

*A Study
on Matthew,
Mark, & Luke
—
The Parables*

Jesse C. Jones

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— The Parables

“A parable is a form of teaching in which one thing is thrown beside another. Hence its radical idea is comparison.”

From Vincent's Word Studies in the NT

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Preface: Bible Study Guides for the New Testament

Writing a book was not on my mind when this effort was initiated some years ago. In fact, it began when a member of my Sunday School class commented that his son had talked about committing suicide the previous week. As a result, I felt an urge to see what the Bible had to say about hope, with a view toward helping his son cope with his suicidal feelings. The result of that effort was an article entitled: “Hope and the Miraculous Three Pound Computer,” located in Chapter 6 of the book [After the Big Bang](#). My next writing endeavor was a fallout from a Sunday School class discussion about temptations, or trials, and their purpose in our lives. An article entitled “The Trials of Job” located in Chapter 7 of the same book resulted from that effort. After this I began to feel a prodding from the Lord to continue studying and writing. The chapters in this book document what I subsequently learned about two of God’s greatest and most marvelous creations: earth and mankind, who He made to exercise dominion over it.

Some of the material presented in these New Testament Bible Study Guides conflicts with commonly held viewpoints, and differs as well on the definitions of some words used to explicate them. One thing I have learned through this

effort is that the meaning of many of the words used in the Bible is not uniformly agreed to by expositors, and in many cases, not agreed to by the various versions of the Bible. For example, in the KJV of the old testament (OT), the word “soul” is used over 780 times. Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words notes that in over 400 of these uses, the Hebrew word used is misinterpreted. I mention this not to heap criticism on the KJV, for it is my personal Bible, and I love it dearly, but to point out the importance of consulting Hebrew and Greek sources, and good conservative lexicons, when trying to understand difficult scripture. The meaning of some words is not absolutely clear even then. Nevertheless, this is the process I have followed in this effort.

I am a retired engineer: my education and work experience sparked a great interest in details. I found that to understand the technical difficulties and problems that arise in the operation of complex machines, a good understanding of the details of the design is absolutely necessary. What is presented herein is an analysis of important details in God’s creation of the earth and man: his habitat and milieu. However, no description is completely adequate to portray the unbelievable complexity and efficacy of tripartite man. Scientists and en-

gineers have tried to duplicate the various subsystems in God's design of man for years, with limited success. Part of the problem is that we do not understand many of the operational details, but the greatest impediment is probably the fact that man is composed of three parts: spirit, soul, and body, two of which (spirit and soul) are immaterial, and are thus largely beyond the scope of scientific and medical analysis. The third part, the highly complex body, is strongly influenced by these two immaterial parts. God has given mankind a great challenge in trying to understand tripartite man. What better model could we find for our study than our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: spirit, soul and body in perfect relationship. When Jesus came to earth He emptied Himself, and was formed in the likeness and fashion of a man. Like us, He was a tripartite being, but without a sin nature. Thus, He was the perfect man, the ideal for all to emulate.

I read a book several years ago by Watchman Nee in which he made the observation that one of the primary ways God speaks to us is through our intuition. After that I began to try to follow the guidance I received in this manner, and what is presented herein is largely a result of that attempt. I hasten to add that all readers will not agree with my conclusions. I have learned much

about God's creation, and His design of man through this effort: that may be the primary purpose He had in mind. My hope is that readers will find new ideas in these words that drive them to the absolute authority: God's Word - the Bible.

As references I have used the King James Version (KJV), the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT), the Revised Version (RV), and Recovery Versions of the bible, as well as the Interlinear NIV Hebrew - English Old Testament (OT), and the Interlinear Greek - English New Testament (GNT). I have also used Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words, Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament, Moulton's Analytical Greek Lexicon, the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, and Webster's New World Dictionary for word interpretation. Unless otherwise noted, scripture passages quoted are from the KJV.

The John A. Dickson New Analytical Bible and Dictionary, Authorized King James Version, Chicago 1950, was a primary reference source. This Bible was given to my wife and I in 1957, and is one of my dearest treasures. It has been rebound once, and is in need of a repair job at the present time. Thus,

the reader can appreciate the usage it has had over these 62 years, most of which has been during the last 25 years. The book introductions have been generally quoted from this source, with changes (mostly grammatical) made only when considered necessary.

Finally, I want to recognize the lady that takes everything I have written, and makes the necessary changes for placing it on the internet. Ms. Sandra Crosnoe is the daughter of two of my, and my deceased wife's, dearest friends, Ted and Jimmie Crosnoe (also deceased). When God moved us (my wife and I), to a Methodist Church in Pasadena, Texas, in 1962, Ted, Jimmie, and their two daughters were among the group of several families in the church that were touched by God in a mighty way that led to a weekly Bible study, that resulted in many changed lives. As the years passed by, and the families went in different directions, we were not able to maintain the close relationship we had in Pasadena. We settled in Lubbock, Texas, in 1982, and I got the call to start writing on the Bible. Sometime after that Sandra was in Lubbock and we got together for dinner. When she learned of my involvement in writing on the Bible she immediately volunteered to help in making it available by publishing it on the internet. She may not have known what she was getting into, for God

has not ceased from giving me Bible subjects to study and write about. This series on the New Testament has been our greatest undertaking, and Sandra's help (as always) has been essential. She has corrected my grammar, argued with me on interpretation, prepared the pictorial cover pages, and generally polished the appearance of the various books in ways that I could never have accomplished on my own. Without her help, this (and other) documents would never have been made available to the general public. I do so appreciate all her work. I believe Ted and Jimmie will give her a "well done" when she joins them in heaven. Her personal website is [Finding Gems and Sharing Them](#).

These bible study guides are available at no charge to read, print, download and share on a platform called Scribd (no membership is required to read/download). They are all listed and linked as a group in [Bible Study Guides by Jesse C. Jones on Scribd](#). Upon completion, most of them will contain study questions in the Appendix. Other works available are listed and linked with [Books for Believers and Seekers](#). If you hit a pop-up page on Scribd asking you to become a member to read free, simply click the 'x' in the upper right corner to remove the pop-up and continue to our links on Scribd. My personal web-

site is [Revealed by Fire - Jesse's Studies](#) if you wish to see my latest articles and updates.

It is my sincere hope that these works will guide you to a personal ongoing relationship with Jesus and a life led and anointed by the Holy Spirit.

JESSE JONES

The Parables

Introduction

In lieu of providing an analysis of all four of the Gospels I have provided a detailed analysis of the book of John only, and have included parables from the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, none of which are included in the book of John. In adopting this approach I hope to deal with most of the important teachings of Christ in the Gospels, and leave out the historical repetition in the four books. None of these parables are included in the book of John, and hopefully between the detailed account in John, and the analysis of these parables in Matthew, Mark, and Luke we will have covered most of Christ's teachings in the New Testament. The parables I have selected for analysis are taken from a list of 31 parables in the John A. Dickson New Analytical Bible entitled, "Parables in Chronological Order". I have eliminated some duplication.

The New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition, says that, "Both parables and allegories have been regarded as forms of teaching which present the listener with interesting illustrations from which can be drawn moral and religious truths; a 'parable' is a somewhat protracted simile, or short descriptive story, usually designed to inculcate a single truth, or answer a single question, while

‘allegory’ denotes the more elaborate tale in which all or most of the details have their counterparts in the application.”

I have attempted to present these teachings in a form whose meaning can be understood in today’s vernacular, although some are understandable without any change. Also, my analysis is what I believe God has given me, although in my research I have consulted many resources including the “Bible Hub”, the Complete Jewish Bible by David H. Stern, The New Bible Dictionary by I. H. Marshall, et al, Vincent Word Studies in the NT, and several other Bibles and Lexicons. The Bible quotes are all from the King James New Analytical Bible, by John A. Dickson, unless otherwise noted.

The Two Debtors

Luke 7:36-50

“And one of the Pharisees desired Him that He would eat with him, and He went to the Pharisees house, and sat down to meat. And behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood behind Him weeping, and began to wash His feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, this man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering him said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master say on. There was a certain creditor (lender) which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And He said unto him, thou hast rightly judged. And He turned to the woman and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she has washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me

no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in has not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore, I say unto thee, Her sins which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And He said unto her, thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began say within themselves, who is this that forgiveth sins also? And He said unto the woman, thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.”

Lesson: The teaching of Jesus in this parable seems pretty straightforward. God judges a man/or woman on the condition of their heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “*for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*”

The biblical heart is the vital element of the body, which is the lowest part of tripartite man (spirit, soul, and body); it is material in nature but it includes memories, thoughts, emotions, feelings, etc. that are immaterial, which I often refer to as software. The biblical heart includes the central nervous system, which controls our senses and voluntary behavior; the autonomic nervous system, which regulates our emotions and internal organs; our intellect,

memory, conscience, and thought; and the circulatory system and the internal organs and glands to which it provides fuel and oxygen.

All the issues of life come from the heart (Proverbs 4:23). When God wants to determine the measure of a man He looks on the heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, “ . . . *for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*” 1 Peter 3:4 indicates that the perfect heart is the “*ornament*” of a meek and quiet spirit. This is like a teacher (the spirit) seeing her star pupil (the heart) achieve great things: the student becomes the teacher’s “ornament,” learning and applying the lessons taught. You might ask: “Why does God not look on the spirit or soul, instead of the heart?” I believe the answer to this question is that the heart, being mortal, is part of man’s physical body, and can be programmed by man; whereas the spirit and soul are immaterial and immortal, are under God’s control, and cannot be reprogrammed in any significant way by man. The biblical heart is where the effectiveness of the mind-renewing process is manifested. Thus, when God wants to “measure” the level of ‘Christlikeness’ in our lives, He looks on the heart.

The real measure of our commitment to God and His Christ is how much fruit of the Holy Spirit we bear in our lives. This is a function of how far we

are willing to go in the mind-renewing process. Works, which determine our rewards in God's kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:13-15), will be measured at the judgment seat of Christ. These are works done in and through our body at the urging and direction of the Holy Spirit. These works have nothing to do with salvation, which we know is by the saving faith of God working within our hearts unto belief. This is another reason that God looks on our heart, for it is here that the evidence of our abiding is manifested through the fruit that we bear (John 15:4).

“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” (Hebrews 10:22). Will we go all the way to the place where we have the mind of Christ? Rest assured that if you do it will be costly in this world, but worth everything in the Kingdom of God.

The Sower

Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15

“And going out from the house in that day, Jesus sat down by the sea. And great crowds were gathered to Him, so that He boarding the boat, He sat down. And all the crowd stood on shore. And He spoke to them many things in parables, saying: behold the one sowing went out to sow. And in his sowing some fell by the roadside, and the birds came and ate them. And other fell on the stony places, where they did have much earth and it immediately sprang up because it had no deepness of earth. And (with) the sun rising, it was scorched; even because of having no root, it was dried up. And other fell on the thornbushes, and the thornbushes grew up and choked them. And other fell on the good ground, and yielded: fruit; indeed, one a hundredfold, one sixty, and one thirty. The one having ears to hear, let him hear.

