 Co. 15:51-52; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:26-27). 1

Corinthians 15:52 says, *“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”*

The rapture/resurrection of all those that have the Holy Spirit within will be the end of the Holy Spirit’s ministry on earth as “comforter”, and the force that restrained the antichrist (1 Th. 2:1-7) will no longer hold him back. As announced by the silence in heaven and culminated in the “sounding” of the seventh trumpet, this is a sea-change event in recorded time. Revelation 11:15 records this momentous pronouncement as follows: *“And the seventh angel sounded: and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.”* From this time on the world belongs to our Lord, for when God prophesies something, it comes to pass (Da. 7:14, 18, 27).

Post-Tribulation Rapture

I can find no logical support for any sort of rapture after the Lord has conquered evil in the battle of Armageddon: this is the time when Satan is cast into the abyss, where he is bound and sealed for 1000-years (Re.20:1-3).

Revelation 20:6 says, *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and*

shall reign with him a thousand years.” This says that those raptured/resurrected in the first resurrection will reign with Christ during the millennium, and those that were not included in the first resurrection will be resurrected for judgment at the Great White Throne at the end of the millennium: this will be their second death.

Conclusion

From what we have discussed I believe the arguments in favor of the rapture/resurrection occurring after the middle of the final seven years, and early during the Great Tribulation, is very persuading. A short summary of these arguments is listed below:

- 1.** God will not pour out His wrath on those that belong to Him, thus we know that the rapture/resurrection must occur before the events described in Revelation Chapter 16 begin.
- 2.** According to Matthew 24:15, when the antichrist erects an image of himself and places it in the Jewish temple, the time known as the Great Tribulation is about to begin. Revelation 7:14 says that the multitude of believers from every nation, kindred, people and tongues standing before God’s throne in heaven came out of Great Tribulation. This tells us that the rapture must occur during the Great Tribulation: Matthew 24:22 adds that the days during the Great

Tribulation to the time of rapture will be shortened for the elect's sake. This seems to imply that the time of rapture could be early during the Great Tribulation.

3. The rapture is described in Matthew 24:27-31 as being after the tribulation of those days. This seems to validate the fact that the great multitude of raptured saints before the throne will suffer during some of the Great Tribulation. This is also alluded to in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and Revelation 10:7, which says that the rapture will occur when the seventh angel begins to sound. This corresponds to the time of the end of the seven plagues of the Great Tribulation, and the beginning of the time when God's wrath is poured out upon the earth.

4. We conclude that the rapture will occur sometime after the middle of the last seven years during the Great Tribulation. God promises that He will shorten the days that believers will suffer during the Great Tribulation in order to save some from death orchestrated by the antichrist. For readers interested in a more detailed presentation of the timing of events occurring during Daniel's prophesied final week I would suggest referring to Table 1a and 1b in Chapter 8, ["A Layman's Commentary on the Revelation of Jesus Christ"](#), [available at the website SCRIBD, at no cost.](#) I would also recommend Marvin Rosenthal's book entitled: "The Pre-Wrath Rapture of the Church".

Chapter 6

When Does God Give The Holy Spirit?

This must surely be one of the most perplexing questions in Christian churches of today, though I doubt that it would have caused any consternation among believers of the first century. The scripture seems clear about this, for Luke 11:13 says, *“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?”* But many individuals, who feel that they have received Jesus as Lord and Savior, come asking for prayer to receive the Holy Spirit, only to leave in doubt about receiving after being prayed for (often with the laying-on of hands). This is a problem that apparently never arose in the first-century church. Some in the book of Acts were baptized the name of Jesus (Acts 8:15-17), and some by John’s baptism for repentance only (Acts 19:2), but did not know of the Holy Spirit. They were later prayed for by Peter and John in one case, and by Paul in the other, and they received the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in

tongues and prophesying. In another case Peter went to minister to a group of Gentiles, and while he was preaching the gospel God poured the Holy Spirit out on those that were there: they received the Holy Spirit without prayer, and apparently without asking Him. There was also a certain Jew named Apollos who was an eloquent speaker and fervent in the spirit, but he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, teaching the things of the Lord, and showing by the scriptures that Jesus was the Christ. In this case Aquila and Priscilla, workers with Paul, took Apollos under their wing, and expounded the way of the Lord more perfectly, which we assume included Apollos receiving the Holy Spirit. What we note from the book of Acts about the first-century church is that there seems to be no questioning or doubt about having, or not having, the Holy Spirit. Incredulity associated with receiving the Holy Spirit appears to be a more recent development.

I received the Holy Spirit in 1963 at a Layman's Retreat in Palestine, Texas, in the company of seven other men from a Methodist church in Pasadena, Texas. We were all unexpectedly blessed by a Damascus Road experience which occurred in the small bungalow where we were housed

during the retreat. We had returned from the morning session and were outside of our bungalow talking when one of the men named Stan suggested that we go inside for prayer. There was no mention of the Holy Spirit; in fact, I think we were all pretty ignorant in that regard. My immediate reaction was, “Why is Stan messing up our bull session?” I did not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ at that time, and when it came to praying I always struggled. I suspect that the other seven men were in that same condition: believing **in** Christ, but not believing **into** Him. Anyway, we all dutifully went into the bungalow and sat on our individual bunk beds as Stan began to lead us in prayer. There was no mention of the Holy Spirit during the entire prayer time. Stan asked us to begin mentally confessing the things in our lives that we would like to be rid of into our cupped hands, placed in front of us. As the prayer session went on for awhile I unexpectedly began to weep - something that I never did (I considered it unmanly). At about the same time I began to be aware of a strange and powerful presence in the corner of the room behind me. I recognized immediately that God had entered our room, but what I sensed was a source of indescribable light that seemed to be communicating with my inner being, most of which I

didn't register immediately. As the prayer time came to an end embarrassment about my tears was replaced by surprise when I realized that all of us had shared the same experience. We all knew that something had changed in our lives, but I do not believe we realized that we had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Several began confessing what they were going to do as a result of what had happened, e.g. quit smoking, quit gambling, starting a men's prayer group at church, etc. I did not recognize all the things that had changed in my life immediately: some took several months for me to understand, but one thing did stand out that I now believe encompassed all the others: Jesus Christ knew me as a person and wanted to come into my life to make me like Himself (in His image). Fortunately, when we returned to Pasadena, a spirit-filled acquaintance of Stan's from Lubbock, Texas, came to Pasadena to spend some time interpreting what had happened to us and teaching us about the Holy Spirit. This was the first time that the name of the Holy Spirit had come up, but I think that some of the group knew that something had entered their lives, for so much had changed. I remember my feeling at that time: I wanted God to jerk me up in a Sunday morning service with a message in tongues. Seem pretty foolish now that I look

back on it. At that time the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit was considered to be using tongues in personal prayer, not in a public prophetic message. As a result, many of us sought out speakers who came to Houston, Texas, in hopes that they could teach us how to release our tongues. It was fruitless: I never spoke in tongues as a result of the instruction we received from these men. However, several of our group did begin to use their tongues in this way. Unfortunately, they chose a very inappropriate time and place to do this and, as a result, our pastor encouraged us to leave the church: this new move of the Spirit was disrupting to some of the leading members of the church. There was certainly fault enough to go around on both sides of the dissension that arose: those that had been filled with the Spirit were overly exuberant and used poor judgment, the older leaders of the church (including the pastor) were too closed-minded and could not bring themselves to believe this move was from God.

Note: For anyone interested in greater detail about the events that occurred in Palestine, Texas, described above, I refer you to Chapter 1 of a book entitled “A Man of God” by Jesse C. Jones, available free at the website SCRIBD.

