

WHEN SOUL SEES SELF

Our Resting Place

Dr. Frederick David Graves

Philadelphia Trust

www.TheGospelMystery.com
Trustees@PhiladelphiaMissions.com

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866-529-3279

Stuart, Florida

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When Soul Sees Self

DEDICATION

To all who've
been wounded by
sin and its shame.

Forgiveness is
God's door to
Peace.

His name is
Love.

Ask Him in!

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INTRODUCTION

Flocks of big Canadian geese descend each winter on a northern Colorado town.

They flutter down to land in lawns and vacant lots, perch on roofs, and waddle carelessly along the sidewalks and busy streets as if they own the place.

Why they visit this particular spot is unknown. Yet, each year they appear with regularity when the dark Canadian nights grow long and bitter cold.

Feeding the geese by the edge of a pond one morning, tossing pieces of bread to a milling mass of gray, white, and black feathers, where pale yellow beaks snapped eagerly at every morsel, I wondered if the birds grew weary on their flight to this haven from their northern habitat each year. It's a long way from the clear, blue Canadian lakes that are their summer home. They must be very tired by the time they arrive, welcoming the feel of solid soil beneath their big, webbed feet. What agreeable rest it must be to stop flapping after going at it steadily for several hundred miles!

I couldn't help but ask the geese, "Why here? Why not ten miles north of here or farther west? What is it about *this* place?"

The geese replied in guttural goose language, crowding noisily for the remaining scraps I tossed.

Some of their scrawny legs were crimped with numbered metal bands by which each goose could be identified and its migratory path scientifically tracked. "Scientists may know how these geese got here from Canada," I mused, tossing my last crust, "but only God knows how these *particular* birds came to waddle at my feet this very morning."

Only God knows how I came to stand in their midst throwing crumbs of bread.

Never will I forget that peaceful morning by the pond. Bare tree limbs scratched dark lines against the bright blue sky. A mated pair of Mallard ducks milled in the mass of feathers and beaks gobbling my bread. Bright sunshine sparkled the water. A solitary hiker trekked by under his burden of bright red backpack. Two lovers

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strolled hand-in-hand, communicating silently. I tossed bread and laughed at the silly geese, wondering where I'd be tomorrow.

I was searching for a place to rest my weary wings.

That morning I was certain I did not know where my path was leading. I tried to control my life until that day at the pond when I saw with agitated surprise that my life was in control of *me*.

Indeed, I was *out* of control.

I stood feeding a gaggle of geese in the midst of nowhere, not knowing if I should flee to the nearby mountains or return to my busy law office in Florida and bear the burdens from which I fled to that mountain pond in the first place.

My entire life stood on the bank of that tiny pond.

I saw geese, ducks, hiker, lovers ... precisely where *they* ought to be. It was I who was out of place. I did not belong. I wasn't part of the picture.

I wasn't part of anything.

I was a mere observer, a pair of eyes detached from life.

I belonged to no one.

I had no home.

I was 50 years old with no idea who I was.

"Dear God," I prayed, "please guide me as you guide the geese. My life has reached a dead-end. I've lost my bearings. I don't know which way to turn. I'm lost."

Nothing happened right away, but a process began that day.

God started letting my soul see my self.

The lies I'd been trying so hard to live started falling away.

I began to see what I'd been blind to more than 50 years.

Soul began to see self.

I stopped striving and started *living*.

I put the past behind me, let go of my ridiculous struggle to be what I thought I needed to be, and began to receive God's grace instead of grasping for it like a fool, letting His Spirit replace my self and clothe my soul with new life.

I began to be loved for the person God is making me, instead of for the person I was never able to become by struggling anyway.

The past is behind me.

Tomorrow is mine.

There's a new thanksgiving in my heart.

The mistakes of my past are grievous to remember. Memories try to pull me down with guilt, but I've been learning to let go and move on. I cannot fix the past nor mend the pain of those my self has wounded.

There's a tiny sign above my desk that reads, "God will mend a broken heart if you give Him all the pieces."

God mends broken hearts.

He is mending mine, and He will mend yours.

The healing begins when soul sees self.

But, since self hides truth to keep soul in the dark and thereby under self's control, we must literally come to the end of our self, as I did at the pond that morning when I gave God permission to show me why I was lost.

I was a self-directed man.

My soul was blind to the enemy who lurks within us all.

When I thought of "me", it was self with whom I identified, not the soul who is and always will be me, eternally me.

Self ruled my soul.

Self got me into mess after mess until that morning when God showed me my problem was my self!

As the cartoon character Pogo said, "We have found the enemy, and it is *us!*"

It's a bitter pill that makes us well.

Soul sees self by God's merciful grace.

Then the healing that follows is *all* His doing.

I need no longer struggle to be someone other than my soul.

It's OK to be me.

It's OK to be *you!*

God loves our soul, not our selves.

God's eternal plan is to transform us into the image of Christ by the presence of His Spirit working within us, replacing self with Christ, acknowledging this transformation to others, confessing it is by His Power we resist the counterfeits of self that seek to take His place within us, and giving Him all our thanks and praise.

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I know this now as never I did before.

He shows me in ways I could not before imagine, ways I cannot anticipate, ways I cannot control, ways I know are *His* doing!

My soul rests.

He is working *within* me.

From time to time God reminds me of those my sin has hurt. A trembling shakes me to my core and tears begin to flow, washing away the secret corner where self used to hide from truth. Darkness tries to steal my joy, taunting me with its lies, yet God uses even this to tear down the strongholds of self so He can continue His Work of transforming my soul ... a work I trust He will finish when at last my soul enters forever with Him.

Sorrow fades as I see the One who loves me most *still* working in me, the Great Potter molding me with nail-pierced Hands into something better than I could ever be alone, conforming me to who He wishes me to be.

I know by this ongoing transformation that He lives *within* me, rescuing my eternal soul from my temporal self.

I know this work He has begun is work that He will finish.

He is giving my soul life as he destroys the self I once was.

I consent to this process because it is salvation for my soul.

Like a shepherd guides his sheep, He turns me from the dangers of darkness that once ensnared me in chains of a wasted yesterday.

Eagerly I advance toward the light of Christ as He chips away the rough edges of self, work I was never able to do alone.

My soul is singing as never before!

His love pilots me to safe havens, just as He guides the geese to their favorite winter pond each year.

His Spirit is my soul's compass now and not my self-direction.

It is a sublime mystery that evades my human understanding.

It is sure and certain knowledge of His presence, His peace, and His purpose for my life.

My soul draws nearer each moment to eternal home with Him.

God in Christ and Christ in me, the hope of Glory.

Soul being set free from self.

#

PREFACE

As I explained in my Introduction, God has begun to speak to me in a way I could not, or would not, hear before.

He shows me His love as I have never known it.

He touches me with a gentle and approving touch, and in that touch I learn something new each day, something I did not before know about my self, my soul, *and* God.

At first I didn't know how to answer. I fumbled and stumbled. I fidgeted and squirmed. I made mistake after mistake.

When I should have moved forward with confidence, I doubted.

When I should have waited patiently, I rushed.

Disaster followed.

My faith was weak, because the tiny flicker of faith I had was only *my* faith, manufactured by my self-will because I was told by so very many, "You must have faith!"

The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God."¹

So, fearing to displease God, I scrunched spiritual shoulders, gritted doubting teeth, and forced self to have the best faith I could muster ... counterfeit and flimsy as it was.

God wanted my soul to have *His* faith as He dwelt *within* me, but self cannot understand such things.²

I didn't understand.

My self wasn't about to trust *anyone* to fix my life, believing it was up to *self* to please God by labor and sacrifice. After all, that's what I was taught

That's probably what you were taught as well.

I didn't have faith because I did not yet know what real faith is, the faith planted in us when God's Spirit comes to dwell with our soul and do His work of redeeming us from self's folly.

God began to show me *how* He wanted me to *trust* Him, not on blind manufactured faith but with *new* faith supported by evidence He would provide, blessed assurance, faith that *knows!*

¹ Hebrews 11:6

² 1 Corinthians 2:14

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Faith that has no doubt.

He wanted me to have a relationship with Him that was *real* and *secure* and *intimate*, a confidential relationship in which I could live without doubt, knowing He wants what's best for my soul.

But, I missed it.

I didn't hear His Voice.

I didn't know He was *within* me.

I hadn't seen the evidence *within* me.

It was another painful lesson.

More time for agonizing growth.

But, God was set on changing me, transforming me, embracing my soul ... but I was still "me", a self still running my "self-show", like everyone else before God lets us crush ourselves beneath the weight that so easily besets us,³ the burden of ego, self-madness.

I had to die to self.

How we resist that death that leads to life eternal!

How terrible is the price we pay before we are set free by dying while we still live.

Yet this *is* the key to liberty and life eternal.

God touched me at that Colorado pond. A gaggle of silly geese broke a crack in the shell I'd built to hide my empty soul.

God's Light of truth began to shine in.

Soul started to see self.

I saw a man filled with nothing but a "self" dancing in darkness.