And coming near, the disciples said to Him, why do you speak to them in parables? And answering, He said to them, because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but it has not been given to those. For whosoever has, to him it shall be given, and he will have overabundance. But whosoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. Because of this, I speak unto them in parables, because seeing they do not see; and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And the

prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled on them, which says in hearing you will hear, yet in no way understand; and seeing you will see, and not perceive. For the heart of this people has grown fat, and they heard sluggishly with the ears, and they have closed their eyes, that they not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears, and understand with the heart, and be converted, and I heal them (Isaiah 6:9-10). But your eyes are blessed because they see; and your ears because they hear. For truly I tell you, that many prophets and righteous ones desired to see what you see, and did not see; and to hear what you hear, and did not hear.”

The following analysis of Matthew 13:11 and 12, is adapted from Gill’s “Exposition of the Entire Bible”.

The "kingdom of heaven," refers to "mysteries" relating to the Trinity of persons in the Godhead, to the incarnation of Christ, and the union of the two natures, human and divine, in him, eternal predestination, redemption by Christ, satisfaction by his sacrifice, justification by his righteousness, and pardon through his blood, the resurrection from the dead, as well as other things having difficulties attending them which are not easily resolved: how to know and understand the great truths of the Gospel, spiritually, savingly, and experimentally (T experientially?), is not from nature, or to be acquired by

men's industry, but is the gift of God's grace, flowing from his sovereign will and pleasure; a favour which the disciples of Christ, as a chosen people, receive from the Lord. But it is not given to the wise and prudent, to the Scribes and Pharisees, to the multitude, to the bulk and generality of the people, and to the rest that were blinded. The Gospel of Mark refers to them as "them that are without," who are not in the number of God's elect; nor within the covenant of grace. These are those within themselves, that despise the rules and judgment of the wise men: but Christ here calls the wise men themselves as such.

Now our Lord, who was privy to the secret and sovereign dispensation of God, who, of his own will and pleasure, determined to give a spiritual and saving knowledge of divine things to some, and deny it to others, made this the rule of his conduct in his ministry. He preached in parables to some without explication, while he spoke plainly to others; and, if in parables, gave them an interpretation, and an understanding.

Whoever has the true grace of God implanted in him, has a saving knowledge of Christ, and a spiritual acquaintance with the doctrines of the Gospel, shall have more grace given him; he shall grow in the knowledge of Christ, and the Spirit of truth shall lead him into all truth: and he shall have more abundance of grace, light, knowledge, and experience. Grace shall

abound to him; he shall be filled with all the fulness of God, and shall arrive to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; and his light shall shine more and more unto the perfect day. But whosoever does not have the truth of grace, nor a spiritual knowledge of Christ, nor any experience in the doctrines of the Gospel, from him shall be taken away even what he has, or "that which he seemed to have," as Luke expresses it; for everything other than true grace is a mere show, and has no foundation in it. Even speculative notions of the Gospel, external gifts of the Spirit, means of grace, the Gospel of the kingdom of God, and the ministry of it, can be taken away.

Then hear the parable of the sower. Everyone hearing the Word of the kingdom, and not understanding, then the evil one comes, and catches away that which was sown in his heart. This is that sown by the roadside. And the Word sown on the stony places is this: the one hearing the Word immediately receives it with joy, but (he) has no root in himself, (so it) is temporary, and (when) tribulation or persecution occur because of the Word, he is at once offended. And that sown into the thornbushes is this: the one hearing, and the Word, and the anxiety of this age, and the deceit of riches choke the Word, and it becomes unfruitful. But that sown on the good ground is this: the one hearing the Word and understanding it, who indeed bears fruit and yields one truly a hundredfold, and one sixty, and one thirty.

The Tares

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

“Another parable He put forth unto them, saying, the kingdom of heaven is likened to a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir didst not thou sew good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, an enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of the harvest I will say unto the reapers, gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and His disciples came unto Him, saying, declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, he that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world: the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but tares are the children of the wicked one; the enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the

end of the world. The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend [cause stumbling], and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

This story is also recorded by John in the book of Revelation 19:20-20:15.

The Mustard Seed

Matthew 13:31-32, Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-30

“Then said he, unto what is the kingdom of God (heaven) like? and whereunto shall I resemble (compare) it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed (became) a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again he said, whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few (only) that be saved? And He said unto them, strive to enter in at the strait (narrow) gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and you begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence you are: then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught us in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from

the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

This quotation is more like an allegory than a parable, but Matthew 13:31-32, and Mark 4:30-32, introduce the initial question about the mustard seed as a parable. Luke 13:18 introduces the same question without identifying it as a parable, and the interpretations given are difficult to understand. To our analysis of this initial question I have added the second related question in Luke 13 about who would be saved, which leads into questions regarding the end of time.

The first question raised is about the kingdom of heaven, and Jesus’ answer was that it was like a mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds, but when it is grown, it becomes a great tree, and birds of the air come and lodge in its branches. In attempting to interpret this parable it seems that the principle point being made is the growth of the smallest seed to become a great tree. I suggest this would correspond to “teaching of the Word, (growing)” into the great tree, which would be “the future kingdom of God.” In this analysis God builds (populates) His future great kingdom by drawing His elect (small seed),

and feeding them in the Word (John 6:44-45) to become mature believers. Like the mustard seed they are planted in fertile soil (receptive hearts).

The second parable given here is that of the leaven, which was hidden in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. It seems to me that this parable has to do with the manner in which the teaching of the Word was spread. It started quietly, with Jesus calling His disciples one or two at a time, until He had the twelve men He wanted. When He started teaching it was to relatively small groups and He began to draw ever greater crowds by performing miraculous healings. He would often ask those that were healed, or helped in other ways, to not identify the one that had ministered to them. As His notoriety began to spread He would at times keep His identity hidden by not openly planning to attend large religious celebrations, but attending unnoticed later. Finally, as He became well known (as the meal was fully leavened) and as His influence spread through gradual change (as does leaven), He prepared for His ultimate sacrifice, and purpose, in coming to earth; salvation for those that believe. As the leaven gives its all to the meal, Jesus Christ gave His all (earthly life) to the believers who would makeup His church body.

The third question raised here is about those who will be saved? Many will think they should be considered among the saved that are allowed into heaven, the kingdom of God, but Jesus says the Master of the house will respond by telling them that He never knew them. Matthew 7:21-23, says, *“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”*

I cannot think of a more devastating word to hear from the God of the universe than: **“I never knew you.”** Matthew 7, goes on to give us some guidance as to how we should live our lives so that we never hear those words from God: obey the teachings of Jesus.

Note: See also Appendix I, **“What does it mean to be in Christ,”** which comes from an article I wrote several years ago that I hope will provide helpful guidance on this subject.

The Hidden Treasure

Matthew 13:44

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

This parable emphasizes the inestimable value of our relationship with Jesus Christ. Philippians 3:7-11 says, *“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I might win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know Him, and the power His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of [from among] the dead.”*

In this passage Paul expresses his feelings about his relationship with Jesus Christ: all things are but loss to Paul as long as he gains Christ, and the power of His resurrection. This is that same Saul who attended the stoning of Stephen, and made havoc of the church: entering every house to arrest believers, and take them to prison. But an encounter with Christ on the road

to Damascus brought about a total change in his life, and God changed his name to Paul accordingly, to reflect this changed persona.

This is like the “sea” change that should be reflected in our own lives when we join Christ in death to our sin nature on the cross, and receive the Holy Spirit. The change in our lives may not be as quick as with Paul, but he spent some time in Arabia, and Damascus (thought to be 3 years), before he began his missionary journeys.

I was blessed to have an encounter similar to Paul’s in 1963, and God began to sanctify (conform me to the image of Christ) at that time. It took me some time to understand what had happened, but finally, after 25-years, God got me to the place where He could lead me into His plan for my life: studying and writing on the Bible. I have loved it!

There are several things that happened to Saul (Paul) that also happened to me that I think are significant:

1. Paul encountered a light from heaven — I (and the men with me) all encountered a light that I can only describe as being heavenly.
2. Paul was shocked, and fell to the ground — I was shocked that such a thing was even possible, and I began to weep.
3. Paul heard a voice speak to him — the Lord spoke to my mind (not audibly).

4. Paul asked who was speaking to him, and the Lord answered, Jesus — I knew immediately that it was Godly, and I assumed that it was Jesus.
5. Paul was told what he was to do — the Lord told me what He wanted of me.
6. Paul was trembling and astonished — I was shocked that such a thing could happen to a human being.
7. Paul received the Holy Spirit from Ananias several days later — I received the Holy Spirit during my encounter, but I (and the men with me) needed an experienced believer to come and teach us about what had happened.
8. The message to me was that Jesus wanted to come into my life, and for me to give control to Him — I believe the message to Paul was the same, for after his encounter God was given control of Paul's life. I can only aspire to Paul's commitment in this regard.

Note: For a more complete discussion of our encounter with Jesus Christ refer to the book entitled: ["A Man of God," by Jesse C. Jones available on scribd](#) to read/download free. It is also linked on the author's website [jessecjones.wordpress.com](#).

The Costly Pearl

Matthew 13:45-46

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking costly pearls: who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all he had, and bought it.”

Note: The teaching from this parable is the same as that from **The Hidden Treasure** (a previous chapter in this book).

The Drag-Net

Matthew 13:47-50, 25:31-46

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”

This parable can be understood by referring to Matthew 25:31-46: *“When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall separate the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them of his right hand, come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. for I was hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me. Then the righteous answer Him, saying, Lord when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave you drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.*

Then He shall say to those His left hand, depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer Him, saying, Lord when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall He answer them, saying, inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous unto life eternal.”

I learned something from this scriptural passage a few years ago that may be worth repeating here. I was determined to not be a goat, and my church did not have any service activity, so I began helping a charitable ministry near my home that provided clothing and other household items for the needy in Lubbock, Texas. I collected items donated to the ministry for about a year, when I happened to read this scripture again, and realized I was doing it for the wrong reasons. I was trying to not become a goat: but to honor God I should have been doing it out of concern for the needy. In judging the nations in this passage of scripture He looked on what their hearts led them to do (or not do), and He judged my actions the same way. I was doing a good deed, but I was doing it for the wrong reason; and thus, my heart was not right. My works, in this situation, are consumed in the fire that “proves” each man’s work (1 Corinthians 3:13-15).

The Wicked Servant

Matthew 18:21-35

"Then came Peter to Him, and said, Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith, not unto thee seven times: but until seventy times seven." "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven like unto a certain king, which would make a reckoning with his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents (\$16,425,000). But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, lord have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence (\$17.00): and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, and said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I

forgave thee all that debt, because thy desirest me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, until he should pay all that was due him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses”

I have included below the summary of a lengthy article on biblical forgiveness which can be reviewed in its entirety in Appendix 2.

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 Greek New Testament (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 New Testament (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 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, and this unforgiveness 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.