The Stumbling Block

I believe this is the real crux of the problem: “Removal of the stumbling block(s) that keep us from knowing when, and to what level or degree the Holy Spirit comes into our life.” I think much of the confusion in regard to whether a person has, or has not, received the Holy Spirit is the result of a lack of a clear, and widely agreed to understanding of the meaning of the scripture in John 20:22. After His resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples, where they were assembled for fear of the Jews, and said, *“Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.”* Although this verse is interpreted by many Christians to mean that the disciples received the Holy Spirit at that time, the actual meaning according to many Bible expositors is that the disciples should “anticipate” receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, some 40 days hence. To further support this interpretation, some number of days after His appearance the disciples were told that they would actually receive the baptism of the Holy Ghost not many days hence (Acts 1:5), and in Acts 1:8, they were told that they would receive power when the Holy Ghost came upon them. This is exactly what hap-

pened on the day of Pentecost: the Holy Spirit was poured out with a mighty rushing wind, cloven tongues like fire rested on each one, and they all began to speak with other tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance. During the past 50+ years I have witnessed people receiving the Holy Spirit many times, and it always seems very obvious that some life-changing power has entered their bodies. All of the men at Palestine were too ignorant about the Holy Spirit to know what had happened, but we soon learned that our lives had been changed forever by the very Spirit of God Himself, and that He entered our lives for a purpose: to conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. I hope readers can accept the fact that the disciples did not receive some diminished measure of the Holy Spirit (as compared to baptism), when the Lord breathed on them, for we will now examine that very thing.

Some years ago my wife and I changed churches and soon joined a Monday night Bible study. The leader happened to be discussing the subject of receiving of the Holy Spirit, and I pointed out that John 3:34 KJV, strongly implies that God gives the Holy Spirit to believers by measure when it says, “. . . *for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him* (Jesus).” My understanding was that if God made a point of saying He did

not give Jesus the Holy Spirit by measure, He must be implying that He does give ordinary believers the Spirit by measure. Some time later, after I had purchased a Greek New Testament (GNT), I found to my surprise that John 3:34 GNT says, “. . .*for God does not give the Spirit by measure,*” which states that God gave the Holy Spirit to Jesus (and us by implication), without any limitation whatever. The KJV renders that verse in such a way that led me to assume God gave believers the Holy Spirit with limited capabilities, somewhat like He did in the OT, when He filled Bezaleel and Aholiab with the spirit of God for wisdom, understanding, and knowledge, for the building of the tabernacle (Ex. 31:1-5). The passage in the Greek NT cleared up the meaning: God does not give the Holy Spirit by measure to anyone under the new covenant. This is something that changed from the old to the new covenant: Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to abide with us forever (John 14:16). And He did not send the Spirit to us piece-meal, we received the whole Person when He came to reside within us. One possible area of confusing on this is the fact that God does give faith by measure. Romans 12:3 states that “*God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*” Subsequent scripture describes how the measure is determined by the particular gift that is given. Faith is

the power unto belief, and the fact that it is given by measure seems very logical, whereas, the Holy Spirit is a person and can not be divided by measure. Unfortunately, we often do not give the Holy Spirit freedom to manifest all the gifts and fruits that He offers. Maybe this is why God finds it necessary to send a particular gift with an extra shot of power (faith) for us to believe and manifest it.

R. A. Torrey in his book entitled: "What the Bible Teaches", says "A number of suggestive phrases--"Baptized with the Holy Spirit," "Filled with the Holy Ghost," "The Holy Ghost fell on them," "The gift of the Holy Ghost was poured out," Receive the Holy Ghost," "The Holy Ghost came on them," "Gifts of the Holy Ghost," "I send the promise of my Father upon you," "Endued with power from on high," are used in the New Testament to describe one and same experience (see Acts 1:5, 4:8, 10:44-46, 11:15-17, 19:2; Heb. 2:4; 1 Co. 12:4, 11, 13; Luke 24:49)." All of these suggestive phrases state that when a believer is baptized, filled, fallen upon, come upon, endued by, gifted with, etc. the meaning is always the same: they have received the Holy Spirit in fullness, without measure.

I realize that this is a difficult teaching for some to accept, for it certainly brings into question the suggestion that baptism for salvation insures receipt of the Holy Spirit. Also, Luke 11:13 indicates that God will give believers the Holy Spirit when they ask for it. I think we need to be mindful that God certainly wants to give us the Holy Spirit, but according to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Bible Words, "our asking must be in due recognition of His name (i.e., in accord with the divine will and purpose)." This seems logical, for God's primary purpose in giving the Holy Spirit is to renew our minds, to sanctify us and conform us to the image of Christ. He seemingly has a time and condition (a base line, or goal), that each of us must reach before He entrusts us with the Holy Spirit, for when we receive we are going to be a little crazy (in a good way), for awhile: it is like receiving a power surge, and your life is going to change. The change that comes will affect those that receive in different ways, and the way that it affects you will enhance your uniqueness, for you will be gradually transformed into the person God had envisioned all along. We will discuss this change in a little more detail next.

Witness of the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:16 says, “*The Spirit itself [Himself] beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.*” This verse will always have a special meaning for me because I have a vivid memory of having a discussion about death with a friend when I was about 18. She had no doubts about the fact that she would immediately go to heaven. I had no such confidence for I did not have the witness that I was a child of God’s, even though I knew Jesus as my Savior: I believed **in** Him (objectively), but not **into** Him (subjectively). A short time after the encounter at the Palestine Men’s Retreat (see above), I happened to come across this scripture and realized that I now had the witness within: now I believed **into** Him. I was 33 at that time, so it was obvious that God had been working on me a long time to get me to the place where He could trust me with His Spirit. Knowing that I was a child of God was one of the big changes that happened to me when I received the Holy Spirit: I think it is one of the changes that happens to all those that receive the Spirit. I have read that John Wesley relied on this as a test of whether a person had received the Holy Spirit, or not.

Another thing that happened to me was realization that Jesus wanted to become personally involved in my life, He wanted to come into my life through His Spirit, and He wanted me to receive the guidance He would provide. This was just a totally new thought to me: I didn't know that He was a person (albeit immaterial), that wanted to be active in my everyday life: that He was that interested in me. Once He began to enter my life I felt that some changes had to take place immediately: this seemed to include gambling, my lack of a prayer life, my family, my relationship with my wife, and my priorities. There were a lot of other things that changed over a longer period of time--in fact He is still working on me after over 50-years.

Another change that took a little time for me to release was my tongue. Although I was immediately freed to go to God in prayer, I did not find a way to release my tongue in prayer in sessions conducted by well-known spirit-filled speakers. This came to me during private prayer without any fanfare at all. What I learned from this is that praying in tongues is actually letting the Holy Spirit within me to pray. I find it is especially helpful when I do not know how to pray about some particular problem. It is no more a sign that a person has received the Holy Spirit

than any of the other many characteristics that accompany Him when He enters your life. Praying in tongues is different than receiving a prophecy in tongues, and this difference is best explained by reference to 1 Corinthians Chapter 14.

One other thing I might mention about prayer is that once I received the Holy Spirit my prayer life began to come alive. I talk to God now and know that He is listening. I often get feedback and guidance during prayer, and, consistent with God's nature, it is usually something that I would never have thought about. For example, I was once praying about a facilities problem we had at the church we were attending. I was in charge of church facilities so it was my job to make decisions concerning modifications, etc. The change required was relatively expensive for a small church, and I wasn't convinced that the proposed solution would solve the problem, which concerned building a ramp for one of the teenagers in our church that was confined to a wheelchair. I was asking God for guidance about whether make the change, or to refuse and make some members upset, when God asked me why I didn't seek healing for the wheel-chair bound young man. God was very specific: He re-

ferred me to a healing in the NT of a woman with a spirit of infirmity - a incident that I was not at all familiar with.