I knew for the first time what the Bible calls the "fear of God".

I was terrified.

I was lost.

And I knew it.

I needed my life to change, but that morning I began to see that I hadn't the power to change my life. I'd been running my own life more than 50 years ... *running it to ruin!*

I was empty, homeless, worn out like a rusty old farm machine abandoned in an empty field, useless, and forgotten.

And, it was all my own doing.

³ Hebrews 12:1

The icy shock made me see how blind I was and how I needed light to shine in my darkness.

God chooses this way to bring us to Himself.

There is no other way.

There is no broad path, no books to read, no prayers to say, no noble purpose to set forth upon, no work, no sacrifice.

One way. His way.

Shame for what we are, what the Bible calls godly sorrow!

I was ashamed of self.

It was sorrow unlike any sorrow I'd ever known.

It wasn't sorrow for the mess I'd gotten myself into again. It wasn't sorrow for things I'd lost. I wasn't sorry for me.

I was ashamed at what I'd let my self do with my life.

This was *different*.

It showed me I must be changed and could not change my self.

Self had to die so soul could finally be alive.

This is the start of being born again, as your Bible explains.⁴

It is the beginning of life that cannot die.

It is the way, the truth, and the life prepared for us by God in Christ and Christ in us!⁵

God turned my godly sorrow into joy.

He showed me the inky darkness of self where my soul had been hiding all my life.

He tore away the curtain of my self-deceit.

I pray that by reading my book and checking my footnotes to scripture passages you will see that what God started to reveal to me by that winter pond long ago is, in fact, the Gospel hope.

I pray God starts this revelation in you so we may be united one day in His home beyond the stars.

Souls set free of self-ishness.

#

⁴ John 3:3-7

⁵ John 27:21-23

OUR WAR

We are at war with reality.

Most of us in one way or another are (or have been at some time in our lives) engaged in mortal combat with the truth.

We make impatient demands that others change to suit us.

We dream impossible dreams and are shattered when they don't come true.

We reach eagerly for tomorrow's promises or stare listlessly at failures of our past, refusing to see the value of this very moment and all that it makes possible.

We go on fighting, even when we know down deep inside we cannot win one single battle on our own!

We will not rest.

We've been taught that work will get us what we want.

Work and warfare.

We don't understand God's rest. We think rest is the opposite of being actively involved, and we are determined to be actively involved. We will not let go. We insist on control. We struggle for the things we want, even when our efforts bring us only pain and disappointment. We will not let God give us freely what we truly need. We want what *we* want. We want it now. And, if God won't give it to us, we go out and fight for it.

We do not wait upon the Lord.

We will not rest.

We refuse to understand that rest is not detached inaction. It is the force of faith. It is the outcome of decision, the consequence of our determination to let God be in control instead of self.

Rest is the purpose for which we let go of our lives and begin to let God live them instead.

Rest is the resignation to put self to death.

Rest is letting the Christ of God empower us to victory.

Rest is making peace with God, for God alone is able to regulate our lives through His peace that passes understanding.

His peace brings rest.

Seeing self as our enemy, however, is very hard to do.

We insist on being in control.

We think God really isn't interested in us (or that He isn't even real). We think our destiny is entirely under our control. We will not give God the task He desires—to live within us and through us to make things right that we cannot make right on our own.

Yet, there's no other way to find rest in this life or the life after.

We strive to bend everything and everyone to *our* self-will.

All things that are not as self wishes must then submit to self.

We imagine what self cannot cause.

We want things *our* way, no matter what it costs. Often the price exacted when our folly runs its course is too dear! We lose forever what we hoped to gain. We think we *must* succeed if only we keep trying. (Someone taught us that nonsense when we were children.) We work at altering reality from the moment we awake till we're lying on our beds again at night with thoughts of the struggle still racing through our weary little heads!

Things we try to conquer end up conquering us.

Yet we remain determined and will *not* rest until self has what self demands.

This battle with truth that poisons our lives must end.

Jousting with windmills must stop.

Striving must cease.

We must give up our struggle to change the unchangeable.

We must especially give up our temptation to alter the behavior of others (even when our motives spring from good intention).

We need to pray God changes *us* and that the work He works in us will have the effect we hope for in the lives of others.

We need to accept that some things will never change by human effort, no matter how we fight to change them.

If we pray, perhaps God will change them.

If we *don't* pray, life will go on as it has.

Or, get worse.

When it comes to most things outside ourselves (especially other people), if God doesn't change them, they simply will not change!

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The best we can do, therefore, is *be* changed.

We can love and encourage others.

We can pray for them.

We can visit them when they are ill.

We can be courteous and kind, extending love to them at every opportunity.

However, we *cannot* change them.

And, it is time we give in to this unchangeable fact and *let go!*

We are the ones who need to be changed, and God will change us if we ask Him to do so, but we need to stop battling the reality around us and begin to battle the reality within. We need to make war on our self-ishness, to call on God's power to rid us of self.

To continue fighting reality is to wage an unwinnable war.

We are fighting God and cannot win!

We can find no rest until truth is embraced.

Instead of fighting reality, we need to rest—not content with the horrors of hunger, loneliness, and despair, but realizing that only God can work the change we seek.

We need Him to change us *first*.

Once we are changed, we can be used to relieve a few distresses in our world, feed the hungry, visit the lonely, encourage those in despair.

This change comes from God working *within* us when we ask in prayer, confessing our need is love and our barrier self-pride.

God who *is* Reality waits for us to ask.

He loves us too much to give everything we ask, but He delights in giving His Christ to live *within* us, giving life to our souls.

He waits till we abandon our hopeless struggle.

If we refuse to rest and let God bless our lives as He desires, we destroy our lives by venting anger and rage at things and people who will not obey our will. Our fury overturns the only apple cart we have.

Hopes are dashed.

Marriages broken.

Businesses fail.

Afflictions overtake us.

Adversity sets in.

We come to the end of our self.

It is in such dark times that a glimmer of light may begin to shine in. This first light may awaken us to the fact that it's not God who causes ills to befall us. We do it. He merely ordains by His law of love that dire consequences follow disobedience as surely as night follows day.

Our refusal to rest in His truth is what brings our pain.

Pain brings understanding.⁶

It is the way He made us.

So long as we rebel, our rebellion exacts a price. Until we open our eyes to see His light, self imprisons our souls in darkness so we cannot see who is *really* causing our troubles.

The apostle Paul was at war with reality. Before his Damascus road conversion, he struggled against truth. He was commissioned by the Jewish Sanhedrin to persecute early Christians. He sought them out, arrested them, and carried them to prison. Though we're not certain he personally participated in the murder of Christians, we're told he stood by as Stephen was stoned to death and that Stephen's clothes were laid at his feet. Paul consented to Stephen's murder, whether he threw a stone or not.⁷

Paul did these things in the name of God!

He thought he was God's servant, because the high priests told him so. He worked to rid the world of a new religion they told him was a threat to the traditional Jewish worship of *his* God, the God of Moses, the God of Jerusalem's leaders, the God he thought he knew so well.

The only threat was that some people were being awakened to the corrupt leadership at Jerusalem's Temple, that those in power would be seen for the arrogant, ambitious men that many of them surely were.

Paul was a learned man taken in by these priests in fancy robes and prominent posturing. He should have seen through them, but

⁶ The story of Job, the oldest story in the Bible, teaches this truth. Job is not in our Bible to encourage us to emulate the patience of a man, but to demonstrate the faithfulness of God who waits for us to see beyond ourselves so we can enter fellowship with Him in spirit and in truth.

⁷ Acts 7:58-8:1

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they flattered him, lifted him above the common rabble, and gave him political power of his own.

Though he spoke many languages, this educated man could not see beyond his self-importance. The authority he was given to destroy the followers of Jesus puffed him up in his own mind. He could not see the resilience of that movement he was licensed to stop. He could not understand the people's hopeful faith in a lowly carpenter crucified dead in Jerusalem, allegedly risen from a tomb, and seen by many who reported what they witnessed.

The hope this new Christ faith gave and the love it nurtured in the people's hearts was more than he or *any* man could kill.

It was *reality*.

And Paul was at war with it.

One day as this angry man journeyed on the road to Damascus, a bright light appeared in heaven. A loud voice demanded, "Why do you persecute me?"⁸

Paul asked, "Who *are* you?"

"I am the Christ of God whom you persecute," the voice replied. "You are struggling against the truth!"

Terrified, Paul asked the voice, "What must I do?"

"Go into the city where you will be told what to do."

The brilliant light disappeared as quickly as it came, and Paul opened his eyes to discover he was blind! His vision turned to inky night. Now helpless, this once powerful man was lost in a world through which he could no longer find his way.

His strength was turned to weakness.

Paul found the end of self, and there he found truth.

He could go no farther in his own power.

He was forced to see self's blindness.

He would never again be the same.

"I am the Christ of God," the voice said, "whom you persecute. You are struggling against the truth!"