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 interpreted 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 18:35, God says that He will deliver the believer to the "tormentors," if he refuses to forgive. I believe we could interpret this to mean that God will chastise believers regarding their unforgiveness 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 that refuse to repent 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. Believing 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 repentance.

The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:25-37

“And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted (tested) Him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, what is written in the law? how reatest thou? And he answering said, thou shall love the Lord thy God with a all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And He said unto him, thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, and who is thy neighbor? And Jesus answering said, a certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and sat him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I

will repay thee. Now which of these three, thinkest thou was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, he that showed mercy unto him. Then said Jesus unto him, go, and do likewise.”

Notice that in this parable Jesus characterized the lawyer and the Levite, who were probably regarded highly by the Jews, as goats; whereas He characterized the Samaritan, looked down on by the Jews, among the sheep.

The Rich Fool

Luke 12:16-34

“And He spake a parable unto them, saying, the ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he taught within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said to him, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

And He said unto His disciples, therefore, I say unto you, take no thought (be not anxious) for your life, what you shall eat, neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouses nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought (by being anxious) can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest. Consider the lillies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like

one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not what ye will eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell all you have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also."

I grew up in a small town in North Texas in the 1930's, and 1940's: during the depression, and the beginning of recovery. I had many friends, but I do not remember any one ever mentioning money, or ever referring to their family's financial condition. My neighbor, who lived across the street from us, had two sons, both of which were good friends. Their father was president of one of the two banks in my home town, and compared to my family, they were well off. But I never remember the subject of financial status being brought up. My Dad was a furniture salesman who earned about \$300/month, but when the depression hit his salary was reduced to \$0.00/month, plus a 2%

commission on all the furniture he could sell. Of course, people weren't buying much furniture in the early thirties. He augmented what he made selling furniture by selling insurance, and we got by pretty well.

When school dismissed for lunch the kids came home for dinner: I had coco and home made bread almost every day. My Mom's home made bread was well known, and later in life, after my Dad was gone, she sold it to special friends. I went to work when I was about ten-years old. I had many different jobs as I grew up, but probably the longest-lasting was in the hardware store adjacent to the furniture store that my Dad now managed. The two stores were connected, and the folks that worked there all had nicknames, most of which came from the radio show of Amos and Andy. It was great place to work, and I made \$0.50/ an hour, a pretty good salary for a high-school kid in the early forties. I can't think of a better life than I had, growing up in that world in the 1930's and 40's. We had essentially no crime, and just about everyone was trustworthy and honest. The influence of the many churches on society was strong and positive.

I write about my experiences growing up in an attempt to give the reader some idea about life at that time in a small Texas town, and to make the point that the love of money was not a relevant factor in the lives of these folks. Of

course, everyone worked to make enough money to live on, but I don't remember the love of money having the influence we see in our society today. This "love" seems to influence just about every decision made in business today, and it causes the people involved to make decisions based on squeezing the last penny out of the product, rather than satisfying the customer.

When I see the end result of some of the big winners of lotteries, and others who have inherited, or accumulated money not earned through effort or cleverness, I am thankful that I haven't been bitten by this "love" bug. The message taught by this parable is pretty well told by the last sentence: wherever your treasure (desire) is, there will your heart be also.

It is also the message conveyed by the parable about Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31), in which Lazarus was a beggar, who desired to be fed from the crumbs from the rich man's table. They both died, and Lazarus was carried into Abraham's bosom (Paradise), while the rich man ended up in hell (Hades). The rich man was suffering in a terrible condition, and he cried out to Father Abraham for him to have Lazarus to dip his finger in water, and come and cool his tongue. But Abraham reminded him that he had received good things in his life, while Lazarus had only received evil things; but now it is reversed: you

are tormented and Lazarus is comforted. He also reminded him that there was a great gulf between the two of them which could not be breached.

This is another teaching about how difficult it is for those who have riches, and live sumptuously, to enter Paradise when they die. *“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”* (Matthew 19:24).

The Barren Fig Tree

Luke 13:6-9

“A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then he said unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shall cut it down.”

This parable appears to be related to the five verses 1-5, just preceding, which introduces the word “repent,” relating the repentance of men, and the “new life” of the fig tree. I believe there is some confusion within the body of Christ in regard to this word, and I hope the scriptures mentioned below offer some clarification:

1. Luke 13:3 - “. . .but , except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.”
2. Acts 3:19 - “Repent ye therefore, and be converted (turn again), that your sins be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”
3. Luke 5:32 - “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

4. Psalm 51:4 - *“Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight.”*
5. 2 Corinthians 7:9 - *“Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner.”*
6. Isaiah 55:7 - *“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; . . . for He will abundantly pardon.”*
7. Matthew 3:8 - *“Bring forth therefore fruits meet for (worthy of) repentance.”*
8. Luke 15:7 - *“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”*
9. 2 Timothy 2:25 - *“. . . if God peradventure will give them repentance.”*

The Wedding Guest

Luke 14:7-11

“And He put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms(seats); saying; unto them, when thou art bidden of any man to a wedding (marriage feast), sit not down in the highest room (chief seat); lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room (place). But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; for that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at best with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. “

See commentary on **The Pharisee and the Publican** - a subsequent chapter in this book).

The Great Supper

Luke 14:15-24

“And when when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said He unto him, a certain man made a great supper, and bade many: and he sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yolk of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord all these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”

This parable seems to refer to the failure of the Jews to receive Christ, but instead to persist in recognizing the Abrahamic covenant, and the law, rather

than Jesus and His ministry of love and grace. Luke 13:34-35 seems to show how He feels: *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent to thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”*

As a result of the Jews rejection of Jesus Christ, the message of salvation went out to the gentiles, and Paul was appointed as their minister.

Luke 14:22 raises an interesting question: *“And the servant said, Lord it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the Lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.”* I have been unable to find any creditable answer to this conundrum, nor have I received anything from God on this. We know that God will save a remnant (1/3) of the Jews, and it could be that this refers to His coming back for them at the end. Matthew Henry’s Commentary says that “Christ's house shall at last be filled; it will be so when the number of the elect is completed.”

Counting The Cost

Luke 14:25-35

“And there went great multitudes with Him: and He turned, and said unto them, if any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or that a king, going to make war with another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is a great way off, he sendeth an embassy (Ambassador), and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

The word “*hate*” in the first sentence in this passage should be understood to mean, “to regard with less affection, love less, esteem less.” We know that the Bible has many scriptures advising us to love ourselves, neighbors, brethren, wives, etc. This statement is given to remind us that we should love God above all else that is dear to us if we want to become a disciple of Christ. And we must bear our cross just as Jesus did His. 2 Timothy 3:12 says that all who live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. Matthew 5:10-12 says, “*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*”

I believe what the Lord was referring to here is a principle that seems to be characteristic of all life (both animal and plant): stress seems to strengthen, whereas a life void of challenges leads to weakness and impotence. I do not believe that God is seeking weak and powerless citizens for His kingdom. The one that develops strength under stress is the one that can bear his/her cross, and is thus a candidate for being a disciple of Christ. This person knows how

to determine the strength of their adversary, and is thus equipped to win the battles they encounter.

The Lost Sheep and The Lost Coin

Luke 15:1-7, 15:8-10

“Then drew near to Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, this man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And He spoke this parable unto them, saying, what man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which was lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

Here Christ tells of the great joy that breaks out in heaven over one sinner that has repented. Luke 5:32 adds, *“I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* The only question that might arise here is, “Are there any that have no need for repentance”? In the parable the ninety-nine are assembled as a group, and apparently safe from attack, so the shepherd is justified in leaving them to save the one. I assume that the flock represents Christians

that have already repented, and thus are believers into Christ. If that is the case the parable is easy to understand. Of course, we are not impervious to sin after we have believed into Christ, and received His nature by joining Him in the death of our old sin nature on the cross. We can still choose to sin for which we must repent as described in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* The sheep in the fold could represent new believers or those that have received repentance from God for sins that they committed after salvation.

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and neighbors together, saying rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

“And He said, a certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living (property). And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And when he would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no longer worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no longer worthy to be called thy son. But the father said unto the servants, bring forth the best robe, and put it on him. and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring

hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Now his older son was in the fields: and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, thy brother is come; and thy father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said to him, son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

Although there are many “rabbit trails” in this parable that we could pursue, the important teaching is wrapped up in the prodigal son’s statement “*when he came to himself.*” Matthew Henry’s Commentary on Luke 15:17-24, has this to say about this phrase: “Having viewed the prodigal in his abject state of misery, we are next to consider his recovery from it. This begins by his coming to

himself. That is a turning point in the sinner's conversion. The Lord opens his eyes, and convinces him of sin; then he views himself and every object, in a different light from what he did before. Thus the convinced sinner perceives that the meanest servant of God is happier than he is. To look unto God as a Father, and our Father, will be of great use in our repentance and return to him. The prodigal arose, and returned to his home without stopping. Thus, the repenting sinner resolutely quits the bondage of Satan and his lusts, and returns to God by prayer, notwithstanding fears and discouragements. The Lord meets him with unexpected tokens of his forgiving love. Again; the reception of the humbled sinner is like that of the prodigal. He is clothed in the robe of the Redeemer's righteousness, made partaker of the Spirit of adoption, prepared by peace of conscience and gospel grace to walk in the ways of holiness, and feasted (sic) with Divine consolations. Principles of grace and holiness are wrought in him, to do, as well as to will.”

I can identify with this 100%, having gone through a similar experience in my own life. In 1958, while working for Douglas Aircraft Company, I was sent to England with two other employees to represent the Company in preparation for the installation of a medium-range missile system. We were there for a few months prior to the arrival of a large contingent of Douglas

employees who would actually install the system. We rented an apartment and soon became friends with four girls who lived above us in the same complex. All three of us were married and had no business getting involved, but that didn't seem to slow us down. A few months later, when I was returning to the U.S. to get my family and return to England, guilt began to overwhelm me, and I "came to myself". I drew a "line in the sand" so to speak, and determined that I would not drink beer, nor have it my house, from that time on. But I had to confess my infidelity to my wife, for I knew I could not live with that lie in our relationship. It was a few months before my wife was able to forgive me, and it was a stressful time in our family of five. But she finally was able to really forgive me. God was working on both of us for the next two years, continuing to draw us to the place He had planned. Finally, in 1963, while working for NASA in Houston, TX, I went to a men's retreat with six other men from our church: and the Lord came into the room where we were praying. All of us realized what had happened, and each one seemed to receive guidance appropriate to their particular need. I sensed that He wanted to come into my life, and to guide me in the actions and decisions I made. This was totally beyond my belief system: I did not know God as a person, nor did I know anything about the Holy Spirit. Needless to say, we had a lot to learn

over the next few years. Shortly thereafter my wife also received the Holy Spirit, and our life together became a “*one flesh*” relationship.

Note: The complete story about this event is contained in a book entitled [“A Man of God,” by Jesse C. Jones available on scribd](#) to read/download free. It is also linked on the author’s website [jessecjones.wordpress.com](#).