I have also had experiences in which God jumped into situations when I was not praying or even thinking about spiritual things. I was once sitting in an airport feeling very down about my performance at a NASA Headquarters meeting to determine how to divide a tight budget among various proposed facilities. All at once God spoke to me firmly, and what seemed to me to be loudly, saying that our facility was going to be funded and I would realize that I did not have a thing to do with it. This was actually an answer to an earlier prayer request of mine for my prayer group to lay hands on me and pray about pride. I was beginning to feel pretty important to God as a result of the blessings we had received in the prayer group that He (only) had raised up. Just as with all of God's promises, the facility was approved about a month later.

Possibly the greatest change that has occurred in my life after receiving the Holy Spirit is my relationship with Jesus Christ. I believed in Christ when I was young, and I revered and honored Him as my Savior who died to allow God to forgive my sin, but I cannot say that I actually felt "love" for Him at that time. I didn't have a personal relationship

with Him, and I suppose it is difficult to feel love for someone you don't know personally. It was some time after I had received the Holy Spirit that I began to realize that I loved the Lord: I felt a depth of love for Him that I really cannot describe. It was the kind of love (*agape*) that Jesus asked Peter (twice) if he had for Him in John 21:15-16: Peter's answer was that he had affection (*phileo*) love for Him. Finally, Jesus asked Peter the third time if he loved (had *phileo* love) for Him, and Peter (with petulance) answered that he had *phileo* love for Him. I believe this is a wonderful teaching on how our love for Christ changes after we receive the Holy Spirit. Before I received the Holy Spirit my answer would have been the same as Peter's, now I believe it could be best described as *agape* love, described in 1 Corinthians 13. Galatians 5:22 says that *agape* love is (among) the fruit of the Spirit, so I should expect to have this kind of love for Christ if I have received the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 13:13 says "*And now abideth faith, hope, charity [love], these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love].*"

I have used my own experiences as examples above, but I want to now summarize the things given in God's Word that can happen to a person who receives the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit:

1. Can tell you what to speak under trial.
2. Can come upon you.
3. Can fill you.
4. Can baptize you.
5. Can take various invisible and visible forms.
6. Can alert you.
7. Is the one Person of God for which blasphemy cannot be forgiven.
8. Will teach you all things.
9. Will imbue you with power.
10. Will cause you to bear fruit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, and temperance.
11. Will give gifts: word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, and interpretation of tongues.
12. Must not be lied to.
13. Can be received by obeying Christ.
14. Can be received by the laying on of hands.
15. Can release those oppressed by the devil.

16. Provides guidance.
17. Places overseers over the flock.
18. Conscience bears witness of.
19. Spoke through OT prophets.
20. Causes our hearts to pour out the love of God.
21. Gives power to abound in hope.
22. Compares spiritual things with spiritual things which natural man cannot understand.
23. Resides in our body: the temple of the Holy Spirit.
24. Cannot call Jesus accursed but calls Him Lord.
25. Seals the believer to the day of redemption.
26. Is distributed according to God's will.
27. Cannot be renewed if partakers fall away.
28. Enables gospel preaching.
29. Is not given by measure.
30. Must not be grieved.
31. As our comforter provides encouragement and alleviation of grief.
32. As our sanctifier renews our minds and conforms us to the image of Christ.

- 33. Gives us understanding of the Word of God.
- 34. Knows the mind of God, thus we have access to the mind of God through Him.
- 35. Sets us free from the law of sin and death.
- 36. Guides us in prayer, worship, and praise.

Closure

In his book “My Utmost For His Highest”, Oswald Chambers has this to say about the Holy Spirit and the believer: “The Holy Spirit has been given; the Lord is glorified - our waiting is not dependent upon the providence of God, but on our own spiritual fitness. The attitude of receiving and welcoming the Holy Spirit into our lives is to be the continual attitude of a believer”.

Chapter 7

Strongholds

The word “strongholds” is used many times in the Hebrew OT, but the KJV separates the two words “strong” and “hold(s)” in both the NT and the OT. The Hebrew word interpreted by the combination of these two English words generally means a fortified place, or a defensive structure of some kind. The word “stronghold” is used only one time in the GNT. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 GNT says, *“for the weapons of our warfare (are) not fleshly, but powerful to God in order to pull down strongholds, pulling down imaginations and every high thing lifting up (itself) against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought into the obedience of Christ, . . .”* Moulton’s Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised gives the meaning of the Greek word interpreted “stronghold” as, “an opposing bulwark of error or vice.” For those unfamiliar with the word “bulwark,” Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language gives the following definition: “1. an earthwork or defensive wall; fortified rampart. 2. a breakwater. 3. a defense; protection.”

It seems clear that what this passage of scripture says is that powerful spiritual weapons are available to believers into Christ for the destruction of strongly held beliefs, thoughts, and ideas that are contrary to the Word of God. Moulton defines the word “*fleshly*” in these two verses as “carnal, human as opposed to divine.” Where do these beliefs, thoughts, and ideas originate? They originate in the mind, where forces act to influence thought, behavior and personality as a result of worldly enticements. James 1:12 says, “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried [hath been approved], he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord promised to them that love him.*” 1 Peter 1:7 adds, “*That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*” It comes down to this: “*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would*” (Ga. 5:17). Galatians 5:19-21 goes on to identify these works of the flesh as adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, reveling, and other similar evils. When we receive salvation all of our past sins (and the associated guilt) are forgiven (Ro. 3:25; Heb. 9:15): we are clean spiritually for the first time in our lives. In His death on the

cross Christ also provided the blood sacrifice necessary for forgiveness of future sins, but we must confess and receive repentance for our transgression: God will then cleanse us from unrighteousness (1 Jo. 1:9).

In salvation God also removes stony places from our heart, and enlivens our human spirit (Eze. 36:26), so that we are equipped to receive guidance and direction from His Holy Spirit. He then sets us on the path to sanctification (making us holy), which will continue until we die. This is when the battle between our flesh and the Holy Spirit begins. Of course, we have the Holy Spirit within to help in defending us from being overwhelmed, but God is in the process of making us over into the image of Christ, and He will always do whatever that requires. Most of us are pretty ignorant about spiritual things when we are first saved, consequently we have a lot to learn. If we are exposed to false teaching from our church, friends, teachers, or the world, we can begin to develop new stony places in our hearts, and old ones can spring up. God warns us to prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good (1 Th. 5:21), but we don't know the Bible; thus, we are susceptible to Satan's enticements, which are often packaged in "religious" wrappings. Our safe haven during our early life under sanctification is the Holy Spirit and the changed nature we re-

ceive at salvation (2 Pe. 1:4). God is working with a baby believer, and babies can make pretty big messes at times.

Ezekiel 36:26 describes the changes that take place in a person's life when he/she receives Jesus as savior: "*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*" As we have various experiences we translate the essential facts learned, including the outcomes, into memories that are stored in our mind, which is an element of the biblical heart. These stored memories are recalled when we experience identical, similar, or related occurrences, using techniques and processes (computer-like brain routines) that are not well understood, and no one can adequately explain. Some of these routines (e.g. bodily control functions) do not change with experience, but are affected by illness and age. Others change as we have new or related experiences; and some are actually developed as we gain new knowledge. Using these routines, and the stored memories we have, we begin to derive the same emotions and feelings from identical, or similar experiences. In effect, our mind (biblical heart) is closed to other possible outcomes. This is what I believe the Bible calls *hardening* of the heart, and unfortunately, some of these stones are so entrenched that they can be characterized as strongholds, which can only be pulled down by

spiritual weapons provided by God Himself, acting in the temple (or body) of the believer.

The Bible describes these weapons as the whole armor of God, that enable a believer to stand against the wiles of the devil. They consist of: love of the truth; righteousness; preparation of the gospel of peace; faith; the hope of salvation; and the two-edged sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which is the only offensive weapon. We see from the description in Ephesians 6:14-17, that God has provided full-body protection for the believer, but we must keep our armor in tip-top condition, as with any soldier who knows his life depends on his wariness and the effectiveness of his weapon. 1 John 5:18 says, in part,

“...but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked [the evil] one toucheth him not.” If the believer abides in Christ, Satan has little means of access for leading him astray. The one offensive weapon, the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God), is fully able to fend off the devil if he tries to attack; thus, we are fully protected, defensively and offensively, but only if we **abide** (to be in close and settled union). The only exception to this is if God sees that you need teaching. Under this circumstance He can allow Satan access just as He did in teaching Job (Job 1:9-12).