We hear God say these words if we listen with our souls, if we see the tears of those we hurt, if we take a closer look at the self in our mirror who proclaims, "I'm a good person. I'm where God

⁸ Acts 9:3-9

wants me. I'm doing my best, and my best is good enough. I know what's what. I'm not deceived. God is on my side. I'm OK just as I am."

Paul believed that, too!

Yet, Christ told him, "You are struggling against the truth!"

Paul believed he was doing what God wanted him to do.

He saw his self at the center of God's will.

Self at center-stage!

Paul was at war with reality ... as most of us are.

Fortunately for us who have his writings to guide our journey toward truth, God loved Paul enough to humble him by blindness through which he saw the darkness of his self.

God will do the same for us, if we ask to see *our* blindness.

We are *all* at war with reality until we surrender to God's truth, that we are only what we are, merely God's creation to do with as God wishes, according to God's pleasure.

We struggle against this truth so long as we believe we are OK on our own, as we are, controlled by Mr. Self. We're unwise, weak, and ugly until we let Christ enter our hearts and *be* our wisdom, strength, and beauty through the power of God's love.

God yearns for us to know this, for only then can we be truly free⁹ to love Him, others, and our own souls.

God yearns for us to know this so we can enter life eternal *now*!

He urges us to look within to see self's hopeless war and ask as Paul did, "What must I do?"

Paul, once an enemy of Christ, wrote most of the books we call our New Testament! His life was changed on that Damascus road, as ours are when we hear God's voice and take our eyes off self to see the truth beneath our very noses. The truth we struggle against, truth of our need for forgiveness, truth of the sufferings of those around us who need Christ as much as we.

Paul had no choice but to let go.

Paul was helpless. He had to be led by the hand, guided to the city where he'd learn what he must do.

He no longer controlled the reality he thought he knew so well.

⁹ John 8:32

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Reality now controlled *him*, and he was helpless in its grip, just as we are—whether we admit it or not.

After three days in Damascus with nothing to eat or drink, afraid and groping in darkness, he was taken to a man named Ananias. This faithful man, obeying instructions he received from God, laid his hands on Paul as he was told to do, and immediately Paul's sight was restored. Paul was filled with Christ's Spirit, demonstrated by humility, gentleness, kindness, mercy, and peace. He began at once to preach the Gospel of Christ and urge others to do likewise.

Paul set about to establish the Church he once tried to destroy!

Paul was blessed of God, blind only three days before receiving his sight.

Some of us are blind all our lives by the struggle of self that we ignorantly believe will bring us all we desire.

Self's struggle *becomes* our darkness.

We use up today attempting to change tomorrow.

Instead of resting in the reality of this very moment, we try to overcome it.

We don't abide in love, we try to *get* love.

We spend vast sums of money and time we never can recover to create an empty make-believe, attempting to dominate what never will surrender, demanding to own what cannot be possessed.

We insist on getting what self wants, until we have nothing.

We are angry at truth for being what it is.

How insane.

Truth is truth.

Reality will not be something else.

Truth cannot be pushed around like people.

Truth won't change to suit our fancy.

Truth *is*.

We humans are relentless, nonetheless. We assault reality as if it were our mortal enemy and aren't content until we *make* the truth our enemy.

Then it assaults us in return.

We retaliate, of course, convinced life isn't fair!

On it goes.

Sometimes we get so angry with things and people we may destroy them and ourselves in the process.

We will not abide anything that's not precisely as self wants it to be and spend our lives in this impossible frustration.

We could be resting in the blessings we have, but self fights to have more and more and more.

When we cannot change reality outside ourselves we imagine it is as we wish it to be. We elaborate, procrastinate, and complicate reality by altering our image of it. We create our own little world, then self hides inside its self-created borders, alone with its lies.

If this continues we may need psychiatric treatment to escape the imaginary prison of that tiny psychic cosmos we create within ourselves to justify our manifold failures. Some never escape the walls they build to protect self from Truth.

All this because we are angry with God, angry with reality.

We refuse to admit this, of course.

Indeed, it is the very truth from which we are hiding.

We want to believe we love God, believe in God, inclined to do His will, committed to His precepts, pious in prayer, studious in devotion, guided by His Holy Spirit.

Yet, this simply is not true.

Paul wrote to the church at Rome, "We have proved both Jews and Gentiles that *all* are under sin as it is written, 'There is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understands. There is none who seeks God.'"¹⁰

We are no different.

We don't seek God.

We imagine we do.

We'd like others to think we do.

But, it is God who seeks *us!*

We blame anyone but self for what's wrong in our life. We see all our problems *outside* self. We curse everyone and everything that will not bend to our demand. God is the real target of our rage. God who won't let self rule. God whose law convicts us of sin.

¹⁰ Rom 3:9-12

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Since God's law won't justify us, we ignore it and hide within our self.

We dance in our darkness because we secretly hate light.

We don't see the error of self, because self *won't* see it.

We are at war with reality.

We are at war with God.

Like Adam who blamed God for the apple *he* ate all by himself, we blame others for our problems, unable to admit how self created our distress. When God questioned Adam in the Garden, that first man complained, "The woman *you gave me* enticed me to eat!"¹¹

He didn't blame *her* nor take responsibility for self.

He blamed God for making the woman who enticed him to eat!

As if Adam would have created a woman less enticing, given the opportunity to do so!

Adam didn't take responsibility for the actions of his "self".

He blamed God.

We all do it, one way or another. When unhappy with things as they are, we beg God to change the things, instead of begging God to change *us*.

Millions find God guilty "because He lets bad things happen".

If we're too afraid or dishonest to blame God openly with words of our mouths, we blame our spouse, boss, children, parents, TV, politicians ... anyone but self.

But, it's still the same thing.

We blame God.

We are at war with reality.

We believe God gave us our problems or at least could make things better if He'd only do so.

If we scream at our spouse because he or she isn't all we hoped for in a mate, we are really raging at the God who made our spouse, who failed to intervene and stop us from getting married. It's never our fault. Nothing is ever our fault.

God refused to warn us.

God declines to change him or her to what we think we deserve.

¹¹ Gen 3:12

We blame God ... even when we think we're blaming others.
Once we admit this truth, we begin to see our folly.
We begin to see our self ... that which we most resist seeing!
Of all life's discoveries, self is often last to come in view.
Everyone *else* must be wrong.

Self *must* be right.

"There's nothing wrong with *me*," we say.

"*You* are the one who needs God's mercy."

"*You* are the one who sins."

"*You* are the one who needs to go for counseling."

"*You* are the one who doesn't know what love is."

"*You* are the one who needs fixing!"

We are blind to self, walking in our self-imposed darkness, ever nearer the dangerous cliff of ultimate destruction that is the destiny that darkness intends for us, the destiny we are led to by this sin of self making war with reality.

Fighting truth is really dumb!

Rebelling at the will of God is hopeless insanity.

Is it any wonder that we stumble?

Is it any wonder that we fall?

We are certain we are right, certain all who disagree are wrong.

We're lost in a deception of our own making.

Anyone who threatens to expose our twisted view becomes an enemy, a poisonous viper that must be shaken off.

We befriend those who reinforce our lie, who hide with us in our chosen shared addictions, who affirm us in our errors.

We turn against the few who truly love us until we are alone, surrounded by self-ish fools as blind as we, soothing our sorrows with alcohol, drugs, gambling, illicit sex, even religious fervor.

Any darkness will do so long as it hides us from the truth.

Darkness deceives us, until God's light begins to shine *within*.¹²

Sadly, many lives are lost in the eternal darkness of death before their self allows their soul to see God's light shine in.

¹² Luke 1:76-80

When Soul Sees Self

It's in defense of self that so many end in inescapable, eternal darkness where souls endure torment forever alone.

Our impossible desires and violent temptations eventually steal the only thing that's ever truly ours ... *now!*

We fail to see this instant as the only truth we ever know of life. This ever-changing now *is* our life. In it alone we find all we can ever know of love, hope, joy, and even life eternal.

Eternity begins *today!*

We deny truth and miss out on life because self is dissatisfied with today, unable to have all self demands to have *right now!*

Yet, all we ever know is *now*.

All we ever do is what we do *today*.

Yesterday is gone.

Tomorrow never comes.

The only truth we ever touch is captured in this ever-changing, ever-present moment.

We are finite, human, mortal.

We're not half so wise as we imagine.

We reach ahead to what we cannot yet experience.

We look back to what we cannot possibly amend.

We ignore the very instant that is *now*.

We are so foolish!

Lured by the lust and ambition of self, we reach for more than what we have.

Always self is disappointed.

This persistent, pesky desire to *have* what self demands is what destroys us. Self will not rest with what it has. Self wants *more*, and it's always somebody else's fault when self doesn't have it yet!

Our lover squeezes toothpaste from the middle of the tube, will never wash the supper dishes, leaves his trousers on the bed, and never stops complaining.

It is *we* who are complaining.

We don't want things as they are.

We want them *our* way.

We aren't satisfied with truth.

We tell our loved ones how to love us, yet they won't *obey!*

We *demand* their affection.

Love dies.