The Unjust Steward

Luke 16:1-13

“And He said also to His disciples, there was certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, how is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thy mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, what shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and he said unto the first, how much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, an hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then he said unto another, and how much owest thou? And he said, an hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, take thy bill and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been

faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. “

Matthew Henry interprets Luke 16:1-12 as follows: “Whatever we have, the property of it is God's; we have only the use of it, according to the direction of our great Lord, and for his honour. This steward wasted his lord's goods. And we are all liable to the same charge; we have not made due improvement of what God has trusted us with. The steward cannot deny it; he must make up his accounts, and be gone. This may teach us that death will come, and deprive us of the opportunities we now have. The steward will make friends of his lord's debtors or tenants, by striking off a considerable part of their debt to his lord. The lord referred to in this parable commended not the fraud, but the policy of the steward. In that respect alone is it so noticed. Worldly men, in the choice of their object, are foolish; but in their activity, and perseverance, they are often wiser than believers. The unjust steward is not set before us as an example in cheating his master, or to justify any dishonesty, but to point out

the careful ways of worldly men. It would be well if the children of light would learn wisdom from the men of the world, and would as earnestly pursue their better object. The true riches signify spiritual blessings; and if a man spends upon himself, or hoards up what God has trusted to him, as to outward things, what evidence can he have, that he is an heir of God through Christ? The riches of this world are deceitful and uncertain. Let us be convinced that those are truly rich, and very rich, who are rich in faith, and rich toward God, rich in Christ, in the promises; let us then lay up our treasure in heaven, and expect our portion from thence.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Luke 16:19-31

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: and there was certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores. And desiring to be fed by the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table: moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died and was buried; and in hell (Hades) he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray you therefore father, that you would send him to me father’s house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, nay father Abraham: but if one went unto

them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

This parable should make all children of God acutely aware of the danger associated with accumulation of significant wealth. Satan seems to have great influence where money is involved. 1 Timothy 6:10 says: *“For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*

The rich young ruler could not part with his wealth when Jesus told him that he had to sell all that he had to come join Him. Jesus then said: *“For it is harder for a camel to go through the needle’s eye, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”* There are many other scriptures that proclaim the difficulty of rich men entering the kingdom of God.

If you are a believer who has accumulated much, remember where it came from, and return it to the giver before (or at) your death. I believe God expects you to use what you have been given to provide for your family, and other monetary obligations.

The Unjust Judge

Luke 18:1-8

“And He spake a parable unto them to this ends, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, there was in a city a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, avenge me of my adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?”

This is a parable emphasizing the importance of importunity (persistence) when praying to God. This principle is also mentioned in Luke 11:5-10, which is a story about a friend coming late at night to borrow three loaves of bread. At first the one disturbed refuses to get up and help the friend, but because of his friend's importunity, he rises to give him all he needs. Jesus then says, *“And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be*

opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."

I am not aware of any examples of this in my prayer life, but God is clear about this characteristic of prayer, so I know it to be true. Of course, our prayer must be in accordance with God's will, and our request must be in earnest.

People often ask, 'How long should I pray? Shouldn't I come to the place where I stop praying and leave the matter in God's hands?' The only answer is this: *Pray until what you pray for has been accomplished or until you have complete assurance in your heart that it will be.* Only when one of these two conditions has been met is it safe to stop persisting in prayer, for prayer is not only calling upon God but is also a battle with Satan. And because God uses our intercession as a mighty weapon of victory in the conflict, He alone must decide when it is safe to cease from petitioning. Therefore we dare not stop praying until either the answer itself has come or we receive assurance it will come." [From Streams in the Desert, May 7].

I confess that I have struggled with this teaching. Most of the time my difficulties arise when I'm praying for individuals that I have no direct contact

with, and have no straightway method of monitoring their ongoing condition.

Example: A lawyer that I contacted to do some legal work for me several years ago has a daughter who has been in a coma for some time. It just so happens that his daughter was a childhood friend of my granddaughter, who lived with me and my wife for the first six years of her life. I once attended a program sponsored by a children's girl dance organization that both my granddaughter, and the lawyer's daughter were attending. While there, the lawyer's daughter came over and jumped into my lap. I'm sure that she was imitating my granddaughter, showing her that she could demand my attention as well. Nevertheless, I remembered that incident when the lawyer told me about her condition during the time when he was preparing my will.

After that I had the urge to begin praying for her, and I continued for some time (more than a year). Until the time of this writing I had not been in contact with the lawyer since, which is now several years. I was reluctant to call him and ask him about his daughter's condition. Nevertheless, I made the call using this article as an excuse. To my exceeding great joy he told me that she was still living, and was much improved; she could tell them that she loved them, and she could blow them a kiss. She was no longer in the hospital,

confined to a bed. She was now in a home for the disabled, but still had to be fed through a feeding tube. I know she still has a way to go, but it was a great blessing to me to hear about her marked improvement. I am now encouraged to start praying for her further improvement: God may want to restore her completely.

I learned a lesson from this experience: I need to follow up on prayers for people for which I do not have continued contact. In some way I believe God can measure the level of our faith in our prayers, and following up seems to be a sure sign showing that we have some “skin in the game”. I in no way claim that I am the only one praying for this young lady. I’m sure that her parents, as well as others have been praying for her, and I’m sure they all are blessed by what has happened.

The Pharisee and the Publican

Luke 18:9-14

“And He spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: Two men went up to the temple to pray; the one was a Pharisee, the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his great, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalted himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”

When working in Las Cruces, New Mexico, I had a small newspaper placed on my desk at a time I was not there. I do not know the individual that placed it there, but judging from the message that was highlighted within, I believe with all my heart that God was behind it. Later, when I wanted to quote this message I tried to determine the author so I could get permission to use it. Although it has all the characteristics of Oswald Chambers’ writing, his

organization reported that the author was unknown. I quote this remarkable message below:

The High Calling

If God has called you to be really like Jesus in all your spirit He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put on you such demands of obedience that He will not allow you to follow other Christians, and in many ways He will seem to let other good people do things which He will not let you do. Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it; and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent. Others can brag on themselves, on their work, on their success, on their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works. Others will be allowed to succeed in making great sums of money, or having a legacy left to them, or in having luxuries, but God may supply you daily, because He wants you to have something far better than gold, and that is a helpless dependence on Him, that He may have the privilege of providing your needs day by day out of the unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward, and keep you hid away in obscurity, because He wants to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. God will let others be great, but keep you small. He will let others do a work for Him, and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing; and then to make your work still more precious, He will let others get the credit for the work which you have done, and this will make your reward ten times greater when Jesus comes.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch on you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words and feelings or for wasting your time, which other Christians never seem distressed over. So make up your mind that God is an infinite Sovereign, and has a right to do as He pleases with His own, and He will not explain to you a thousand things which puzzle your reason in His dealings with you. God will take you at your word; and if you absolutely sell yourself to be His slave, He will wrap you up in a jealous love, and let other people say and do many things that you cannot do or say. Settle it forever, that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit, and He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that others are not dealt with. Now 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.

The Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16

“For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny [shilling] a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace. And he said unto them; go ye also into the vineyard, whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that ye shall receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, call the laborers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, saying these last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them,

and said, friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few are chosen. “

The teaching from this parable obviously relates to the fact that God does not choose those that are welcomed into His kingdom based on how long they have followed Him, nor by worldly achievements. John 15:16 says, “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained 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.*”

This is undoubtedly one of the most difficult biblical teachings for believers to accept. Our concept of justice rebels at the thought that God would choose only some for salvation and leave the others, thus condemning them to eternal punishment and suffering. We refuse to accept the fact that God could act in a way that conflicts with our own sense of right and wrong. 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*

replieth 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? God is the Creator of all men, but He is Father only to believers (Romans 8:14; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). God the Father administers justice with wisdom, kindness, mercy, and love far beyond our comprehension. As His children we must recognize His authority over us in everything.

The two words “election” and “chosen”, and their derivatives, are of great importance in accepting the fact that God chooses us: their use in the Bible is outlined below:

I. 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 individuals God seems to commit Himself to doing what is necessary to insure that these chosen ones are “called” (see John 6:44) to Jesus Christ. The word “elect” is used in the old testament (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 new testament (NT), 21 of which refer to the election of those to the body of Christ (the church), and one to elect angels

(see 1 Peter 1:2; Romans 9:11; Revelation 17:8). None of the uses of these words refer to men electing to come to Christ.

2. *Chosen*, as used in the NT, conveys the idea of choosing recipients to bestow special favor and privilege. The word *chosen* is used in the OT 94 times, 21 of which refer to God the Father choosing Israel, or the Savior. Chosen is used in the NT 30 times, nine of which refer to those in the body of Christ (the church) being chosen out of the world (see John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4-5, 11; Romans 8:29; 2 Timothy 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). The evidence from study of the six words choose, chooseth, chooseth, choosing, chose, and chosen, as used in the King James Version (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 uses are unrelated to this search.

It seems clear from analysis of the words *election* and *chosen*, as used in the Bible, that God chooses those that belong to Him, and man's free will is not involved in this decision 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 Romans 9:10-24).

The Pounds

Luke 19:11-28

“And as they heard these things, He added and spake a parable, because He was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear. He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, occupy [trade ye herewith] till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message [an ambassage] after him, saying we will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, lord thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, well thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, be thou over five cities. And another came, saying, lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: for I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, out of thy own mouth will I judge thee, thy wicked

servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury [interest]? And he said unto them that stood by, take from him the pound, and give it to the one that hath ten pounds. And they said unto him, lord, he hath ten pounds. For I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me. And when he had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem.”

This parable is difficult to understand because it seems totally unlike the Jesus we have come to know from our studies in the NT. Nevertheless, there seems to be no other way to interpret this parable than to recognize this nobleman as Himself, ascending to heaven to receive His authority over the kingdom of God on earth, and returning as the Holy Spirit, guiding us as our intercessor and mediator from His position at the right hand of God the Father.

At first He corrects His disciples, who were under the impression that the kingdom of God was about to be immediately revealed. He describes the

nobleman giving gifts to his ten servants who represent the believers on earth to whom He has endowed with certain gifts, differing in purpose and importance. Just as the nobleman, so Jesus does with His flock: He expects them to use their gift to the benefit of others. But the Jews did not accept Him, just as the “citizens” did not want to be ruled by the nobleman. Next the nobleman commanded the ten servants to come and report regarding their success (or lack thereof) in trading with their pound. When we are called before the judgment seat of Christ, we will be asked to report on the works we have accomplished through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). As with the nobleman’s servants, we will receive rewards (or not), based on whether our works survive the refiner’s fire. For those whose works are consumed, they will suffer loss, but they will survive, but by fire. Finally, the nobleman asks for those that rejected him as their leader to be slain before him. This must apply to those whose names are not found written in the Book of Life which are cast into the lake of fire at the end (Revelation 20:15).

The Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32

“But what think ye? A certain man had two sons; and he came unto the first, and said, son, go to work today in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go sir, and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first. Jesus saith unto them, verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”

In this parable Jesus is addressing the chief priests and the elders of the temple in Jerusalem. He chastises them for questioning His teaching, and asking who gave Him the authority to do the things He was doing? In His response He presents this parable in which the two sons represent the priests and elders (one), and the publicans and harlots (the other). In His summary He states that the publicans and harlots will enter the kingdom of God before the priests and elders (to whom He was speaking). When John the Baptist

came to them in righteousness they failed to believe him, but the publicans and harlots did believe. After the priests and elders saw this they still refused to believe and accept John's teaching.

The Vineyard

Matthew 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19

“There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country. When the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise. But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, they will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, this is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him. When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh what will he do to those husbandmen? They say unto him, he will miserably destroy those wicked men, and let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them, did ye never read in the scriptures, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes? Therefore, I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be

broken [to pieces]: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spoke of them. But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitude, because they took Him for a prophet.”

This is a parable about the Father’s attempt to draw mankind into a spiritual relationship with Himself so they would be worthy to enter the kingdom of God. The parable was given to the Jews, but in our analysis we attempt to interpret it as applying to the present-day believer. The householder represents God the Father, who has prepared a world created to provide for and protect those that live therein (the husbandmen). God wanted the husbandmen to develop characteristics like those of the fruit of God’s Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness [kindness], goodness, faith [faithfulness], meekness, and temperance. This is the fruit that God sent His servants (prophets, kings, leaders, etc.) to “receive”, but instead they were slain, imprisoned, and beaten by the Jews, and later by the Romans. Finally, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, hoping that mankind would respond to His only Son, but they (the Jewish leaders) crucified Him on a cross.

In verse 43 Jesus tells the Jews that the kingdom of God will be taken from them and be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. This is a very cogent statement: we know the kingdom was taken from the Jews when they were conquered by the Babylonians in 597 BC, and even though Israel was re-established as a nation in 1948, we can rightly assume that the kingdom of God was not restored to them at that time. The Bible does record that a remnant (Zechariah 13:9 says 1/3) of the Jews will call on the name of the Lord when Jesus returns for the final battle of Armageddon at the end of time. This is when God declares that they (the Jewish remnant) are once again His people, and this seems to be the time that the kingdom is restored to Israel. In regard to the statement that when the kingdom of God is taken from Israel it will be given to a nation that brings forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit? See Appendix 3 - **Is America “The” Nation?** which gives a summary argument for America as that nation.

Although Jesus, through His death on the cross, brought salvation to sinners and established the Church, today we see another move of Satan in men's lives. The vineyard (world) seems to be decaying, and is certainly full of “weeds” (devastation and sin). Can we agree that God must be sharing many of the same feelings that the householder in our parable experienced? And how

do you think He feels when He looks on the things He created; that He declared were very good in Genesis 1:31?

The Wedding Feast

Matthew 22:1-14

“And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage feast for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, tell them which were bidden, behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: and the remnant took his servants, and treated them spitefully [shamefully] and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith to the him, friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, bind him hand and

foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

In this parable Jesus is teaching about the wedding feast that will occur in heaven for Christ and His bride. It seems that the first group mentioned here, whom we assume represents the Jews, refused to accept God’s guidance, and thereby failed to join Christ’s wedding feast. God then sent another opportunity through His prophets, preachers, and teachers offering salvation, but they were also rejected by the Jews who treated them spitefully, and slew some of them. It was at this point that God gave up on the Jewish nation (at least temporarily), and determined to give the kingdom of God to another nation. He then turned His attention to the Gentiles, to whom He gave salvation and sanctification. But some tried to enter the marriage feast without the necessary credentials (wedding garments). But the king (God) ordered them to be cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Hades).

The Ten Virgins

Matthew 25:1-13

“Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone [going] out. But the wise answered, saying, not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage [marriage feast]: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”

This is a parable that just about all believers are familiar with, but sadly not to the extent of applying it to their own lives. The oil in this parable obviously

refers to the Holy Spirit, and the foolish virgins to those who fail to keep their relationship with God viable by failing to listen, and act on His guidance.

When the time comes for the Lord to celebrate the wedding feast with the bride (the “virgins” who have maintained their oil supply), they will join Him in heaven and the entry door will be closed. And when the others cry out, begging for entry, the Lord will say to them, “*I never knew you*”, the phrase that no person on earth ever wants to hear. If this might apply to you the thing you need to do is to start seeking God, talk to Him, tell Him how sorry you are and repent; then get involved with His body (a Bible believing church). Study the Bible and follow His guidance about the works He has planned for you.

What Does it Mean to be in Christ?

Being *in Christ* is a biblical term that seems to be little understood by believers in today's world. I wonder if the reason for this is, at least in part, due to the dearth of teaching on the resurrection, righteousness, renewing of the mind, sanctification, the body of Christ, and conforming us to Christ's image. In his book entitled "The Normal Christian Life" Watchman Nee describes what being *in Christ* means by using the description of man's condition of being dead to sin, but still alive to the law. He bases his argument on Romans Chapter 7, which explains that we are not under law, but under grace. To quote from pages 155-56 in this book: "Grace means that God does something for me; law means that I do something for God. God has certain holy and righteous demands He places upon me: that is the law. Now if Law means that God requires something of me for their fulfillment, then deliverance from Law means that he no longer requires that from me, but himself provides it. Law implies that God requires me to do something for him; deliverance from Law implies that he exempts me from doing it, and that in grace he does it himself. I

(where *I* is the *carnal* man of Chapter 7:14) need to do nothing for God: that is deliverance from Law. The trouble in Romans 7 is that man in the flesh tried to do something for God. As soon as you try to please God in that way, then you place yourself under Law, and the experience of Romans 7 begins to be yours". Nee goes on to point out that there is nothing wrong with the Law, the problem lies with the unrighteousness of the person upon which the law places demands. "The trouble is not that the Law's demands are unjust, but that I am unable to meet them." In his interpretation of this scripture Watchman Nee illustrates how our deliverance from the law is like the woman and the two husbands in Romans 7:1-4. The first husband is the law, and the second husband is Christ. The woman has a dilemma: she cannot be married to both husbands and, unfortunately, she is married to the less desirable one, the Law. Since the first husband is never going to die, the only solution is for the woman to die. Romans 7:4 says, "*Wherefore, my brethren, ye are also become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.*" In dying we are freed from the Law and united with Christ in resurrection. If we are not *in Christ* we are still under the Law. This is how we are *in Christ*: by accepting the death of our old life and joining Christ in His death on the cross. In the power of

Christ's resurrection our lives become fruitful, and we become empowered for all the claims that God's holiness will make upon us. It is by being *in Christ* that His righteousness becomes our own, and our sins are washed away by His precious blood.

As I look back on a lifetime of church attendance I recall very little teaching on the meaning of the resurrection, and none on the meaning of being *in Christ*. 1 John 5:18 New Living Translation (NLT) says: "*We know that those who have become part of God's family do not make a practice of sinning, for God's Son holds them securely, and the evil one cannot get his hands on them.*" This does not mean that we no longer commit sins, but that we now have a choice **not** to commit them: we are no longer slaves to sin. This means that when we are regenerated in resurrection we will not **practice**, or **live** in sin. And when we abide *in Christ* the evil one cannot touch us. 1 John 3:5-6 says, "*And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known [knoweth] him.*"

Ephesians 1:1-20, uses the term “*in Christ*” twelve times, so we know that this phrase is important. This passage of scripture refers to the riches given to those that are *in Christ*:

Faithfulness
Spiritual blessing
Being holy and without blame
Foreordained to be chosen
Redemption
Remission of offenses
Knowing the mystery of His will
Grace
Wisdom and prudence
Restoration to perfect unity
Inheritance
Sealed by the Spirit of promise
Hope
Power

This list includes most, if not all, of the blessings that believers inherit through being *in Christ*. Still, this does not translate into a working knowledge of what it means to be *in Christ* to me. Possibly one key to personal realization of what being *in Christ* means is related to discernment of the body of Christ. If we are

where the Lord wants us to be in His body (the church), and are seeing His gift(s) manifested through us unto the edifying of the body members, we are certainly *in Christ*. Jesus Christ spoke the church into being to create a special relationship with those that believe *into* Him. He identified them as His body, as described in Ephesians 5:22-33. This passage makes several important points:

- 1) We are to submit ourselves to Christ for He is the head of the church. Just as the brain controls the functions of all the cells and organs of the human body, Christ is to control the actions of the church.
- 2) Christ loves the church and gave Himself for it so that He could sanctify and cleanse it with washing of water by the Word. If the church is hearing and following Christ's directions He will provide teaching that will cleanse the body.
- 3) Christ's shepherding of the church will result in a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, and if one goes astray, he finds it and gathers it up in his arms and returns to the flock.

- 4) Christ nourishes and cherishes the church. Christ feeds and protects the church just as the robin feeds and protects her chicks.
- 5) We are members of Christ's body, of His flesh, and of His bones. In the same way that we protect the members of our body, Christ protects the members of His body.
- 6) We will become one (spirit) with Christ in the same manner that a husband and wife become one flesh (see 1 Corinthians 6:17). If we are on God's track for our lives our human spirit becomes one (over time) with the Holy Spirit in the same way that a godly couple begin to act alike, and function as a unit, over time.

Ephesians 5:22-32 describes the relationship we have with Christ after we have believed into him, for comparison is made to a man and woman after they have been married, and the union has been consummated. Christ gathers us together into His mystical body and begins the process of sanctification, the renewing of our minds, so that we can think and act like Christ. This is referred to in the bible as *conforming us to the image of Christ*. The analogy of the union between a man and woman in marriage is perfect. When a man and woman come together as one flesh each one must undergo some

reprogramming (renewing) of the mind so that they can come together in agreement on issues that initially were divisive. In the same way, the Holy Spirit shows us God's will in the situations and decisions we face, and if we accept His guidance, gradually we become more Christlike. John 16:14 says that the Holy Spirit receives from Christ and declares it unto us. The decision to follow God's guidance, or not, is a question of the will, which resides in our soul. Ephesians 6:6 GNT says that we do the will of God from our soul. Most English versions of the NT incorrectly substitute the word heart for soul in this passage.

Possibly the most difficult scripture to grapple with in regard to being *in Christ* is Ephesians 2:5-6, which says: "*Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*" Our inclination may be to think that this refers to the period after rapture and resurrection, but I can find no support for this view. A quote on this scripture from Vincent's Word Studies in the NT says this, "Even now we sit there in Him, and shall sit with Him in the end." I think there is little doubt that this scripture means just what it says. Just as we are in Christ's body on earth (the church), in some mysterious way there is a part of us that resides in the heavenlies *in Christ* at this very moment.

Let's summarize what we have discussed above about being *in Christ*.

- 1) Christ has gathered us into His mystical body where we reside (abide) under his protection, safe from unwarranted attacks of the evil one.
- 2) The purpose that Christ tries to fulfill in the members of His body is that of conforming us to His image: making us like Him in every thought and deed. He does this through the renewing of our mind (biblical heart).
- 3.) When Christ's body is functioning as it should He can nourish and teach us through the gifts that are in operation. Spiritual gifts are given specifically to buildup and temper the body. The fruit of the Spirit is plentiful in this environment. Agape love is the principal fruit that should be manifested by the body. It is God's love that identifies us as being *in Christ*.
- 4) When we are *in Christ* and Christ is *in us* we are living proof of the answer to Jesus' prayer in John 17:21-23.
- 5) One who abides *in Christ* does not sin habitually, for he is in fellowship with God and thus cannot live in fellowship with sin.