Another biblical term that seems to have a similar, if not identical meaning to the word “stronghold,” is the phrase “hardness of heart.” In Mark 3:1-5, Jesus confronts the Pharisees about the hardness of their hearts regarding a man who had a withered hand which Jesus healed on the sabbath day. Jesus asked them, *“Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath day, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill? But they (the Pharisees) held their peace. And when he had looked around about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith to the man, Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.”* I believe it is fair to say that these Pharisee’s had a stronghold protecting their erroneous belief about the sabbath day, as well as their understanding of good and evil.

I believe the worst thing about holding these strongholds, or hard places in our hearts is the destructive effect it has on our being able to glean the truths God has given us in His Holy Word, the Bible. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones discusses this at some length in his preface to the book “Studies in the Sermon of the Mount.” He says that studying the Bible, which is our only real authority about God and the Christian life, with preconceived “theories” leads to over-emphasizing one aspect and under-emphasizing another. “There is nothing so dangerous as to come to the Bible with a theory, with preconceived ideas, with

some pet idea of our own . . . “ I suggest that strongholds and hard places are similar, if not identical to such theories and preconceived ideas. We must approach our study of the Bible recognizing that it is our Maker’s description of what He has done throughout history in relation to mankind, while trying to develop a body of friends who will love him unto death, and who will eventually join Him in heaven for eternity. In this regard we must believe that the Bible is the “true truth,” and when we come across a Word or scripture that challenges our pet theories (some of which have hardened into strongholds), we must be willing to study the Bible with an open mind until we come to full acceptance of the truth as given by God.

I want bring this chapter to a close by describing what I believe was a hard place and a stronghold I encountered in my own life that I hope will give the reader a more personal understanding of how these conditions in our hearts can drive our spiritual outlook on life. If you are one that has these identical conditions in your heart you may have difficulty receiving anything from these narratives. I only hope you can consider these as examples of the manner in which hard places and strongholds can sometimes keep us from understanding the truth from God’s Word, and two ways they can be dealt with successfully.

Example 1 - A Hard Place

I am presently retired, but I was an engineer all of my professional life, and as such, I leaned toward some sort of scientific explanation of God's creation. I don't remember receiving any specific teaching on this subject, but the generally accepted theory that human life came about via a biological miracle followed by macro-evolution was considered valid, for it was considered authoritative by the scientific world, and therefore could not be challenged. However, I grew up in the 1930's Bible belt and considered the Bible as God's Word. To accommodate two opposing views regarding the first chapter of Genesis I cobbled together an explanation that incorporated both: a sort of scientific explanation of the first chapter of Genesis, one in which God used biologic and scientific methods during the creation process. This may sound dumb, but I was young, and had not given this subject much serious thought. Unfortunately, this theory is still being taught in public schools and universities, and thus, unbelievers, as well as many Christians and Jews, accept this academic fraud hook, line, and sinker. I was one of those that accepted this teaching without question, since it was the "accepted" theory in the mid-1900's when I was in

public school, and later in universities. I never thought to question this since it came from teachers older and more knowledgeable than I. But I was young, and most teenagers and those in their twenties who are still seeking direction for their lives, seldom spend any time searching for answers to such questions.

In 1963 I had an encounter with Jesus Christ, and as a result, my relationship with Him changed, I began to know Jesus personally, subjectively rather than just objectively. Soon after that time I was blessed to become part of a Bible study group taught by a great man of God, seemingly sent to us to make disciples of Christ. Almost immediately my belief about the creation raised a red flag with my new mentor. As he and I would talk about this privately he never argued with me, but always treated me with Christian love. As we would part he would always say, “You just keep praying about this Jesse, and I will do the same.” The remarkable change that took place in my thinking in just a few weeks astounded me. I do not remember doing any real Bible study on this subject, nor do I remember searching scientific articles for answers: my thinking just did a 180-degree turn. My mentor, Brother Earle Frid, never registered any surprise about my change of heart. I am suspicious that he knew what would happen all along.

In thinking about this now, many years later, I tend to believe this is what could be characterized as a hard place in my heart. I did not have any solid basis for believing in macro-evolution, other than mere acceptance of what the scientific world said. I did not have a strong defense, which I think is required for a stronghold. When Brother Frid, who I considered to be a true disciple of God, began to illuminate the Bible, and tell about his experiences with Jesus Christ, my mind began the renewing process, and I began to believe “into” Him, rather than just “in” Him. I began to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, whereas before I only knew that He was true and real, but I had no intimacy with Him: I had no sense of His presence within me through the Holy Spirit. As a result of this change I began to see God in a different light. I began to see that He wanted to be part of my life: actually, He wanted me to willingly give Him control of my life.

Somehow, all of this resulted in God being “bigger” and “greater” than I had ever realized, and I began to see Genesis Chapter 1 in a different light: He could create (bring material things to be from nothing); make (form things from existing materials); or He could develop (use the natural processes He put in place). This chapter is obviously the key to understanding the means He used in creating the universe, our beautiful earth, and the creatures He devised

to occupy it. In Genesis 1:1 God states clearly that He “*created*” the heaven and the earth, so we know that they were spoken into existence from nothing.

Verse 2 mentions the earth, which then existed in a crude and formless mass, ready to be “*made*” into a place suitable for mankind. In verse 3 God “*creates*” light, and He divided the light from the darkness. The light referred to here is not light from the sun and moon, which are “*made*” and placed in the heavens on the fourth day. Rather, this is cosmic radiation, which is identified as photons (a quantum of light energy), that travels at a velocity of approximately 180,000 miles per second by wavelike or vibrational motion. We detect a portion of this wave referred to as “white light” through our eyes, by the stimulation of color sensitive photoreceptors. This white light can be separated into its various wave-lengths by passing it through a prism, or other diffracting medium, to provide the six colors of the visible spectrum. In verses 6 and 7 God separated the waters above the earth from those below by placing a firmament (atmosphere), which He “*made*” between the two. In verses 9 and 10 God “*made*” the waters under the atmosphere to be gathered together and dry land to appear. In verses 11 and 12 God seems to have “*developed*” grass, herbs, and trees using the process of growth that He established. Verses 14-18 describe how God “*made*” the sun and the moon and set them in the firmament

to rule the day and the night. In verses 20-22, God “*created*” fish and birds which were to produce according to their kind. In verses 24 and 25 God “*made*” living creatures in the earth, each after their kind. In verses 26-28, God “*created*” and “*made*” man in His own image (tripartite), and gave them dominion over all living creatures, telling them to be fruitful and multiply. In using both terms, “*created*” and “*made*” I believe the Bible describes the “*making*” of man from the dust of the ground, and “*creating*” His tripartite image (body, soul, and spirit).

From the above we see that God created, made, and developed to bring His creation about. He was behind every act that occurred here, and I do not see any possible connection to the methodology proposed by many in the scientific world that man came into existence through an accidental biological miracle, and developed into modern man through millions of years of macro-evolution. God goes out of His way to insure that we understand that living creatures propagate by bearing their offspring after their “own kind.”

Example 2 - A Stronghold

If my categorical structure is valid I would have to say that a stronghold is much, much more difficult to overcome than is a hard place. Many who identify themselves as Christians will not agree with me in the resolution of my

stronghold example, for other divergent opinions on this subject are widely accepted in today's liberal spiritual environment. Nevertheless, I hope that readers will be able to accept this as a case study on this subject, whether you can accept the conclusion or not.