We kill it.

We won't abide truth, and love cannot exist outside of truth.

We are at war with God¹³.

We can't control our own lives or the lives of others. We've not yet learned that none of us can control *anyone*, nor get, have, own, possess, or retain the everything our self desires.

And, we are here for such a bitterly brief moment.

So little time to love!

So little time to give!

Our lives are flickering candles, and we cannot keep the light of life aflame by our own effort.

Our life is not ours to keep.

None is certain of tomorrow.

Life isn't real estate or money. It can't be owned. It only can be *lived and shared*. The best part of life is giving and loving, not holding on, demanding more, insisting on control, trying to change others by threats and demands.

We need to deny self its hopeless demand for what it can't have.

We need to see our enemy is within us ... *self*.

Just as Pogo said!

The beauty of life that so many of us miss is that by the measure we give to others, by that same measure *and much more* they will give to us!

They do not give because they are *compelled* to give.

They do not give because we threaten them.

They do not give because they're obligated.

They give because they have received from God through us!

Once we learn this in our hearts (not just our heads) those we love will love us in return ... without strings.

We can be free of the struggle for love.

We let go of the strings, and the strings let go of *us*.

¹³ See Acts 5:39

When Soul Sees Self

Things come. Things go. Things rust, rot, fall apart, wear out, break, or disappear. Things don't last forever.

People also come and go. None stay in this life forever.

The only way to love another is to see that person is in our life for just this present moment, a precious gift from God, not ours to own or imprison, but ours to release to the watchcare of Him who alone knows best.

Indeed, those we love are more precious, and the love we share with them more dear, because they are so fragile, so temporary.

Our ability to love grows stronger with loss of those we love, by distance, divorce, or death. This is a beautiful mystery. It's not as the world sees love, but it *is* the way love has to be, how God created love and demonstrates His love to us.

We need to see the pain of others and pray God moves through us to comfort them, for by their comfort we are comforted as well.

We need to see the needs of others and pray God moves through us to meet those needs, for as their needs are met so are our needs.

We need to weep with those who mourn, rejoice with those who are thankful, encourage those who are downcast and afraid, for by this we know God lives within us, and we experience Him by the joy in our souls, our treasure in these earthen vessels.¹⁴

We need to risk being hurt, for by passing through pain we leave it behind. If we structure our lives to avoid pain, we deny ourselves the best life has to offer—*true love*.

Love that takes no chances, love that hides from suffering, love that wants only warm fuzzies isn't love at all.

Love doesn't run from the nails.

We have *true* love only as we are willing to embrace reality, to taste the bitter with the sweet, to tear down our self-defenses so we can receive the love of God through others, to let go of self's demands so we can have what we most hope for, to release our struggle so we can be free of its chains, to face our fear so we can find the courage we need to live in victory.

#

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:7

OUR NEED

The Frailty of Body

As soon as we awake each morning, we start using the life force we were given for the day.

As the hours tick away, we draw nearer to death.

We drink coffee, eat donuts, take lunch breaks, snack, have tea in the afternoon, enjoy a hearty dinner, snack again before retiring at night. Yet, food replaces only what we burn as fuel, a chemical depletion.

Something else disappears as we work and play.

Something that all the coffee, donuts, prime rib, stewed carrots, and mashed potatoes in the world cannot replace.

The force of life ebbs away.

Force that cannot be re-fueled by food alone.

We need rest.

If we press on as our life force is depleted, we court disaster, fall prey to illness and, if we use up *all* the force, we die! That is precisely what happens to people placed in circumstances where they cannot rest. Life cannot continue without rest. People die for lack of it.

There is no substitute for rest.

Rest restores us.

All work and no play not only makes Jack a dull boy.

It will kill him.

Each of us needs time to do nothing, time to reflect, time to let muscle and bone recover from the stresses we put them to. Even those who work behind a desk must take time for walks, sit by a pond in the park, or settle down in an easy chair to replenish the life force within.

Our bodies weren't designed to go without rest.

Even young people need rest to grow up strong and healthy.

The older we get the more we need periods of quality rest.

Mere relaxation alone, however, is not enough. No matter how much rest we get while awake, there's a need built into each of us

When Soul Sees Self

to sleep. Lying in a hammock watching clouds float is restful, but it doesn't replace sleep. Reading a good book while seated in the most comfortable recliner ever made, cannot replace the necessity of closing our eyes and drifting off in sleep.

We cannot live without sleep.

Thomas Edison slept less than two hours a day. I know a man for whom ten is not enough. Two or ten, we need *some* sleep every day. Our frail bodies need its recuperative power.

If we deprive our bodies of sleep we burn up all our life force and have none left to keep us alive.

Our bodies are too frail to go without sleep.

They were designed to stop from time to time and *do nothing*.

Our bodies need rest.

The Frailty of Mind

Our minds *also* need rest.

Our brains get clogged with clouds of data every day. Random thoughts crowd in. Wild ideas compete for attention.

We think of things we need to do, things we want to do, things we wished we'd done yesterday, things we wish we'd *never* done.

Our minds get full.

Too much input, too much thought, too much busy clutter, too much to remember, too much to forget.

Our minds are exhausted, overwhelmed, burned out.

Mental exhaustion leads to frustration that becomes despair and finally depression. We run out of mental energy to deal with stress. If we don't rest our minds, we may suffer a nervous breakdown.

Our minds need rest just like our bodies.

Eliphaz told Job during that poor man's affliction, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."¹⁵

We are troubled on every side.¹⁶

Scott Peck begins his book The Road Less Traveled,¹⁷ with this simple statement, "Life is difficult."

¹⁵ Job 5:7

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:8-10

¹⁷ The Road Less Traveled, Scott M. Peck, Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, New York, 1980.

Our childhood expectation that life will be rosy when we finally grow up is without basis in fact.

Life *is* difficult.

We must work to make our way.

We don't always succeed.

Relationships turn sour.

Stress mounts.

Troubles press on every side.

The greater our troubles the less we are able deal with them.

If troubles become too intense or too many and we refuse to rest, we become unable to deal with even the simplest of them. They rise before us like giants, and we shrink before their demands.

As troubles grow, we grow more tired. We weaken.

We need to do something about our troubles, yet the harder we press to erase them, the less energy we have to be effective.

Troubles remain as defeat brings frustration.

As if things weren't bad enough, frustration builds to become a new trouble we cannot solve until we deal with our other troubles.

It's a vicious cycle.

We are trapped by our troubles, not only enduring the stress of everyday living, day-to-day things that demand attention and the burden of trying to make them go away, but now we must endure the added affliction of frustration that results from our failure to act effectively.

We may feel like giving up.

The next step comes as we begin to realize the trap we're in.

There seems no escape.

Trouble becomes a way of life.

We try harder. Failure deepens. Weakness worsens.

It seems we have no way out.

Nothing we do makes the slightest difference.

Frustration turns to despair.

If we are unable to find rest at this point, despair may take root, deep within us. Despair is harder to cast off than frustration.

When Soul Sees Self

Either we reverse the process by dealing with the cause of our frustration or we hide in the temporary solace of addiction, while despair remains below the surface, haunting us, killing us.

We desperately need rest, for rest alone can break the cycle and set us free. Once despair drives us to addiction, we may get trapped in the artificial rest addiction offers.

We sink deeper in the mire of darkness, farther from truth.

Despair becomes depression, a more serious disorder that can cause death by disease or self-destruction. Depression isn't merely a more virulent form of despair. Depression is physiological. It affects our body, a recognized pathology caused by lack of rest.

Our minds simply cannot endure the constant tensions of life without rest. Even simple things can strike us down when we are deprived of rest.

We cannot work effectively.

We cannot concentrate.

We burst into tears unexpectedly, uncontrollably.

Inside, we are dying.

If we don't get the rest we need, the disease of depression may progress beyond reversibility. It may be impossible to regain our health without the help of professional counseling, medication, or even hospitalization. Many pass this point and *never* return ... all for lack of rest.

Life's troubles can drive us over the edge if we don't rest before the burden gets so great we are prevented from resting naturally.

Life's demands become impossible to meet if we refuse to rest.

The signs may be subtle, a headache at the end of a day, being irritable with those we love, not being able to function "normally" without alcohol or other drugs. We may turn on those we love, not realizing the anger we feel is really at ourselves for failing to deal with our challenges and their imperative demands. We are exposed to more than we can handle. Our turmoil manifests in our behavior toward others and toward ourselves. We lash out for no apparent reason, convinced our troubles are caused by others who must pay the price of our pain. We blame them for problems we could solve by just taking a break. We accuse them. We pout. We rage.

If we cannot turn our anger on others, we turn it on ourselves, attacking the one who most needs comfort—*us*. We punish the soul we need to be loving. We impose self-doubt and criticism where it isn't deserved. We demand more and more from the little person inside us.

We insist, "We can make it!"

If the madness isn't stopped, we may rob ourselves of life itself.

Our lack of rest may *kill* us.

Lack of rest began the process.

Rest alone can stop it.