Do I Have Anything Inside Of Me That Says I Am *In Christ*?

This is a more difficult question to answer than the inverse: What do we have inside of us that says we have Christ in us? Romans 8:16 says that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and verse 9 identifies the Spirit as being both the Spirit of God and Spirit of Christ. Some believers I have talked to seem doubtful about having this witness, but my personal experience was that very shortly after I received the Holy Spirit I realized that I was a child of God. This witness in the heart was a key principle in John Wesley's ministry: it was the proof to him that he was a Christian (from "John Wesley" by Basil Miller, page 63).

However, understanding the phrase *in Christ* is more elusive, and identifying what it is within us that confirms this seems even more difficult. There are many scriptures that mention the feelings and beliefs we have when we believe into Christ:

1 John 3:14 *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."*

1 John 5:1 *"Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God."*

1 John 5:10 *"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself."*

1 John 2:29 *"If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him."*

We know from 1 John 3:14, that if we have God's agape love for the members of Christ's body, we have part in the resurrection. Also, if we live righteously, we know that we are born of Him. Being born of Him certainly implies that we are part of, or *in Christ*, just as we are part of, or "in," our own earthly parents. *Knowing*, or sensing this fact as a reality in my nature, seems to be more elusive, however.

Before we *know* Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives we can do wrong and our conscience seems to excuse us. Hebrews 10:22, indicates that our conscience is in our heart, and we have noted above that God gives us a new heart when we believe *into* Christ. As a result of receiving this new heart, things begin to change in our lives: when we do something wrong it bothers us, and we do not want to repeat the same offense. Our goals and ambitions begin to change as well, and we find that our priorities get rearranged. All this happens over time, and with some of us it takes a considerable period of time before we begin to recognize these changes. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:17, Oswald Chambers says, "When we are born again, the Holy Spirit begins to work His new creation in us, and there will come a time when there is not a bit of the old order left. . . How are we going to get the life that has no lust, no self-interest, no sensitivity to pokes, the love that is not provoked, that thinketh no evil, that is

always kind? The only way is by allowing not a bit of the old life to be left; but only simple, perfect trust in God, such trust that we no longer want God's blessings, but only want Himself."

As noted above, Christ has placed us into His mystical body, and He describes this as being like a marriage, when a husband and wife become one flesh after being together for some time. As Christ renews our mind, a process that takes time, we begin to act and think like Him. 1 Corinthians 6:17 says when we are joined to the Lord we become one spirit, just like husband and wife become one flesh. In the same way that we sense the development of this relationship in marriage, I believe we can sense becoming one spirit with Christ. I recognize this as I become aware of Christ guiding my thoughts, words, and actions. I begin to ask myself what Christ would have me do, or what He may be trying to do, in all the situations that I encounter. Sometimes I feel like an impartial observer as I see Him manifesting some aspect of His nature through my body without me consciously doing anything at all.

Some time ago I encountered an estranged member of my church body who nurtured a lot of hurt feelings and ill will toward those with which I fellowship. As I approached her she seemed to stiffen, and I was not sure that she would respond to my reaching out to her. At first she was very cold and

accusatory, but all at once I felt God loving her through me, and I began to see an immediate melting of her iciness. I did nothing to cause this, nor was it in my nature to love her in that way; it was totally God showing her the agape love that He had for her, using my body: I was as overwhelmed as she was. I was blessed to see the power of God's love in action, which no obstacle can withstand. I wish this happened a lot more often. This is another way that I become aware of the fact that I am *in Christ*: I am in Him and He can use my abode (body) any way that He sees fit.

Another way that I think we can sense being in Him is through the confidence we have that He has our life under His control. I think that most regenerated believers have the sense that God has a plan for their lives, and that Christ (through the Holy Spirit) is working to bring it to fruition. In one sense all of us receive a *call* from God to do something with our lives. Many that enter the ministry or become missionaries say that they were *called*, but all true believers should know what God has *called* them to do in their lives while on earth.

I believe we get a strong signal that we are *in Christ* when we begin to bear the fruit of the Spirit. John 15:4 says "*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in*

me.” The branches (believers) can only bear fruit when they are connected to the vine (Christ), and are continually being fed by life-giving nourishment (wisdom from the Holy Spirit). Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance. Love is the principal fruit; I do not believe there is any power on earth that can stand against an outpouring of God’s agape love.

Believers know that they belong to God, and that they are going to meet Him one day to join Him forever. When we are *in Christ* we begin to know His will and desire to follow his direction in our daily living. We begin to recognize a number of things that we can no longer do, and the number of these things increases as we mature *in Christ*. We begin to have an emotional love for Christ, and to enjoy expressing it in worshipping Him. As our prayer life develops we find ourselves turning more often to Him for our own, and other’s, needs. We finally get to the place where we go to Him just to talk about things; in short we begin to develop a close relationship with Jesus Christ, the creator of everything that exists in heaven and on earth. More and more we begin to think and act like Christ: we begin to be conformed to His image, we have believed *into Christ* and we are now *in Christ*. If that isn’t enough to boggle your mind I don’t know what is!

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.

After learning my lesson about the need to understand the details about any biblical subject I expect to understand and clarify, I want to provide what I believe to be a proper biblical understanding of God's intent relating to 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 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 bad 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 my 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. God's (agape) love, is best described in 1 Corinthians 13. I fully

expected repayment according to the schedule they themselves proposed when the loans were made. When they defaulted my feeling for them was certainly not one of love, nor was it hatred. Obviously, I cannot expect 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 the cash involved was 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 relative of my wife, and I did not know her well. She had repaid money that she had borrowed 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 (part) of what I consider to be His money. She never repaid any more 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, or parties, 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 (Romans 4:16, 25; Colossians 2:13; Ephesians 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 (Romans 4:15, 17, 25;

Ephesians 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, but not the other. Repentance was clearly not involved in the first case, and possibly not in the second.

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 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 referred to before, and this scripture seems to (possibly) 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 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 all our 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 abundant 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 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 (2 Corinthians 2:10), 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 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 trespass 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 subsequently 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” 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 "unforgiveness" in my heart for this couple. I am only sorry that they did not listen to God in this situation.

Is America “The” Nation?

Matthew 21:33 relates a parable given to the Jews by the Lord about the householder who developed a vineyard, let it out to certain husbandmen, and then departed to a far country. When the time of the fruit drew near he sent servants to the husbandmen to collect the proceeds from the crop, but the husbandmen beat, killed, and stoned the servants. Then the householder sent his son, thinking that the husbandmen would respect the son. Instead they killed the son also. This parable obviously refers to the Jews insisting on the crucifixion of Jesus by Pontus Pilate, Procurator of Judea. Matthew 21:43 records God’s plan of action as a result of the Jews rejection of Christ: *“Therefore say I unto you, ‘The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.’”*

When I recently became aware of this verse I was shocked that I had not noticed it before. My immediate thought was, “Could this be referring to America?” I couldn’t think of any other nation that had been blessed as we have, any nation whose founding documents all validate the fact that America was established as a Christian nation. To prove that this verse, in all probability, does in fact refer to America, I want to start by establishing America’s Christian foundation by quoting a few excerpts from the many documents and statements attributed to notable personages at the time of our nation’s beginning:

1. The Declaration of Independence, July 4, 1776, *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."*
2. Thomas Jefferson :*"My God! how little do my countrymen know what precious blessings they are in possession of, and which no other people of earth enjoy!" "God who gave us life gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are the gift of God? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just, that His justice cannot sleep forever."*
3. Noah Webster: *"The moral principles and precepts contained in the Scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws. All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible."*
4. Abraham Lincoln, April 30, 1863: *"We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, these many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us! It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness."*

5. George Washington: *"No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible hand which conducts the the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seem to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency...We ought no less to be persuaded that the propitious smiles of heaven cannot be expected on a nation that disregards the eternal rules of order and right, which heaven itself has ordained."*

6. John Adams: *"We have no government armed with powers capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."*

7. John Jay about the importance of faith for virtue, *"Should our Republic ever forget this fundamental precept of governance, men are certain to shed their responsibilities for licentiousness and the great experiment will surely be doomed."*

8. Benjamin Franklin: *"Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. Nothing brings more pain than too much pleasure; nothing more bondage than too much liberty."*

9. 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights: *"Free government, or the blessings of liberty, can be preserved to any people, but by a firm adherence to justice, moderation, temperance, frugality, and virtue."*

10. Theodore Roosevelt, July 4, 1886: *"We must keep steadily in mind that no people were ever yet benefited by riches if their prosperity corrupted their virtue."*

11. James Madison: *"Liberty may be endangered by the abuses of liberty as well as the abuses of power."*

12. Alex De Tocqueville, noted French political philosopher visited America in her infancy to find the secret of her greatness. He first examined businesses, schools, national government, and cities and towns but could not find the reason for its strength. Then he visited the churches of our nation whose pulpits were aflame with righteousness and found the secret which he summarized as follows: *"America is great because America is good; if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great."*

13. In as late as 1892 the Supreme Court rendered the following decision: *"Our laws and institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teachings of The Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it should be otherwise; and in this sense and this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian... This is a religious people. This is historically true. From the discovery of this continent to the present hour, there is a single voice making this affirmation...we find everywhere a clear recognition of the same truth...These and many other matters which might be noticed, add a volume of unofficial declarations to the mass of organic utterances that this is a Christian nation."*

I hope these statements of the founders, as well as those of later leaders and notable individuals and groups will convince readers that America was indeed established as a Christian nation, guided by people of virtue, who believed that freedom was worth fighting and dying for. Of the 56 men who signed the Declaration of Independence five were captured by the British and tortured before they died, twelve had their homes sacked or burned, two lost sons and one lost two sons in the fighting. Nine died in the war. They knew when they signed the Declaration on July 4, 1776, in the city of Philadelphia, that if they succeeded they faced years of hardship, and if they failed they would face a hangman's noose as traitors.

The closing words of the Declaration declare: “*With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.*”

The Constitution of the United States was prepared by 55 men who were appointed to a Constitutional Convention in May 1787, with the task of developing a National structure which would deal with foreign nations, and administer matters of National concern (as distinguished from State or local concern). The 13 states had already established guidelines of their own, and the Constitution was to be based on these to the benefit of the population as a whole. The National government was to be supreme in its domain, and the State governments were to be sovereign in all affairs not National or foreign. When faced with difficulty for the first few weeks, 81-year old Benjamin Franklin rose and addressed the troubled convention, pleading that they remember that God had brought them through the struggle of the war, and that He would surely guide them in this endeavor if they only asked. After that they began each day of deliberation with prayer, and the Constitution began to take shape.