The stronghold to which I refer concerns God's choosing of those that will receive salvation, rather than future believers choosing Him. As indicated above, this is certainly one of the most difficult biblical teachings for believers to accept. Our concept of justice rebels at the thought that God would choose some for salvation and reject others, thus condemning them to eternal punishment and suffering. This was exactly the way I felt for much of my life: I refused to accept the fact that God could act in a way conflicting with my own sense of right and wrong. When it came to the Bible I read it as seeing through a glass darkly, I did the very thing D. Martin Lloyd-Jones warns about: I interpreted it in the light of my own theories, beliefs, hard places, and strongholds. This is the problem addressed by Paul in Romans 9:18-21: *"Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter the power [a right]*

over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another to dishonour?

I knew that God was our Creator and thus the Father of all men (Eph. 4:6), but I did not see that He was the spiritual Father only to believers (Ro. 8:14; 2 Co. 6:14-18).

I struggled for many years trying to find a way to make God's teaching on predestination and foreknowledge compatible with my own sense of justice, but I was repeatedly confronted by God's Word in scriptures such as, "*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it to you*" (Joh. 15:16). Over time I finally came to appreciate why God would choose us, rather than waiting and hoping that we would choose Him. The reverence and awe I have for God's majesty have greatly increased as a result.

The meaning of the two words *election* and *chosen*, were critical in my change of heart. God chooses those that belong to Him, and man's free will is not involved in any way at all. In fact, the Bible teaches that unregenerate man does not have free will in regard to choosing or not choosing God (see Ro. 9:10-24). The biblical word "*election*" refers to God the Father choosing (predestinating) those that would be regenerated, saved, and sanctified, before the foundation

of the world. By choosing certain people God committed Himself to doing whatever is necessary to insure that these chosen ones are “called” to Jesus Christ. The biblical word “*chosen*”, as used in the NT, conveys the idea of choosing recipients to bestow special favor and privilege. The words choose, chooseth, choosing, chose, and chosen, as used in the KJV of the bible, exclusively supports the fact that God chooses men, men do not choose God. Of the 216 times these words are cited, 78 relate to God choosing a man, men, Israel, or the elect. The remaining citations are unrelated.

The arguments that finally broke my resistance (my stronghold’s defense) on this subject are listed below:

1. I began to realize that in insisting that God act like I thought He should, I was making a decision for the Creator of the universe who says, “*My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your way my ways, saith the Lord,*” (Is. 55:8, see also 1 Co. 3:20).
2. The scriptures stating, or inferring that God, and not man, chooses those who will be saved. Lewis Sperry Chafer’s book entitled, “Major Bible Themes,” lists the following scriptures that state this fact, Ephesians 1:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; and 1 Peter 1:2. However, there are many other scriptures that state this fact using the terms foreordination, predestination, and

election: Chafer lists over thirty in this category. There are many, many others that infer this fact: some by mentioning those that belong to God, but have yet to be saved (Ac. 18:10; Ro. 11:4), while others refer to the elect (22 times), and chosen (30 times).

3. Scriptures such as Ephesians 1:3-5, *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame [blemish] before him in love: Having predestinated [foreordained] us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”*
4. Romans 8:29, which says that God chose those that He “foreknew” before the foundation of the world, to predestinate, call, justify, adopt, and be glorified (see also Ro. 8:28-30; 2 Ti. 1:9; Re. 13:8, 14:6, 21:27). The key word “foreknew” in this passage is defined by Moulton’s Analytical Greek Lexicon revised as, “. . .to appoint as subjects of future privileges.”
5. Scriptures such as Revelation 13:8, 17:8 and 20:15, that refer to the destiny of those that do **not** have their names written in the Lamb’s book of life.

6. The fact that during the entire history of Christianity whenever the subject of God's sovereignty over man's election became divisive, it was consistently resolved in support of Saint Augustine's position. In the fourth century a controversy arose largely related to a disagreement about the relationship of man's free will to original sin, and to the grace of God. Augustine maintained that before the fall we were free to sin and not to sin, but between the fall and redemption the only freedom left to us was the freedom to sin. After redemption he maintained that we were free both to sin and not to sin. On the other hand, a monk named Pelagius claimed that each of us comes in to the world with complete freedom to sin, or not to sin. In his view there was no such thing as original sin, nor a corruption of human nature forcing us to sin. It was thought that this argument was settled in AD 431, when the third ecumenical council met in Ephesus, and condemned the beliefs of Pelagius. However, in AD 1524, during the Reformation, Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus resurrected this disagreement by publishing writings focusing on the question of man's moral capability, and his dependence on God's grace. Again, the argument seemed settled when Luther's book, "The Bondage of the Will", was accepted as the position of the Reformed church. Luther and the other Protestant leaders of the Ref-

ormation agreed that man is unable to do anything in regard to his salvation, and that God's grace is absolutely sovereign and free. Settling the disagreement between Luther and Erasmus as to whether the deciding factor in salvation was God's responsibility, or man's, seemed to quiet the confusion for a time, but opposition to Luther's position never completely went away. In the early 1600's a man by the name of Van Harmen (Arminius), who was a professor at Leyden University in the Netherlands, introduced teaching that denied that man was totally helpless, and that it was necessary that he do something himself in order to receive salvation. Again, this teaching was rejected in 1618 when an international synod met at Dortrecht (Dort), and denounced the teaching of Arminius and his followers. Arminianism is a denial and rejection of NT Christianity in favor of a religion of works.

7. Many of the scriptures cited in support of man choosing God in receiving salvation refer to the "will of God." In most cases the use of the phrase "will of God" in the Bible is correctly interpreted as, "the desire of God." Thus, 1 Timothy 2:4 KJV, which is interpreted "*Who will have all men to be saved . . .*", is given in the GNT as "*who desires all men to be delivered . . .*" It was God's desire that all men could be saved, but for Him to establish the rela-

tionship necessary for man to overcome evil and be “changed,” God had to insure that some were chosen to receive salvation. Unregenerate man had no access to God’s spiritual truth. Evil entered Adam when he rejected God’s command, and the “sin nature” he received as a result was passed to all mankind, probably by DNA. The human spirit, given to man when He created Adam (Ge. 1:27; 1 Th. 5:23), was now dead to God, and man had no way to receive anything from God. This is the condition of all unregenerate mankind since that time: God had to choose some to have their spirit renewed (Eze. 36:26), so that they could receive the Word of God and be cleansed (Jo. 15:3). This He committed Himself to by predestinating mankind. The word *predestined* is defined in Moulton’s Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised as “to limit or mark out beforehand; to design definitely beforehand; ordain beforehand; predestine.” Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words adds that the Greek word *proorizo* (interpreted as “predestine” in English), is derived from *pro*, meaning “before” or “ahead of”, and *orizo*, which means to appoint, decide, or determine. Webster’s Dictionary defines predestine as: “to destine or decree beforehand; foreordain.”

8. Last, but certainly not least (in fact was the greatest determinate), was God's tearing down of the strong defense supporting this stronghold in my life. In this regard I believe it is God's Word (the Bible), that is the greatest weapon we have in overcoming strongholds, but we must believe that it holds the absolute truth. Any thoughts or ideas we have that conflicts with the Bible must be abandoned. The scripture we referred to early in this chapter includes the phrase, "...*against the knowledge of God*," and I believe it was my intense study of the Bible (with the help of the interpreter, the Holy Spirit) that led to the tearing down of this stronghold in my mind.

Chapter 8

Dead or Alive?

1.

⁶⁶ *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed . . .* “(Romans 6:6)

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone believing into Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16 GNT)

Introduction

I have studied and written about salvation before, but there is one thing that occurs during this process that I have never totally understood: the exchange of the old nature for the new nature, which is documented in several NT scriptures (Ro. 6:6, 11:24; Eph. 2:2-6; 2Pe. 1:4). The most complete listing of life-changes that salvation involves is documented in the OT book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel 36:25-27 says, *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away*

the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” Somewhere within this passage this exchange of natures is included, so we need to see if we can identify it.