Rest restores our mind so we can deal with troubles again, one day at a time, one trouble at a time. We return to our desks and our toolboxes refreshed, ready to deal with life in smaller portions and prepared to tackle bigger things as our mental strength is restored.

We struggle with trouble needlessly.

Jesus asked those He loved, "Why do you worry? Consider the flowers of the field. See how they grow? They do not labor, yet Solomon in all his glory was not so beautifully clothed as they."¹⁸

Flowers rest.

We refuse to rest because we don't trust God.

The Frailty of Emotion

The struggle of our weary minds may take root in our emotions.

Our feelings fester as they feed on our life force.

Things that were troubling us (a supervisor at work, a project we couldn't find time to finish, an accomplishment we tried again and again to master but repeatedly failed at doing) becomes part of how we *feel*.

Once troubles get hold of emotion, they are part of who we are.

The boss at work, the job we can't finish, the self-improvement that keeps eluding us, these *become* us.

We experience them *inside*.

They're no longer troubles outside us. They *are* us!

¹⁸ Mat 6:28

When Soul Sees Self

Only resting can put trouble *outside* where it belongs, separate from us, fixed in its proper place where we can deal with it and overcome it effectively.

Yet saying is easier than doing.

Emotions are powerful.

They control us *because* they are internal.

How we *feel* is who we *are*.

We *become* our emotions.

We feel, therefore we are.

Like our bodies and minds, our emotions need rest, too.

We need to release frustration, despair, and depression, for they poison our minds and bodies. If permitted to run free, unchecked, unguarded, they become habit.

Only rest can bring our emotions under control.

Fear and its sister anxiety are two emotions that result from lack of rest, many times preventing us from doing things that could give us rest. They form a ring of apprehension and dread, reinforcing each other.

The only way to break the circle is to enter it, to pass beyond fear and anxiety by walking *through* them, facing them squarely and seeing them for the paper tigers they are.

Regret and remorse are another pair of emotions that plague us if we don't find rest. Life is not without disappointments. Each of us makes mistakes. Some big, some small, yet most from one of three causes, (1) we tried too hard to accomplish something we were too tired to do, or (2) we lacked confidence to do it well, or (3) we didn't know how to do it in the first place.

Now we regret the doing (or not doing).

If regret is strong enough—or the thing we did or didn't do was vital to our soul or someone we love—we are attacked by regret's brother remorse.

If we allow these to become habit, we create a prison from which the only escape is rest, a prison we might not have entered if we'd rested in the first place.

Emotion is frail.

We get weary, frightened, hopeless, depressed.

We need rest.

The Frailty of Spirit

Wayne Dyer, in one of his excellent motivational tapes The Awakened Life¹⁹, remembers the night his mother died.

When Wayne's mother was admitted to the hospital, a nurse carefully weighed the elderly woman and made a notation on the medical chart, "Weight = 117 pounds".

Mrs. Dyer died a few hours later.

Wayne remembers reading on his mother's death certificate, "Weight = 117 pounds".

One moment his mother was sitting up in bed, talking, smiling, warm, alive—weighing 117 pounds.

A moment later his mother was gone, yet the empty shell still weighed precisely 117 pounds!

The life of Mrs. Dwyer, like life in each of us, is weightless and invisible. When life left her body, there was no *physical* difference measurable with the most sensitive instruments. Her body weighed the same as it did before she died. Life was no longer present. Her body was in every other aspect precisely the same as it had been before she died.

The part no longer present was weightless.

Life is non-physical.

The spirit that was her life departed along with her soul.

Many traditions in Western culture teach there is no difference between soul and spirit, that they're the same. Yet this cannot be, for Paul says, "The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."²⁰

If soul and spirit can be divided, then they *cannot be the same*.

Soul is *not* spirit.

Soul is soul.

Spirit is spirit.

Our soul is *who we are*, the seat of our identity, the "me" of me, the "you" of you.

¹⁹ ©1990 by Nightingale-Conant Corporation, 7300 North Lehigh Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60648.

²⁰ Hebrews 4:12

When Soul Sees Self

My soul is me.

Your soul is *you*.

Souls and spirits are not the same.

Our soul thinks, wants, feels.

Our soul is *us* and never dies.

Spirit is energy that gives life to our bodies.

There are, however, two forms of spirit - light and darkness.

True spirit and false spirit.

Both spirit.

The first is real and overcomes the latter.

The latter is not real and overcomes *nothing*.

Darkness is the absence of light. It is not real, but it *exists*.

The spirit of darkness only has power over a soul to the extent such soul chooses to walk in darkness instead of light.

Our soul chooses.

The spirit of darkness cannot *make* a person do something.

The old saying, "The devil made me do it," is nonsense.

Souls choose darkness to hide their sins from the light.

Their choice makes them fall ... not some external evil power.

Only things that are *real* have power over us.

Light is real. Light has power over darkness.

Darkness exists but is not real and has *no* power over light!

Darkness has no power at all.

The concept of something existing yet not real is scriptural. In John's Revelation, God mentions, "the beast that was and is not, who shall ascend out of the bottomless pit and go into perdition. Those whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will wonder when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."²¹

Darkness is and is not and yet is, falseness, emptiness, deceit.

Darkness is a deceiver.

Darkness is an accuser.

²¹ Rev 17:7-11

Darkness is ignorance, blindness, father of lies,²² and controls every soul who chooses to shun the light.

Souls choose lies instead of truth, self-deception instead of self-examination.

They do this because their deeds are evil.²³

They do this because they are at war with reality.

Our bodies are containers where our souls temporarily reside, made alive by spirits ... whether the spirit of truth who is Christ, or the myriad spirits of lies who seek to destroy our souls.

Spirits are the life force by which soul and body have being.

Take away spirit, and all that's left is a cadaver and a soul with no flesh to make its home, no body to fulfill desires, a will that cannot move, emotions unable to cry out for what's wanted.

When spirit leaves, life in the body is finished.

Bodies are dead without spirit.

Souls are lost without the Spirit of Christ.

Bodies are fun, handy when you want to get from one place to another, dance, write books, play guitar, cook chili on a Monday afternoon, or kiss the sweet lips of a special friend.

Yet your body is not who you are.

Your body is just a temporary shell.

Your soul is *you*, thinking, deciding, and feeling. It is your soul who chooses to be clothed with darkness and die when your body dies, or to be clothed with the Spirit of Christ and live forever.

Each soul makes this choice and lives or dies.

If we choose darkness, our soul will be lost when we die.

If we choose Light, our soul will be saved when we die.

There's no gray area.

Light is light.

Darkness is absolute.

The life within us is either light or darkness²⁴ as we choose.

²² John 8:44

²³ John 3:19

²⁴ Mat 6:23

When Soul Sees Self

Souls compute, compare, remember, evaluate, consider, and see alternatives from which to choose.

Our soul decides if we should fulfill our desires today or wait.

Our soul wants, yearns, and aches for what it does not have, yet it also directs our body to do what it believes is best for the soul. It is responsible, for it decides what we will do today and what we will not do.

Our soul feels pain and joy, fear and love, feelings that may lead us in paths of utter ruin and destruction or reward us with God's blessings.

If our soul is in darkness, we make mistakes seeking joy in the wrong places.

If our soul is illuminated by the light of God's Christ, we can *trust* our feelings, and life takes on new meaning, new victories.

Your soul has three elements—mind, will, and emotion—but your soul is one, not three. You are not mind alone, nor will, nor emotion. You are *all* these things.

Soul is soul and soul is what you *are*.

You are what you are ... a soul, not a spirit.

We are all of us souls made alive by the power of spirit that clothes us and enlivens us in our temporary shell of mortal body, living in time that will never come this way again.

We are finite, mortal, and fall short of the glory of God²⁵.

We are not "good" in and of ourselves,²⁶ no matter what the lying spirits tell us to the contrary, no matter what our self-spirit proclaims to the world. We are imperfect souls under constant alteration by the Unseen Hand of our loving God who alone knows what we will become as we make choices He presents to us each day.

Light or darkness.

Truth or lies.

Christ or self.

We choose.

²⁵ Rom 3:23

²⁶ Mark 10:18

Who will lead us? God's Christ Spirit of truth and grace or the lies of self's darkness that will lead us into never-ending night?²⁷

The spirit we were born with when our body first began to live, is but a vapor, part of the essence of the universe, life with nothing to activate, a "self" separate from our eternal "soul".

Before God breathed spirit into Adam's body, neither his body nor his soul had life. Adam's soul was inert, helpless, alone. Then, "God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."²⁸

Death and life.

The difference is spirit.

The spirit I received at birth was *frailty itself*. My soul was driven by fear and an intemperate desire to remain in my body as long as possible. My spirit was not God's Holy Spirit wherein my soul might rest.

Though my self-spirit is the product of God's ingenuity, created by Him, given by Him, and most assuredly the thing that kept my body alive more than 70 years so far, it was far from holy! It was *my* spirit, the spirit of a man, a life force that did not and could not know God's truth.