The men of the Convention were of extraordinary ability and experience, men of high regard like Washington, Franklin, and Hamilton, chief justices of the supreme courts, and men who had achieved distinction at the bar and in business. Of the 55 members of the Constitutional Convention 31 were lawyers. On September 17, 1787, thirty-nine delegates signed the Constitution, and nine months later the required nine states ratified it, putting it into effect. Rhode Island was the last of the thirteen states to ratify it in 1790.

This is a short summary of the number of speeches, statements, documents, prayers, and events that that led up to the fight for freedom in the Revolutionary war, and establishment of the rule of law afterward. If I ever had any doubts about the Christian foundation of our

nation they were certainly eliminated after this study. The wisdom of the founders when they forged America, the greatest and most prosperous nation in all history, was given to them from God, because they acknowledged Him and sought His aid in all their endeavors. Their oft-repeated theme to future generations was that our nation would not continue to be so blessed if we turned away from God, and were no longer a God-fearing nation. We will address this possibility later.

Before we leave this subject I want to recognize the resources I have used for many of the quotes and historical facts given above:

- 1) "The Rebirth of America," Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986;
- 2) "The U.S. Constitution: a Reader," Hillsdale College Press, 2012;
- 3) "The Constitution of the United States, Its Sources and Its Application," by Thomas James Norton, America's Future, Inc., 1943.

America: An Inevitable Empire?

I was shocked when I became aware of the geological advantages of the North American Continent over that of the rest of the world. This is well documented in a report by Stratfor entitled: The Geopolitics of the United States, Part 1: The Inevitable Empire. The information provided below is used with Stratfor's permission.

"The American geography is an impressive one. The Greater Mississippi Basin together with the Intracoastal Waterway has more kilometers of navigable internal waterways than the rest of the world combined. The American Midwest is both overlaid by this waterway and is the world's largest contiguous piece of farmland. The U.S. Atlantic Coast possesses

more major ports than the rest of the Western Hemisphere combined. Two vast oceans insulate the United States from Asian and European powers, deserts separate the United States from Mexico to the south, while lakes and forests separate the population centers in Canada from those in the United States. The United States has capital, food surpluses and physical insulation in excess of every other country in the world by an exceedingly large margin.

North America is a triangle-shaped continent centered in the temperate portions of the Northern Hemisphere. It is of sufficient size that its northern reaches are fully Arctic and its southern reaches are fully tropical. Predominant wind currents carry moisture from west to east across the continent. Climatically, the continent consists of a series of wide north-south precipitation bands largely shaped by the landmass' longitudinal topography. The Rocky Mountains dominate the Western third of the northern and central parts of North America, generating a rain-shadow effect just east of the mountain range — an area known colloquially as the Great Plains. Farther east of this semiarid region are the well-watered plains of the prairie provinces of Canada and the American Midwest. This zone comprises both the most productive and the largest contiguous acreage of arable land on the planet.

The most distinctive and important feature of North America is the river network in the middle third of the continent. While its components are larger in both volume and length than most of the world's rivers, this is not what sets the network apart. Very few of its tributaries begin at high elevations, making vast tracts of these rivers easily navigable. In the case of the Mississippi, the head of navigation — just north of Minneapolis — is 3,000 kilometers inland. The network consists of six distinct river systems: the Missouri, Arkansas, Red, Ohio, Tennessee and, of course, the Mississippi. The unified nature of this system greatly enhances the region's usefulness and potential economic and political power.

First, shipping goods via water is an order of magnitude cheaper than shipping them via land. The specific ratio varies greatly based on technological era and local topography, but in the petroleum age in the United States, the cost of transport via water is roughly 10 to 30 times cheaper than overland. This simple fact makes countries with robust maritime transport options extremely capital-rich when compared to countries limited to land-only options. This factor is the primary reason why the major economic powers of the past half-millennia have been Japan, Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. Second, the watershed of the Greater Mississippi Basin largely overlays North America's arable lands. Normally, agricultural areas as large as the American Midwest are underutilized as the cost of shipping their output to more densely populated regions cuts deeply into the economics of agriculture. The vast bulk of the prime agricultural lands are within 200 kilometers of a stretch of navigable river. Road and rail are still used for collection, but river ports allow for the entirety of the basin's farmers to easily and cheaply ship their products to markets, not just in North America, but all over the world. Third, the river network's unity greatly eases the issue of political integration. All of the peoples of the basin are part of the same economic system, ensuring constant contact and common interests. Regional proclivities obviously still arise, but this is not Northern Europe, where a variety of separate river systems have given rise to multiple national identities.

The early United States did not face any severe geographic challenges. The barrier island system and local rivers provided a number of options that allowed for rapid cultural and economic expansion up and down the East Coast. The coastal plain — particularly in what would become the American South — was sufficiently wide and well-watered to allow for the steady expansion of cities and farmland. Choices were limited, but so were challenges.

This was not England, an island that forced the early state into the expense of a navy. This was not France, a country with three coasts and two land borders that forced Paris to constantly deal with threats from multiple directions. This was not Russia, a massive country suffering from short growing seasons that was forced to expend inordinate sums of capital on infrastructure simply to attempt to feed itself. Instead, the United States could exist in relative peace for its first few decades without needing to worry about any large-scale, omnipresent military or economic challenges, so it did not have to garrison a large military. Every scrap of energy the young country possessed could be spent on making itself more sustainable. When viewed together — the robust natural transport network overlaying vast tracts of excellent farmland, sharing a continent with two much smaller and weaker powers — it is inevitable that whoever controls the middle third of North America will be a great power.

For the United States, the attraction of owning one's own destiny made it the destination of choice for most European migrants. At the time that Mexico achieved independence it had 6.2 million people versus the U.S. population of 9.6 million. In just two generations — by 1870 — the American population had ballooned to 38.6 million while Mexico's was only 8.8 million. This U.S. population boom, combined with the United States' ability to industrialize organically, not only allowed it to develop economically but also enabled it to provide the goods for its own development.

Global history from 1500 to 1945 is a lengthy treatise of increasing contact and conflict among a series of great regional powers. Some of these powers achieved supra-regional empires, with the Spanish, French and English being the most obvious. Several regional powers — Austria, Germany, Ottoman Turkey and Japan — also succeeded in extending

their writ over huge tracts of territory during parts of this period. And several secondary powers — the Netherlands, Poland, China and Portugal — had periods of relative strength. Yet the two world wars massively devastated all of these powers. No battles were fought in the mainland United States. Not a single American factory was ever bombed. Alone among the world's powers in 1945, the United States was not only functional but thriving.

The United States immediately set to work consolidating its newfound power, creating a global architecture to entrench its position. The first stage of this — naval domination — was achieved quickly and easily. The U.S. Navy at the beginning of World War II was already a respectable institution, but after three years fighting across two oceans it had achieved both global reach and massive competency. But that is only part of the story. Equally important was the fact that, as of August 1945, with the notable exception of the British Royal Navy, every other navy in the world had been destroyed. As impressive as the United States' absolute gains in naval power had been, its relative gains were grander still. There simply was no competition. Always a maritime merchant power, the United States could now marry its economic advantages to absolute dominance of the seas and all global trade routes. And it really didn't need to build a single additional ship to do so (although it did anyway).”...

“From a functional point of view the United States controls North America because it holds nearly all of the pieces that are worth holding. With the possible exception of Cuba or some select sections of southern Canada, the rest of the landmass is more trouble than it is worth. Additionally, the security relationship it has developed with Canada and Mexico means that neither poses an existential threat to American dominance. Any threat to the United States would have to come from beyond North America. And the only type of coun-

try that could possibly dislodge the United States would be another state whose power is also continental in scope.”

Chosen and Blessed

I hope that our arguments above have convinced readers that the creation, founding, and structuring of America can't be explained by mere happenstance. The miracle of a ragtag army of farmers overcoming the British army of sixty-thousand troops, commanded by the ablest generals in Europe, with a naval force of twenty-two thousand seamen in eighty British men-of-war can only happen when men like Washington, inspired by Heaven, can conceive a surprise move on the enemy by crossing the Delaware on Christmas Eve. And who but the Ruler of the winds could have delayed British reinforcements by three months during a critical point of the war, or provide for the miraculous, last minute detection of Benedict Arnold's treacherous scheme? Who but God could move on a man like eighty-one-year old Benjamin Franklin to address the disagreeing Constitutional Convention stating that “I have lived a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth: that God governs in the affairs of man. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this . . .” It was after this that every session of the Convention opened with prayer, which led to the successful development of our Constitution, which established a republic based on the absolute laws of the Bible, not a

democracy based on the changing whims of people. Abraham Lincoln wrote this regarding the relationship between the principles of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." Sadly, our nation no longer holds to President Lincoln's characterization which was drawn from Proverbs 25:11.

The Falling Away

Editor's Note: This article was written in 2016 and it should be noted that references to the current administration relate to our 44th President Barack Obama.

For all the blessings our nation has been privileged to receive we now find ourselves like Israel when the curse of Matthew 21:43 was spoken by Jesus. A past president of our nation proclaimed that we were no longer a Christian nation, and set about instituting regulations and procedures validating that statement. Compare this to the purpose of the Pilgrims in coming to a new land as given in the New England Charter, which states in part, “. . . to advance the enlargement of Christian religion, to the glory of God Almighty . . .” And again in the 1892 decision of the Supreme Court, which states in part: “Our laws and our institutions must necessarily be based upon, and embody the teachings of The Redeemer of mankind. It is impossible that it could be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian . . .” Os Guinness, in his book “A Free Peoples Suicide,” emphasizes the founder’s belief that freedom depends on virtue, and virtue depends on faith, and faith is a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8). Thomas Jefferson once asked, “Can the liberties of a nation be secure when we have removed the conviction that these liberties are the gift of God?”

Abraham Lincoln had this to say about the Bible: “All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated through this Book; but for the Book we could not know right from wrong. All the things desirable to man are contained in it.” Now ask yourself how many people you know spend any significant time studying the Bible, the source of God’s wisdom. Only eighteen years from the time the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock, the Puritans founded the first and perhaps the most famous Ivy League school: Harvard. Almost all the

Ivy League schools were established to train ministers of the gospel. Harvard's "Rules and Precepts," published in 1646, included the following statement: "Every one shall consider the main end of his life and studies (is) to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternal life." I doubt that God would look with favor on what is being taught at Harvard and other institutions of higher learning in 2016.