I should first explain why this OT passage directed to the Jews, applies to believers of all times, including those of us living in the 21st century. This passage of scripture is part of a prophesy given by Ezekiel to the house of Israel, but we know that it applies to believers who are grafted in (Ro. 11:17), as well. In Hosea 2:23, God also made a covenant with the Jewish nation that included the statement, *“I will say to them that were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.”* Romans 9:23-25 makes it absolutely clear that this promise extends to all those that God has called, *“And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Osee (Hosea), I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved.”*

The scripture from Romans 6:6, quoted above, raises many questions in my mind. The overall meaning seems simple enough: when we join Jesus Christ in death on the cross our old sin nature is annulled. But there are several other

things that occur during that life-changing event that seem to cloud my understanding. For instance, when and how is the destruction of our old (sin) nature brought about? What are the components of my nature, and in what part(s) of my body does it reside? Since my old nature died on the cross should I not be able to identify what part(s) of my body are involved in this death, and understand how they are renewed? Why do we keep on sinning after this destruction? How did we inherit our old (sin) nature? How is the new nature of Christ effected within our lives? And how does death mentioned in Romans 5:12, enter into this? I am going to try to understand and document the guidance God provides in the Bible in answer to these questions.

To grasp the full meaning of Ezekiel's prophecy we need to focus on the promises included therein, comparing the meaning of key words in the OT to related words the NT.

Filthiness

The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon (BSB), defines the OT Hebrew word interpreted "filthiness," in verse 25, as "ethical and religious" filthiness. The word "filthiness" is used twelve times in the OT, often in describing Israel's failures, and the evil of their enemies. One usage that seems particularly appropriate to this study is in Proverbs 30:12, "*There is a generation*

that is pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness.” I think the filthiness referred to here is like that of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:25: they spent a lot of effort worrying about the outside, but didn’t pay much attention to the inside. They were told by Jesus that they needed to clean both the inside and outside of the cup. Here we see that it takes the sprinkling of clean water by the Word (Jesus), to accomplish this type of cleansing. This is a necessary part of salvation, but it does not cleanse our sins, which only the blood of Jesus Christ can accomplish. Hebrews 9:13-14 says, *“For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* Also, Hebrews 10:22 says, *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”*

Cleansing

The Hebrew word “*katheros*,” interpreted as “clean,” or “pure,” combines the sense of ritual cleanliness with the divine initiative of spiritual forgiveness and cleansing necessary for receiving the Holy Spirit (Vines Expository Dictionary of Bible Words). The corresponding Greek word “*tabor*,” in the NT is also de-

finer as “clean” or “pure.” In John 13:10, Jesus declared that all the disciples (except Judas) were “clean,” and in John 15:3, He tells them that they are “clean” through the Word He has spoken to them. According to Titus 3:5, we are saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost, and in John 3:5, Jesus tells Nicodemus, “*Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*”

The washing of the body for purification has been ordained by Jewish law for centuries. The OT Book of Leviticus describes the laws relating to uncleanness, and specifies the various methods by which the penitent is restored to ceremonial, and, in some cases moral purity, by washing of the body. Even in ancient Jewish marriages, after the marriage contract was accepted by the bride, it was common for her to undergo a ritual, or cleansing bath, for purification prior to consummation of the marriage. The Jewish marriage process is highly symbolic of the steps involved in a sinner becoming the bride of Christ.

Vines Expository Dictionary of Bible Words has this to say about Ezekiel’s prophecy: “Finally, Ezekiel 36:25-27 combines the sense of ritual cleanliness with that of profound spiritual renewal. The sprinkling of ‘clean’ water here is a divine initiative of spiritual forgiveness and cleansing that is a prelude to the Spirit of God entering the life of a believer - one who is devoted to Him in

faith and obedience.” John 13:10, and 15:3, describe how Jesus “cleansed” the disciples through ministry of the Word. Also, in Ephesians 5:26-27, He promises to cleanse the church through sanctification and washing of water by the Word.

Regeneration

Regeneration is defined as being renewed, reformed, or reconstituted,” by Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language. In the Bible it seems to be invariably administered with clean, pure, or living water, although these adjectives are not included in every case, e.g. John 3:5, and Titus 3:5. Although “*palingenesia*,” the English spelling of the Greek word meaning regeneration or renewal, is mentioned only twice in the Bible, it is strongly connected to conversion, or the new birth, throughout the entire Bible. Vines says that the NT use of the word “regeneration” is closely aligned to that of “heart circumcision,” or the receiving a “new heart,” or “new spirit,” whereas the OT (De. 10:16, 30:6), refers to heart circumcision being a spiritual transformation, both commanded by God and undertaken by Him. He goes on to say that all of God's people are passive recipients of His sovereign grace and transforming power. Ezekiel 36:24 says that God promises to remove one’s “heart of stone” and replace it with a “heart of flesh,” to be followed by the infilling of the Holy

Spirit. Colossians 2:11-14 says, *“In whom ye are also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, putting off the body of sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: Buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it away, nailing it to His cross.”*

I see God’s Word in Titus 3:5 as being very helpful in my understanding of the scope of the term “regeneration” in God’s plan to make us His children: “. . . He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing (of our minds through the work) of the Holy Ghost.” Thus, we conclude that regeneration includes everything necessary for becoming a believer except the infilling of the Holy Spirit, and the work the Spirit does through sanctification (making us holy), which continues to our death. Regeneration includes the sprinkling of the blood of Christ within our hearts for forgiveness of our sins (see Heb. 9:14, 10:22).

Idols

The meaning of the Hebrew word “*gillul*,” which is interpreted by the English word “idols,” is “an image of a god, used as an object or instrument of worship.” When Ezekiel heard that Jerusalem was destroyed by Babylonia he said

that the people do not possess the land because of their idolatry. I have heard the word “idol” interpreted as any thing that draws your attention away from God on a continuing basis. We are repeatedly warned by the Bible that we should seek the wisdom of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:7-14, Paul emphasizes the great importance of the wisdom that comes from God. He concludes by adding that the natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. If we allow the world to draw our attention away from studying the Word of God we will be like the foolish man that cannot know the things of the Spirit of God. Sadly, this is the condition of many, or most Christians in America today, we do not know God, for we have not bothered to study His “autobiography” provided for that very purpose.

The New Heart

Ezekiel 36:26 says, “*A new heart also will I give to you, . . . and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*” The Hebrew words “leb” and “lebab”, defined as heart, mind, and midst, are used in the KJV of the OT 860 times. The Greek word “kardia” is translated as heart in the NT. Both of these words can refer to the organ we call the heart, but they also refer to the inner part or middle of a thing; the seat of desire, emotion, knowledge, wisdom, conscience, rebellion, pride, thoughts, and, in effect, all the is-

sues of life. We note immediately that two of the characteristics commonly attributed to the soul (mind and emotions), reside in the heart, as it is defined by the Bible. I was surprised by a television news broadcast a few years ago in which it was pointed out that until fairly recently, in historical time, the heart was thought to include all the major internal organs. Thus, we should not be surprised that the word “heart,” as used in the Bible, does not merely represent an organ for pumping blood through our bodies, but has much greater significance.

The biblical heart is the material part of the body with which the soul communicates. As we have noted earlier, an unregenerated(sic) spirit cannot receive anything from God; therefore, the heart reacts to worldly influence, and the results are not good. Genesis 6:5-6 says that the thoughts of man’s heart are evil continually, and that God was sorry He had made man. However, God gives us a new heart when we receive Christ, and this new heart is the focus of divine influence during sanctification.

What exactly does God do when He says He will give us a new heart of flesh, and will remove the stony heart from our bodies? It is obvious that God does not remove any of man’s vital organs when this occurs, so He must be talking about removing something not composed of matter that causes the

hardened hearts; something that causes us to have opinions and thoughts that would characterize us as being hardhearted. Where do these thoughts and opinions come from?