That spirit gave my soul and body physical life. It entered my body and clothed my soul, giving me power to stand, walk around, write books, ride bicycles, bake cakes, and do other things none of us can do without a spirit.

Spirit *is* the life of bodies and souls.

However, the spirit I received at birth was only temporary, *not* eternal. It was blind to God.

It was self.

The self-spirit we received when we became living souls in the bodies we occupy at this moment was certain to die, to abandon both body and soul one day, leaving us dead and alone, for that spirit was merely the life we lived in the flesh, the life we lived when we walked according to the course of this world, when we were the children of wrath, even as others are today.²⁹

²⁷ Josh 24:15

²⁸ Gen 2:7

²⁹ Ephesians 2:1-9

When Soul Sees Self

My body, soul, and self wandered in search of peace.
Comfortless were things from which I sought comfort!
Troubling were things in which I sought peace!
As my soul searched for rest, I grew more weary.
Frustration turned to despair, and despair to depression.
I sought rest in approval of others, acquisition of things, hours
of study, civic work, licenses, degrees, even church activities.
None gave rest, however.
Rest eluded me.
I was a soul, trapped in a body, made alive by a self-spirit dead
to God, blind to truth, senseless to love.
I didn't know what I was doing.
I didn't know where I'd been or where I was going.
I lived in a night of self-imposed darkness.
I had not yet seen God's light.
Within me was only inky night.
I kept light out lest I see the hollow self within.
I was lost.

The Power of God's Spirit

When I was a little boy, my grandparents took me to their house to spend Saturday nights so they could get me to church on Sunday mornings.

They made fudge to entice me to visit, let me drink all the soda pop my little tummy could hold, scratched my back as long as I wanted, played games, and sang songs. They allowed me to stay up late and, when at last it was time for sleep, they tucked me into a big four-poster in an upstairs bedroom all by myself, snuggled under a soft down comforter with my head nestled comfortably on a big silk feather pillow.

Next morning after a hearty breakfast of eggs and bacon, toast and jam, we hopped in Granddad's 4-door sedan and drove the half mile trip to a red sandstone building that was the First Presbyterian Church of Barnesville, Ohio.

We always sat in the same pew—third row from the front, right-hand side—where my wondering eyes could see and ponder the

most intricate stained glass window I've ever seen, a masterpiece depicting Jesus with welcome on his loving face and nail wounds in his hands and feet.

I was too young to follow the boring sermon. I fell asleep with my tiny head on Grandmother's loving arm. It was much too complicated for a small child.

Yet the holes those nails made fastened me forever.

They weren't hard to understand.

They weren't doctrines of theology.

They were *nail* holes in the hands and feet of a man who seemed so gentle, so sincere, so loving and innocent!

I didn't understand the preaching, but the nails were no enigma for a child to comprehend. Their cruelty was then and still remains unthinkable.

The sharp touch of a thorn was familiar to me from my explorations of the forests near my childhood home, so a crown of thorns required no degree in theology to understand.

Nor did the wound in His side need words of explanation.

This gentle, innocent man had been *crucified*, nailed to a beam of wood set on a pole and left to hang in the sun while others mocked Him as He died.

I saw Christ as He is.

It took years before I found him *within* me.

I was blinded by self and years of sin I dared not see.

As a child, however, I wondered at such love. I cringed at the cruelty of the nails, the unthinkable death by which He died. He *forgave* those who killed Him! He taught men and women to love one another, to exercise mercy, to help, to give, to know we are equal in God's sight.

He was tortured and killed for His kindness.

I yearned deep within my little child's heart to walk with Him, to go fishing, to sit on the side of a river bank with Him and watch the water flowing by, to tug at his nail-pierced hand and ask Him to tell me how the sparrows fly and why the sky is blue.

I wanted Him to be my friend.

I wanted to live with Him forever.

When Soul Sees Self

My parents weren't happy. Dad was a workaholic. Mom had no joy but us boys. My brothers and I didn't know what was wrong. I thought it was *me!*

I believe our parents wanted to love us, but they didn't know how. Our emotions were sacrificed to their struggle. Their misery was constant. Both struggled to get their needs met by making demands of the other, so neither received *anything*. They vented anger on us boys, so we could not but believe we caused their pain.

"You're just no good! You'll *never* amount to anything."

I didn't understand. I believed I was unwanted and unlovable, a second-class soul forever flawed by faults beyond my control.

There was no way out!

So the man nailed to that cross held a special fascination for me.

The idea He'd overcome death and offered peace in heaven for all who'd confess their sin and accept His sorrowful mercy was wonder beyond compare.

At age 11 a determined young boy walked down the aisle before a gazing congregation of Presbyterians to confess sin he believed he was guilty of and claimed the mercy of God through the power of love he did not understand. I don't remember the words, but I know it happened. I also know God made good on His promise, for there've been times since that day when His grace rescued me from disaster and death to allow me to share His truth of love and hope with you in this very book.

What joy!

What victory!

Well ... *almost*.

The fact is I didn't understand salvation even when it was mine.

I said the words I was told to say, believing in my heart I was sinful, that Christ was merciful, that I needed forgiveness, that He would save me from the hell I feared and could not avoid without His Salvation.

Yet self demanded proof.

My faith was weak.

My understanding was that of a child.

There was no depth of soil for God's love to take root in me and produce fruit.³⁰

I continued in fear that I was just no good, that I'd never amount to anything, that God couldn't love someone like me.

What I *didn't* know was that a spiritual transaction took place when I acknowledged my sin and asked Christ to save me.

God answered that prayer.

My self spirit began to die.

A *new* life began to grow within me.

Still, the agony of my childhood and later pain of my own failed relationships crushed my hopes. I remember the condemnation and again believed it must be true. "God cannot save you," the voice in my head taunted me. "You were *born* bad. Nothing you can do will change that fact. You aren't worth salvation."

I did not realize the God of love who entered my heart that day will *never* die, that my soul clothed with His Spirit will rejoice in His presence forever, that even death cannot steal my love for Him or His love for me. He will keep me by that power through eternity.

I wasn't told about this grace of God.

So, I struggled in darkness most of my life, unable to claim the victory that was already mine.

I didn't understand.

That was more than 60 years ago, and even now I feel I've only just begun to understand what happened that day I went forward to confess my sin and seek Christ as Savior and Lord. My life was hid with Christ at that moment. My old self spirit began to die, and my soul began to be clothed with His Spirit instead, made alive by God's merciful grace. I was being grafted into the vine. I was being made part of the family of God, secure for eternity in the love of Him who gave Himself for me. I had inherited eternal life and did not know it, because my self spirit was still active within me, lying to me, taunting me, tempting me, deceiving me!

No one explained I'd become a new creature.

No one assured me I wasn't going to hell.

I still *felt* condemned.

³⁰ Mat 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-9

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I still *thought* I was unwanted, unredeemable, “not worth it”.

As I got older insecurity prevented me from claiming what was mine already. I did not accept myself so I couldn’t believe others accepted me. I believed the lies were true and struggled with those lies. I did not believe I was loved. I could not see what was wrong.

I was blind.

No one told me how to draw on the power of love alive *within* me. I did not know how to allow Christ to walk within me, for His Voice to speak through me, for His Love to reach out from me to others.

I didn’t know how to commune with Him who was so near.

I didn’t know how to appropriate the grace He was giving.

I wasn’t taught the truth.

I didn’t know the truth.

I certainly was not free.³¹

I put Him on a shelf.

My soul remained in bondage.

I was chained to habits and defenses I learned for survival in my early years dodging damage in our broken home. I continued living the life of self, trapped by my yearning for approval and acceptance, hungering for love and a family of my own where there’d be no screams, no anger, no bloodshed.

For years I wandered crooked paths, tortured by the darkness of my past, fleeing from fear that followed close behind. Each time I began a relationship in which I hoped to share the love my heart was aching for, condemnation drove me out.

Each time I believed the loss was caused by me, yet I could do nothing to alter the pattern.

I lived a twisted life of disappointments.

I failed at *everything*.

The condemnation of childhood echoed in my ears long after I was a grown man. “You’re just no good!”

The voices grew louder as I got older, reinforced by every job I lost, every relationship that fell apart.

³¹ John 8:32

Each soul who touched my life with kindness soon ran from me in horror as the vacuum of my insatiable need demanded more than they could give.

Nothing filled my emptiness. Each failure fueled my fear. I was unable to believe I'd ever have the home I yearned for.

Deep within the words repeated, "You're just not worth it!"

I could not succeed with jobs, for I cared nothing about money or things except as they might bring my hoped for prize—a home with love, joy, peace, and safety.

Nothing else mattered. It was all I desired.

Yet, I could not escape the prophecy, "You'll never amount to anything!"

I tried to believe I was worthwhile. I told myself over and again, "You'll have what you long for if you don't give up. Try harder. You'll marry, have a home, enjoy a life of happiness and love."

"Keep trying!" I told myself. "Keep working for the dream."

My dream became a nightmare.

Nothing worked.