In today's world God's Word, the Bible, seems to command little honor and respect, even by those who identify themselves as Christians. I am especially sensitive to this failure for I was one of those who failed to recognize the wonderful knowledge and wisdom that God has provided through this easily accessed medium, the written word. My wife developed early onset Alzheimers Disease when she was 49-years old. As a result I had a lot of lonely time in the evening, after I had put her to bed. Soon, I began to spend this time reading Christian books. However, it wasn't long before I began to talk to God about everything that was going on in my life, and He began answering by giving me some pretty remarkable answers. This went on for some time when He hit me with a task that I did not feel adequate to handle: writing an article on the seven churches of Revelation (Revelation Chapters 2 and 3). I continued to argue with Him until I happened on a book about that very subject. Now, I thought I had my AHA moment of rebuttal, which I immediately brought to His attention. As I have subsequently learned, you can never get "one-up" on God. His response was that He now wanted me to write a commentary on the entire book of Revelation. I again argued, but finally gave in with the stipulation that He would have to give me the necessary understanding about all the symbology used in the book of Revelation. This is a rather long explanation about how I got turned on to studying the Bible. I now treasure the time I can spend digging for gems in the Bible more than

anything else in the world, and my Bible is the dearest possession I own. I relate this experience to give the reader some basis for understanding my discouragement with the lack of interest in studying the Bible in today's world. The fact that 2 Timothy 3:16, states that all scripture is given or inspired by God, has little or no affect on those that do not know, and are not known, by God. They undoubtedly believe the Bible to be naturally inspired, rather than spiritually inspired. Those that identify themselves as Christians have even less excuse, for they (supposedly) know God, and should have some interest in knowing Him better. 2 Peter 1:20-21 says this about the Bible: *"Knowing this first, no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

I wish I could say something that would spark an interest in reading and studying God's Word among readers. If you are interested in understanding the triune God of the universe, or if you have doubts about Him that you would like to resolve, I cannot think of a better source for study. Many great men of renown have undertaken Bible study to prove that it is false, and that there is no God; but to their surprise they were convicted, and became believers into Jesus Christ. C. S. Lewis, one of the greatest writers of the twentieth century, fell away from the Christian faith he knew as a youth, but then returned under the influence friends and literature, including the Bible. He wrote more than thirty books, but the one I would recommend for any seeker, or new convert is "Mere Christianity," one of the most popular and beloved introductions to the Christian faith ever written.

In addition to the Bible, the other document that has been crucial to our nation's survival and success is the United States Constitution. After the Bible it is considered by many to be the second most important document ever written. I recently completed a free on-

line course on the Constitution provided by Hillsdale College. I am ashamed to admit that I didn't know a lot about the Constitution (the law of our land), before I took this course. I learned that the Constitution was a unique creation: a system of self-government established and maintained by consent of the governed. A constitutional republic with individual liberty, elected representatives and limited government, with power to protect individual pursuits related to life, liberty, property, and the pursuit of happiness: inalienable rights endowed by our Creator. With wisdom far exceeding their own, the founders provided for protection against the inappropriate exercise of power by one branch of the government over the others through a system of checks and balances: the executive, the legislative, the judicial, and the individual. The individual was the primary driver, for only by his/her consent could the government govern. But this entire plan necessarily depended on individual virtue, for that was recognized as the only effective restraint against men's greed. It was this very point that was often mentioned by the founders: the only way to maintain the Republic was for the individual citizen to remain virtuous. A quote by Daniel Webster strikes at the heart of this: "Let the religious element in man's nature be neglected, let him be influenced by no higher motives than low self-interest, and subjected to no stronger restraint than the limits of civil authority, and he becomes the creature of selfish passion or blind fanaticism." Much of today's activity within the Federal Government seems to fall into this category brought about by the actions of people that seem to fit Daniel Webster's description above.

Sadly, in today's world our federal government seems determined to modify, bend, or ignore our Constitution. Our individual rights suffer as a consequence, often in ways that we do not immediately comprehend, and in a manner that causes us to feel helpless to do anything about it. But this didn't happen overnight, nor does the present administration

deserve all the blame for the disintegration of our nation. In October 1964, Ronald Reagan delivered a speech in support of Barry Goldwater's campaign for President in which he discussed some of the ills that plagued our nation, both then and now. He emphasized the importance individual freedom, and how the Progressive element of our society sacrificed this freedom for (supposed) security. He quoted Plutarch's warning: "The real destroyer of the liberties of the people is he who spreads among them bounties, donations, and benefits." He also alluded to the Federal Government's ineptitude in managing those things it has taken over in apparent violation of the Constitution: health, housing, farming, industry, commerce, education, labor, and so on. I can't think of any of these that have been improved by Government takeover. President Reagan gave some very telling examples in farming and labor, but I want to use an example from my own personal experience while working for NASA.

I went to work for NASA in Houston, Texas, in May 1962, and retired in December 1981, while working at the NASA White Sands Test Facility (WSTF) near Las Cruces, New Mexico. During my tenure with NASA I was blessed to be part of the team of people that implemented the bold statement of President John Kennedy to send men to land on the moon, and return to earth safely. This cobbled together team from a wide array of government and industrial sources made this hard to believe task a reality. However, while working for the Federal Government I saw a lot of lethargy in other Government organizations. I believe the Manned Space Program was successful because it attracted a mix of managers, engineers, and technicians from technology based firms who came to Houston, and other NASA sites, with a "can do" and "how can we make it work" attitude. They joined a skeleton organization of existing NASA employees to undertake this seemingly impossible task. Howev-

er, during my tenure with NASA, I encountered other older government organizations that President Reagan could have included in his list of bad management examples. While working at the NASA WSTF, I received a call from one of the White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) laboratory managers who asked if we (WSTF) could run a certain test for them. Now WSMR was a much larger facility than WSTF, and normally you would think they could have performed this test themselves. Nevertheless, I told my caller to check with our laboratory manager to see when we could fit it into our schedule. We ran the test the next day, and the WSMR laboratory manager headed back to the Range with a pickup load of data and a big smile on his face. While at WSTF he told our test personnel that he had been trying to get his test done at the Range for over a year. He could not seem to find a way to satisfy safety, inspection, quality control, and other “nay sayers” at the Range. I believe this is a good example of the lethargic characteristic of government organizations that have been in existence for a while: no one wants to take responsibility when there is the slightest chance that some failure may occur, or someone might get hurt. Rules and procedures multiply over the years, and the “nay-sayers” can always find some reason to delay any decision that, in their wildest dreams, might end up reflecting badly on them. Also, the Federal Government seems to operate on the idea that bigger is better. Consequently, government organizations tend to grow, grow, and grow, and thus encourage the proliferation of “nay-sayers.”

Political influence is another downside of government management. It seems to grow in proportion to the size of the particular organization. It contributes to the ineptitude characteristic of government organizations, although I have encountered it in industry as well. We were about to let a major contract for test facility construction at the NASA

Johnson Space Center when I discovered that one of the bidders was a company that I had found to be dishonest and unreliable previously. I went to the Corps of Engineers Headquarters in Ft. Worth, Texas, in an attempt to keep them from awarding the contract to this company, based on my previous bad experience. Although it was to be a NASA test facility, with severe schedule and safety restraints, they refused to act on my evidence. Sure enough, we ran into scheduling and technical difficulties with this firm that required some rather innovative (and unauthorized), solutions to meet spacecraft schedule requirements.

There is much that could be said on this general subject, but it is obvious that I cannot cover it all in this relatively short dissertation, so let me close this part of our argument by quoting Article 10 of the Bill of Rights to the Constitution: **“The power not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”**

Thomas Jefferson had this to say about this Amendment: I believe the States can best govern over home concerns, and the General Government over foreign ones. I wish, therefore, to see maintained that wholesome distribution of powers established by the Constitution for the limitation of both, and never to see all offices transferred to Washington.” Obviously, we have not satisfied Jefferson’s wishes, nor have we complied with the Constitution on this point.

Our Nation is in serious trouble: surely the school bathroom controversy introduced by the present Federal Administration points out how ridiculous it is for Washington politicians to be determining who can use the woman’s bathroom at local public schools in America. Or for that matter, for the Supreme Court to be telling Texas that they cannot insist on the enforcement of recognized and acceptable medical practices at Texas clinics

performing abortions. Federal Government overreach is seemingly impossible to reign in. We need to heed Jefferson's wish to never see "all the offices transferred to Washington." I'm sure that he would be shocked to see the present state of the Union.

Closure

I hope that you are now entertaining the idea that Jesus was really referring to a future America with His words in Matthew 21:43. The creation geography of the nation of America, the Christian ethos of its first settlers, and the founders strong dependency on God's guidance in the enactment of the nation's guiding documents (the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution), gave us a nation of singular power and influence in the world: a nation that has given much for maintaining freedom in the world. But we are now at a crossroads, for we have enjoyed the benefits made available from our success, and we have failed (or are failing), to honor the wise council of the founders succinctly stated by John Witherspoon in his first Thanksgiving message after the war for independence: "A republic once equally poised must either preserve its virtue or lose its liberty."

I have searched long and hard for some way to end this writing in a way that would inspire readers with some of the pride and dedication characteristic of those who brought this nation to greatness against overwhelming odds. If you consider what God did to prepare this land, and what the founders did (with God's help) to bring this nation to be recognized as the leader of the free world, how can you be satisfied to do nothing to help to restore its honor and virtue? When we were attacked on September 11, 2001, I had a strong urge to do something: I wanted to volunteer to help in some way. I was 72-years old at that time: obviously of little use to anyone, but the point is that terrorists had touched me in the place where pride, honor and patriotism reside. I was feeling what I now wish every citizen of this land would feel when America is belittled by our leaders, or is "spat upon" by foreigners.

Os Guinness, in his book “A Free Peoples Suicide,” has some comments along the same line that I would like to quote: “Once America soars higher than any eagle has soared before, does the eagle no longer need the sun? And is there any sun that the high-soaring eagle recognizes as higher than itself? Is there a reality beyond freedom on which American freedom depends? Those were the questions addressed by G. K. Chesterton after his visit to the United States in 1921, and that was the context of his sober prediction that some ‘ultimate test’ would come. If—as has happened in our postmodern age fourscore years after he wrote—‘the power of the Jewish and Christian faiths is discarded and the power of the Enlightenment is pronounced dead, what would be the authority that authorizes freedom, human dignity, rights, democracy, and finally, meaning itself? Men will more and more realize that there is no meaning in democracy if there is no meaning in anything,’ Chesterton wrote, ‘and that there is no meaning in anything if the universe has not a centre of significance and an authority that is the author of our rights.’”

“Freedom is the eagle whose glory is gazing at the sun? No nation rises higher or lasts longer than the great ideas that inspire it. Freedom never lasts forever, because it is harder to be free than not to be free. Freedom must therefore be sustained and not simply won, ordered and taken for granted. American freedom, like American greatness, was not derived from itself, and cannot be sustained by itself. For the source of its strength it must always look beyond itself.”

“All of which raises the supreme question for Americans today: Will the eagle cease to fly toward the sun and be grounded? Or will the eagle renew its gaze on the sun and soar again? Always free, will the United States remain free always? That is the standing or falling issue that the present generation faces.”

“Americans, that is also the the form of the question through which you confront three of history’s great questions common to all civilizations toward the end of their course: What do you have that you did not receive? What have you done with your inheritance? And what is to be done if you answer the first two questions with honesty?”

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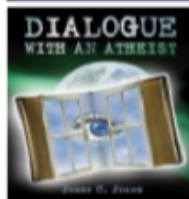


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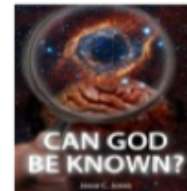
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