As we have various experiences we translate the essential facts learned, including the outcomes, into memories that are stored in our brain, which is part of the biblical heart. Unfortunately, these memories were acquired before we received Christ, and, as a result, they were developed under the influence of the sin nature we were born with. These stored memories influence our reactions when we experience identical, similar, or related occurrences using techniques and processes (computer-like brain routines) that are not well understood, and no one can adequately explain. Some of these routines were obviously programmed in our DNA while we were still in the womb. Some of these routines (e.g. bodily control functions) do not change with experience, but are affected by illness and age. Others change as we have new or related experiences; and some are actually developed as we gain new knowledge. Using these routines, and the stored memories we have, we begin to derive the same emotions and feelings from identical, or very similar, experiences. In effect, our mind (biblical heart) is closed to other possible outcomes. This is what I believe God calls “hardening” of the heart. When God refers to a heart of

stone in this scripture I believe He is describing the condition of our hearts hardened in this way. When God (the master programmer) gives us a new heart of flesh, He does some basic reprogramming, so we can accept (or at least consider) the outcome (feeling, emotion, or action) that He desires, and not just react in the same old worldly way we have in the past. When we are re-generated in Christ we are truly free for the first time in our lives. We are no longer a slave to the “*old man*” (old program), but can choose to follow the new program we receive from God through the Holy Spirit. This is what I believe Hebrews 9:14 is referring to by stating that the blood of Christ purges our consciences from “*dead works*,” and takes away the stony heart out of our flesh in Ezekiel 36:26.

The New (human) Spirit

Several scriptures refer to the fact that God made man’s spirit: Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Zec. 12:1 indicate that God “*gave*” and “*formed*” man’s spirit. Our spirit reflects who we really are, for God is a spirit (John 4:24), and we are made in the image of God. Psalm 139:13 NIV says, “*For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*” I believe this scripture refers to our human spirit, for we know that our *being* is really our spirit that resides in the abode (body) that God forms in the womb. Our spirit resides in our earthly bodies

until the body dies, it then returns to God (Ecc. 3:21, 12:7, and Acts 7:59). The phrase in the KJV, “. . . *thou hast covered me in my mother's womb*,” seems to indicate that God covers the *being* (human spirit) of a person with a body while in the womb. Job 33:4 adds that the Spirit of God made man, and the breath (soul) of the Almighty gives life.

It is by and through our human spirit that we receive inspiration, discernment, and understanding from God (Job 32:8). Thus, it is by our human spirit that we communicate with God. Adam forfeited his relationship with God in the Garden of Eden and passed this broken relationship on to us. Thus, our human spirit is dead (unable to communicate with God): we need some way for this relationship to be restored. This is what Ezekiel is referring to when he states that God will give us a new (human) spirit: our spirit is regenerated (quickened), and we are reconciled to God. We are now able to receive guidance directly from Jesus Christ, our “antenna” is now aimed at the source (God), and our “receiver” is active.

At this point I believe it is necessary to insert a sidebar to clarify a few things regarding the human spirit and the soul. Hebrews 4:12 suggests the extreme difficulty of distinguishing between the soul and spirit.

The spirit is the life principle (our actual being), bestowed on man by God (Ec. 12:7), and the soul is the resulting life constituted in the individual. The body is the material organism animated by soul and spirit. The goal of the spirit and soul is to make the body “holy” by renewing the mind (biblical heart), with guidance received from the Holy Spirit. We know from many scriptures that the human spirit is the nonmaterial constituent of our makeup identified as our “being,” which is covered by our body formed while in the womb. It is through our spirit that God communicates with us after we have been regenerated. Thus, our human spirit is the focus of God’s attention in dealing with us, and He does this via the Holy Spirit. The Hebrew word translated as “soul,” is also often translated as “being,” “life,” or “person,” which obviously embodies the spirit, soul, and body of man, and thus includes the mind, will, and emotions. However, we are dealing with the word “soul,” as one of the three parts of tripartite man, rather than as a word that encompasses the entire person, or the inner man. Thus, we conclude that the widely-held belief that the human soul includes the mind, will, and emotions is correct only when the word “soul” is used to mean person, self, or being, and not when used to identify a part of tripartite man. The Greek word translated “soul,” is often used in the NT in its original meaning of “life” (M’t. 2:20, 10:28; Ac. 20:10, Ro. 11:3; Joh. 19:11), or as the “entire person” (M’t. 12:18, Heb. 10:38, Lu. 21:19). Vincent’s Word Studies in the NT says that the soul is the mediating organ between the body and the spirit. It receives communication from the human spirit, assesses the resistance (or willingness) of the body (actually the biblical heart) to receiving the information, and acts by exercising the will, accordingly. To a great extent the effectiveness of the soul’s arbitration is determined by the depth of the believer’s “reckoning” himself as dead to the flesh. The soul, as described in the Bible, is given to man by the breath of the Almighty (Ge. 2:7; Job 33:4), and is nonmaterial, just as is the spirit. We know from Job 34:14, that our soul accompanies our spirit to heaven or hell at physical death, and this is certainly another reason for maintaining that the soul is nonmaterial. John saw the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God under the altar in heaven in Revelation 6:9, providing evidence that the souls of believers go to heaven at death. The Bible seems to say that the soul can be separated from the body, but it cannot be separated from the spirit; Hebrews 4:12 is not to be understood as dividing soul from spirit, or joints from marrow. The apostle’s meaning seems to be this: that whereas the soul and spirit are invisible, and the joints and marrow are covered and hid; so sharp and quick-sighted and so penetrating is the divine Word, that it reaches the most secret and hidden things of men and discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart by piercing the very depths of the soul and spirit. Believers follow this same plan when they die: our spirit/soul returns to God who made them, and later at the rapture our spirit/souls return with Christ to join with our resurrected or changed bodies to be with Him forever (1Th. 4:14-17).

The Old Man

Romans 5:12 in the Greek New Testament (GNT) says, “. . . *even as sin entered into the world through one man, and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, inasmuch as all sinned.*” We know that this “*one man*” is none other than the man Adam, who was created by God, as described in Genesis 1:26-27. Adam was created in God’s triune image, which I assume means that his image reflected the attributes of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This triune man is described in 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “. . . *and I pray your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” This leads us to consider the possibility that in accordance with Genesis 1:27, our spirit, soul, and body represent the triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). Sure enough, there seems to be a relationship between our human spirit and the Holy Spirit (see Ro. 8:16); between our soul, which embodies our will, and the Father’s will (see Joh. 7:17; Ph’p. 2:13; Ro. 12:2); between Jesus, who came in an earthly body (see Joh. 1:14).

We now turn our consideration to how Adam’s choice to disobey the command of God caused all of his descendants to be born with a sin nature, a condition often referred to in the Bible as the “*old man.*” Genesis 2:7 describes the creation of Adam: “. . . *the Lord God formed the man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.*” Adam

was created with free will, he was free to follow the guidance and commands of God, or to succumb to the temptations of Satan. Slyly, Satan used Eve, Adam's wife, to induce Adam to disobey God's command. In this act Adam chose to be his own master, and to be like God: knowing good and evil. Sadly, Adam was not spiritually prepared to "know" evil, and thus, Satan took control of Adam's decision-making: Satan's suggestions became Adam's default choices, and this curse was passed on to all his descendants.

God also warned Adam that if he disobeyed His command he would die that very day (Ge. 2:17). Death in the Bible is considered to be separation from God, so God was warning Adam that if he disobeyed, and accepted Satan's lie, he would be separated from God. That is exactly what happened, for Adam's human spirit was "disconnected" from God's guidance thereafter: he could no longer communicate with God as he had up to that time, and he was barred from the Garden of Eden. This is the condition of all mankind until they receive salvation, and join Christ in the death of this "*old man*" (or "*sin nature*"), on the cross.