No amount of struggle, study, saving, or sacrifice made the slightest difference. Always what I reached for floated hopelessly beyond my grasp. At every turn there was enticement to enjoy an easy life, some temptation to peace and comfort, some lie I wanted to believe so I could avoid the pain of my unavoidable truth. I fell again and again. I couldn't win. I struggled to my feet, only to trip and stumble to the ground once more, reaching desperately for that home of peace and joy freely shared.

At one point, I believed I'd escaped my destructive past.

I turned resolutely to Christ more than 40 years ago, married a girl who seemed nice, and began what I hoped would be a life of love and joy. I went to law school, and my law practice did very well. We had a nice house, friends, and seemed to be succeeding together. I taught a Sunday school class of young married couples and led a Bible study Monday nights, reaching souls with Christ's love through unworthy me.

Many found Christ's salvation through my ministry.

The deacons licensed me to preach. I was invited to visit other churches with the message of grace and forgiveness God gave me

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in the writings of Paul. I was president of the local chapter of the Christian Legal Society and on the board of directors of a group that offered Christian counselling. I was even invited to sit on the board of directors of the local Chamber of Commerce, and I wasn't even a member of the chamber! The mayor appointed me to the city's redevelopment commission, and I was elected president of one of the Tampa Bay area's most prestigious local organizations hosting its meetings at the yacht club with me at the head table.

I began to believe I was free of my baggage at last. I received the grace and forgiveness I preached. It seemed the past was finally behind me. I could see my eternal home ahead.

Then one Sunday morning while teaching the young married couple's class, I suddenly broke into tears for no reason at all. I sobbed uncontrollably. My whole body heaved with despair. My heart was breaking. I didn't know why. My emotions were torn by anguish and surprise. I fell apart right there in the classroom.

Excusing myself, I walked the two miles home alone, crying all the way.

Truth screamed at my deafened ears.

It was impossible to stop the tears.

I didn't know what was happening.

But it was real.

A few days later, I began again to weep again for no apparent reason. My legs turned to rubber. I sank to the floor where I lay several hours groaning like a dying man, curled up on the carpet, bawling like a baby. The tears could not be stopped.

The taunts were deafening. "Who do you think you are to teach Sunday school? You're no preacher. You were born evil. You're no good. You're going to hell, and now you're trying to take others with you."

I should have known how to resist those lies. I was secure in God's family. I had confessed my sin and accepted the sacrifice at Calvary when I was 11, baptized "down under" in a Baptist Church when I was 28. I made His Soul an offering for my sin.³² My heart was broken by the Cross. I sought forgiveness every day. I knew

³² Isa 53:10

my heart was right with God. I was a new creature, saved, secure, and loved by Him.

Yet, I could not stop the tears nor silence the accusations of my enemy, *for I was still self struggling to be good.*

It seemed necessary to work hard to be good and be loved.

I had to prove those words from my childhood were lies.

Of course, I failed.

I could not reach the perfection I believed would stop the angry blame that met my every failure.

“You’re just not worth it! That’s just not good enough.”

It was true! My best wasn’t good enough.

It was impossible to meet my own expectations. No matter how I battled to fix my faults, the faults remained, and there was always someone ready to point out each of my many mistakes.

I tried to put on righteousness, but my clothes were filthy rags.³³

I wasn’t good enough.

The words my enemy screamed were *true!*

I wasn’t kind.

I wasn’t patient.

I wasn’t caring and gentle.

I was selfish. I was mean. I was fearful.

I was not what God wanted me to be.

And, I wasn’t changing nearly fast enough to save myself.

My life was falling apart instead of getting better. It didn’t seem to matter what I did. The screaming taunts came more often, the anger more severe, my dream of peace unrealized.

There was no rest.

I was seeking the approval of others. I wanted the love of those I cared for, and when they wouldn’t give it I tried harder. Nothing I did or did not do, however, made the slightest bit of difference.

The harder I tried the worse things became.

Approval was the barometer by which I judged my value.

³³ Isa 64:6

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I was the young man Bly speaks of in his best seller Iron John,³⁴ hunting the hidden key.

I was on a mythic quest for a blessing I could not gain.

I believed if I only tried harder, gave more, and stayed faithful to my course that the keepers of the key (those from whom I sought approval) would eventually give me what I sought.

So, I worked harder, hoping I could *make* people love me and gain that key I so desperately desired. If I labored hard enough and long enough, they'll be compelled by their sense of moral duty to present me with the prize I seek.

Yet, approval was denied.

So, on I struggled.

Yet, the harder I tried the deeper my disappointment.

Instead of "Thank you!" I heard the echoes of childhood, "You must try harder! You're just not worth it!"

At last my emotions crippled me. I wasn't wanted. I wasn't loved. I was nearly 50, weary of working for the empty satisfaction of a paycheck, seeing the face in my mirror get older.

I wanted peace, not torment.

I wanted to share my life with someone who wouldn't scream, "You're just not worth it!"

I felt if I should disappear, I'd not be missed.

I was afraid, alone, dying inside for want of that key.

I was married 21 years when I heard, "You'll never change. I want a divorce." Then, once more those words that drove my soul to tears, "You're just not worth it!"

I had no more to give.

I gave up.

Nothing would pry approval from those lips.

I abandoned my quest to gain the key from human hands, forced to see that seeking approval from others is to willingly submit to emotional tyranny and assume an impossible obligation.

The key cannot be given by those who do not have it.

³⁴ Iron John, Robert Bly, Vintage Books, New York (1990), p. 10.

Bly says the key must be stolen.³⁵

I believe the key *has* been stolen.

Jesus took it by force by dying on the Cross.

He alone is keeper of the key. He alone has the approval we yearn for.

He holds the key in nail-pierced hands, unlocking the secret of wounded hearts, releasing phantoms of dread and anxiety, setting us captives free.³⁶

He asks, “Do you love me?”³⁷

We answer, “I do!”

The keeper of the key responds, “Feed my sheep!”

He teaches the key is found not in seeking it from others but in receiving it from Him *then giving it to others without charge*.³⁸

Seeking the key from others is vanity.

We imagine we need approval from spouses, parents, children, or friends when all we need is the life of Christ *within* us, power to love others, whether they love us in return or not.

They want the key as much as we do.

I thought I could earn the key I imagined others to possess.

In the end it nearly destroyed me.

I gave up trying because I could no longer continue. The price was too high, the struggle too much. I was worn out, broken, spent, empty, used up, and drained dry by my quest for something I could never obtain by the efforts self expended in vain.

Only after I was forced to give up did God’s light begin to shine gently into the black night of my self-made misery.

Praise God for Christ’s mercy!

Thank God for Jesus’ sacrifice!

God is making me “worth it”.

It is the work of Christ living *within* me, loving others by the mystery of His grace, transforming me into a soul I never could become on my own.

³⁵ Ibid, p. 12.

³⁶ Psalms 68:18, Isaiah 45:13, Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18, Ephesians 4:8

³⁷ John 21:15-17

³⁸ Matthew 10:8, Rev 21:6

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He makes it possible for me to write these words (for I could *never* write them if He didn't live within me).

I've begun to realize the angry words of those who will not give me approval are symptoms of their own chaotic pain, evidence of their own separation from God.

I've begun to learn that poison darts of bitterness and envy can never kill my soul that lives forever by the grace of God's eternal loving Spirit who gives souls life that never ends.

I let go my quest for human acceptance.

Understanding comes slowly to *most* of us, as it does to me, for even as I write this book there's so much more to learn, so much more to be changed within me. I'll never understand it all within the space of this short lifetime, but I know that where I once was blind, I have begun somewhat to see.

The reason I remained in darkness so long is that I bought the lie that it was up to *me* to please others, to please God, to please myself.

I wasn't resting.

I was a busy beaver bustling about, buying tomorrow with the price of today,

I worked to enjoy life that I never took time to live!

I missed the fleeting joys of this moment to secure tomorrow.

Christ was not Lord of my life ... self was!

The one who had control was *self*.

I didn't wait faithfully.

I didn't trust confidently.

Oh, I'd begun to do those things. I'd tasted life born by grace. I experimented with waiting on the Lord and trusting Him to provide my needs, but I held onto contingency plans and was ready to bail out if the Lord let me down.

God was my co-pilot, but self was in the pilot's seat.

Self was in control.

I had not and still have not discovered the fullness of this life of God within me!

I had not and still have not yet seen all of who Christ really is or who He wants to be in me.

I resisted the truth who sought to strengthen me.

I had my self-agenda.

I allowed the pain in others to destroy me. Since I felt it was my job to make them happy, and they were not happy, I saw myself as a failure unworthy of love.

I was still my little self-child struggling to be good enough to silence my parents' rejection and win approval from others.

I survived childhood by holding to the hope of something better when at last I'd be a man. Nearing 50, I saw with horror there was nothing better on its way.

I could not shake off failure. It attached itself to me.

I was getting older by the minute.

I needed to be changed *inside*.

I needed Christ.