The Greek word interpreted "nature" is used twelve times in the KJV of the Bible, all in the NT. The English form of this word is "*physis*," which means "that which occurs in the physical world" (see Ro. 11:21, 24), but it is also used

to describe the “nature” of God (see 2 Pe. 1:4). Ephesians 2:1-2 says, “*And you hath he quickened who were dead in your trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.*”

The New Man

1 Corinthians 2:11-16 has this to say about the old and new man, “*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned, But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he might instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*” This reinforces what we have said about guidance from God, which the “old man” does not receive because of his “dead” spirit. Ephesians 2:1-5 adds that the change in the “old man” is brought about when God “quickens” his spirit (Joh. 5:24; Col. 2:13). This quickening is also described in Ezekiel

36:26-27, where it says that God gives the believer a new heart, and a new spirit. I believe the Bible uses this description to say that God does some reprogramming in the biblical heart (inner man), and “quickens” man’s human spirit, which could be described as enabling his human spirit to communicate with God, to receive guidance, direction, and comfort. Whereas the “*old man*” lived to fulfill the desires of the flesh and the mind, and was by nature a child of wrath; the “*new man*” has been cleansed from sin and filthiness, and is now prepared to begin renewing his mind, and prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God (Ro. 12:2).

The Changed Nature

So what are the changes in our life when we join our Savior on the cross, and give up our old nature to receive His new nature? One observation we should make up front: even though we receive Christ’s nature in salvation we are not going to be holy immediately. Possibly a better word to describe the believer’s nature at this point is “innocence.” We are “clean” and “sinless,” but the next step God has planned for us is to receive the Holy Spirit. We must receive the Holy Spirit in order for God to lead us into sanctification. The word “sanctification” is defined in the OT to mean “to be clean, pure, consecrated.” The Greek word interpreted as “*sanctify*” in the NT means to “make

holy, sanctify, consecrate,” thus, we see that the Biblical meaning of the word as related to the new covenant is the process whereby believers into Jesus Christ are made holy: conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29, 12:2). Many scriptures in the Bible attest to the holiness of God: here are a few Ex. 3:1-6, 15:11; 1 Sam. 2:2; Ps. 99:1-9; Is. 6:1-8; Rev. 4:1-11. The importance of sanctification is stated in Hebrews 12:14: “*Follow peace with all men, and holiness [the sanctification], without which no man shall see the Lord.*” And in Leviticus 19:2, “*Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I am holy.*” There are many other scriptures that attest to the absolute necessity of being sanctified: here are just a few, Acts 26:18; 1 Corinthians 6:11; and Hebrews 2:11.

We need to rely on the Word of God for answers about the particular changes that occur in our lives when we are born again. Titus 2:11-12, 14, says, “*For the grace of God that bright salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in the present world; Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people [a people for His own possession], zealous of good works.*” Ephesians 2:2-3 says, “*Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now*

worketh in the children of disobedience; Among whom also we all had our conversation [lived] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 says, “*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor feminine, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed . . .*” Colossians 3:5-6 says, “*Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection [passion], evil concupiscence [desire], and covetousness, which is idolatry. For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience.”* And possibly the most complete listing in Galatians 5:19-23 says, “*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance [strife], emulsions [jealousies], seditions [divisions], heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”*

Scriptures that describe the biblical heart state that out of it are the issues of life (Pr. 4:23). Thus, the moral conduct of life, its actions and proceedings, are determined by the condition of the heart. If the heart is pure, the life will be pure; if the heart is corrupt, the life will be corrupt. All of the works of the flesh we have listed above come from the heart. It is just as God stated in Genesis 6:5, and Jesus repeated in Matthew 15:19: the thoughts of (unregenerate) men's hearts are evil continually. All of the evil thoughts and actions listed above originate in the heart, and when these things are uttered by our mouths or manifested by our actions, they defile us. The heart can be faithless; proud and sinful; envious; can conceive lies; can have idols; can be hardened; the Lord can harden the heart; can be discouraged; can entertain desire; can act with duplicity; and can believe. We see from these scriptures that the heart is the part of the body where all the action is; the rest of the material body follows the directions given to it by the biblical heart: essentially all the "inner man," except for the spirit and soul, which are nonmaterial, formed and given by God, and return to Him at our physical death. To really understand the biblical meaning of the word "heart," we need to consider the word "mind." The mind can be anxious, trembling, ill at ease; imaginations can come into our mind; evil thoughts can come into the mind; God can give man up to a repro-

bate mind; we can have a mind of flesh or mind of the spirit; the mind can be renewed; the mind can be perverse; and we can be defiled in mind and conscience. All of the activities of the mind seem to relate to thoughts, consciousness, perception, feelings, judging, and determining. Thus, it seems clear that the mind is the nonmaterial part (software) of the material brain, both of which are included within the biblical heart in most scriptural references.

What I conclude from the above is that when God removes the stones (hard places) from our hearts He essentially cancels the default command to the old sin nature, and replaces it with a default command to the new nature of Christ, fully equipped by the now present Holy Spirit. Of course, we do absorb all the wisdom and guidance of the Holy Spirit immediately; this is the work of sanctification, which continues for the rest of our earthly life. We can still succumb to Satan's enticements, and thus choose to act in accord with our old sin nature (which gradually disappears as we become more holy), but our natural inclination now is to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, who is following the Lord's direction. Galatians 5:17 says, "*For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.*" This emphasizes the vital necessity of re-

ceiving the Holy Spirit, for it is the source of God's comfort, guidance, correction, and sanctification.

About the only question left unanswered at this point in our search is that of the death mentioned in Romans 5:12, *"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* We know that Adam followed Satan's suggestion rather than God's warning, and thus sin entered the world. Romans 6:23 says, *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* 2 Timothy 1:10 says, *"But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* Satan introduced sin into the world, and death followed. When separated from God there is no future eternity to look forward to, and the fear of death becomes overwhelming. Satan had control over the fear of death until Jesus destroyed it on the cross. Believers still face physical death, but they know they are headed for an unbelievably better place where they will spend eternity at the feet of the Creator and Maker of everything that is made.

Closure

In closing I would add that one needs to be cautious about applying any hard and fast checklist, or timeline to God's workings. His ways are above our

ways, but He is always faithful to his Word. I know that God often deviates from the timing and sequence of events followed in Jesus' bringing the disciples to Pentecost. The book of Acts records many conversions that vary widely from what might be referred to as the "norm." Those gathered with Cornelius received the Holy Spirit before Peter could even explain the gospel to them in Acts 10. Samaritans, who had been baptized in the name of Jesus at an earlier time did not even know there was a Holy Spirit until Peter and John were sent to them (Acts 8:14-17). My personal conversion and subsequent belief into Jesus Christ occurred over a period of twenty years. I received the Holy Spirit during a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, but I did not realize exactly what had happened until several months later. My advice would be to be patient, keep an open mind about God's action (or inaction) in your life, but continue to seek Him through His Word, talk to Him in prayer, and ask Him for the Holy Spirit if you feel you have not received (Lu. 11:13).

Note: In writing this Chapter I have used material related to the spirit, soul, heart, and mind from two previous books I have written. The book: "After the Big Bang," is available at no cost at the website "[SCRIBD](#)." The book "The Path to Holiness," is available at Publish America, Baltimore, MD.

Appendix

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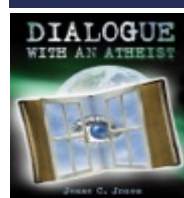
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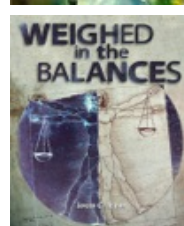
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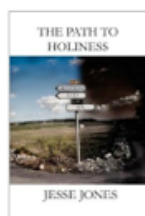


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