When I was baptized by water immersion 40 years ago as an act of my own will, it was the beginning of new life in Christ. I made a choice to surrender, a choice foreign to me before that day. Being reared by Presbyterians, I was baptized as a baby when my head was gently sprinkled with water dipped from a golden bowl on the petals of a rose. I was told this assured me of heaven, but for years the guilt of childhood infected my reason, so I believed admission to heaven must require more than being sprinkled as an infant!

I believed I had to be good.

I was terrified of that thought.

I knew too well I was far from good enough to go to heaven.

The poison of self-imposed darkness seeped through the walls I'd built around my soul, reminding me I was "no good", that I'd "never amount to anything".

No matter how hard I tried, the venom ruined my joy, for always there was a degree of failure, and each failure demanded justice. I believed I was consigned to torture, and there was nothing I could do to escape.

So, the offer of baptism as an adult was something I could do to show Christ how I loved Him for His pain, something I joyfully embraced.

I read my Bible cover-to-cover before I was baptized. I knew Jesus was baptized in the muddy Jordan River, dipped completely

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under that brown water. Pride that used to hold me back let go as I contemplated the Lord of Glory wading into that river to be faithful in everything.³⁹

I wanted to be with him that day. I wanted to get wet all over.

I wanted to be baptized as He was baptized.

I wanted victory over my pride.

I wanted to be plunged beneath the water, to gain *His* approval.

So I was baptized by immersion, not merely sprinkled.

I got *soaked* from head to toe, and my life changed radically.

I asked God at once to give me *wisdom*, remembering the verse from Proverbs, “Wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom.”⁴⁰ Of all things I needed, I knew I needed wisdom most of all. The Bible said it was the *principal* thing. So, that’s what I asked for in my first prayer after being baptized as an adult.

I thanked God for His mercy, then I asked for wisdom.

But, I failed to seek *understanding!*

Proverbs says, “Get wisdom, *and get understanding also.*”

I missed that part.

The consequence was more disaster, more delay.

I started to gain wisdom. Books jumped from shelves inviting me to read. I devoured them one after another, attended morning Bible studies, faithfully attended church, participated in prayer groups, and helped cook Wednesday night church suppers.

I sought the Lord with all my heart and started to grow.

God was teaching me.

His Spirit came alive in me and began to transform my soul.

Christ was part of my life in a new way. I was not the same.

Yet, in spite of the wisdom I got, I failed to get understanding.

I did not yet know that to “under-stand” means to *stand under*.

Understanding was foreign to me.

I was being filled with light even while I stood in darkness.

Self was still seeking to be righteous and wise.

Self was not submitted to Christ’s authority.

³⁹ Matthew 3:13-16

⁴⁰ Proverbs 4:7

I did not yet “under-stand”.

Self was still in charge.

For years I advanced by fitful leaps and bounds. In certain areas of life I climbed steadily, surmounting obstacles I could not get past before, while sliding back along the well-worn path to who I was before. I had so little understanding I began to think myself wise and, predictably, I became a very foolish man.⁴¹

Years later, God revealed to me a verse in Paul’s epistle to the Galatian church. “Stand fast,” he wrote, “in the liberty with which Christ set you free, and don’t be entangled again in the yoke of bondage.”⁴²

There was something strangely powerful about that message, something I had not noticed before when I read my Bible.

It was a light I’d never seen, and it began to shine brightly.

It began illuminating the rest of scripture for me.

I began to *see* what Paul was preaching!

I began to *understand* what he meant when he said our life is hidden with Christ.⁴³

I began to experience liberty, free from the condemnation and taunts of those who cannot give the key.

Life with Christ is not our old life gussied up in new clothes, new attitudes, new friends, and new vocabulary.

It is a *new life!*

It’s not “being in Christ” so much as “Christ being in us!”

Our old self is dying!

We are being made alive, i.e., *born again*, by the love that lives in us according to God’s will ... Christ’s Spirit.

Liberty we never imagined.

Approval we could never obtain by any effort of our own.

Christ gives the key, because He *is* the key ... alive *within* us.

The gift received by all who plead for Him to enter in.

It isn’t complicated.

⁴¹ Rom 1:22

⁴² Gal 5:1

⁴³ Col 3:3

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It isn't difficult.

It doesn't require intellect or sacrifice.

It is simply surrender of self's struggle to be lord of our lives.

Standing *under*.

For years I knew *something* was wrong. I wasn't happy. I was hurting, and the pain was getting *worse*. In desperation I prayed, "Please, God. Give me *understanding*. My life is out of control."

As I surrendered to the truth of my prayer, God began giving me something back for everything I gave away. Surrender became a way of life.

I didn't receive the things I struggled for those years I groped in darkness for approval. Instead, He gave *new* things, and He keeps giving new things today, as self lets go.

I give away the things He gives to me.

A candle loses *nothing* when it lights another candle.

God began to show me I lose nothing by giving away what He gives me.

As self gives away its claims to righteousness, Christ gives me a new righteousness that doesn't depend on my doings.

As self gives away its intellect, He gives a wisdom by which the deepest mysteries unfold.

As self gives away its need to be loved, He gives love that flows from Him through me to others whom I could not love before.

It is His doing ... not mine, not yours, not ours.

There is much of self that still needs to surrender, things I don't yet see but, as those things fall away, I grow more wealthy by His Spirit.

Things we learn to surrender (as we are nurtured by His patient love and learn to trust Him more) include our right to be right, our right to be heard, our right to be healthy, our right to enjoy the products of our labor, and even our right to continue living in these bodies—all things we can never keep by human struggle anyway.

In exchange for each ego-clutching thing we let go, God gives blessings far more valuable than the trash we let go for Him.

Blessings are multiplied!⁴⁴

⁴⁴ 1 Peter 1:2, 2 Peter 1:2, Jude 1:2

Jesus said, “Whoever will save his life shall lose it, but whoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospel’s shall save it. For what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?”⁴⁵

What joy to stand fast in the liberty Christ offers!

What rest to lay my burdens at His feet.

What security to know He is the keeper of my soul ... not I.

Until this truth is *revealed* to us by God, however, such talk sounds foolish. It is a mystery, forever true but always beyond our human comprehension, so long as self is living our life, standing by its own will so our souls can’t be transformed by truth and love.

So long as self asserts its ego, demands to be loved, insists on its rights, and believes self is better than others (or more spiritual or intellectual) our soul remains in darkness.

God’s Spirit is hidden until Christ lives *within* us.

We have no wisdom until He *is* our wisdom.

We have no strength, until He *is* our strength.

We have no righteousness, until He *is* our righteousness.

We have no real love until He *is* our love flowing *through* us.

We have no life until He *is* our life eternal.

Paul wrote, “A natural man,” i.e., a soul still living in his self, “cannot receive the things of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to him. He cannot know them.”⁴⁶

To receive the things of God’s Spirit we allow Christ to replace our self spirit and transform our soul. This comes when we pray to receive His love, wisdom, purity, gentleness, mercy, forgiveness, and patience.

So long as self fights for its rights, imagining it to be something when, except by God’s grace⁴⁷, it is nothing, truth is not in us!

God’s Spirit *is* truth.⁴⁸

Every spirit, however, is *not* of God.

⁴⁵ Mark 8:35-37

⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:14

⁴⁷ Gal 6:3

⁴⁸ 1 John 2:27

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There are *many* spirits in addition to the self-spirit you were born with. Most appear beautiful, wise, and desirable, yet they all seek to deceive us and thereby destroy us. Such spirits are enemies of God, demons subtle as slithering snakes.

We can test spirits within us (and in others) to know if they're of God or not.⁴⁹ God's Spirit is "pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."⁵⁰

The spirits of darkness are bitter, envious, filled with strife.⁵¹

If our lives display the characteristics of lying spirits, we can be certain God's Spirit is not on the throne of our lives, and if we believe otherwise the truth is not yet *within* us.⁵²

We must judge our *self!*⁵³

When God is in control (goodness, truth, and the love of Christ) our souls are gentle, patient, kind, and merciful.

That's how we know Christ is within us.

That's how we know we are saved.

His spirit of truth transforms us ... not our own efforts.

With God in control we rest.

The New Life

When we became living souls, as Adam did,⁵⁴ our self spirit by which our souls became alive was received through the seed of our parents who, in turn, received theirs from our grandparents' seed, and so on back to our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

We can continue to live by the self spirit we were given at birth or let go of self and receive the spirit of Christ and eternal life.

We do as we please, of course.

The choice of our souls to be ruled by self is always up to us, always depending on what we *think* and *feel* is best for us.

⁴⁹ 1 John 4:1

⁵⁰ James 3:17

⁵¹ James 3:14

⁵² James 3:14

⁵³ Mat 7:1-5, Mark 4:24

⁵⁴ Gen 2:7

However, our wisdom is not God's wisdom.⁵⁵

We know in part.

We make mistakes.

We don't see things as they are.

We don't choose wisely.

We are deceived by lying spirits seeking to destroy us.

Our souls will believe anything that promises what we think we want and need. Our souls are lost in the darkness of self, blind to the spirit of truth until we see Christ *within* us teaching us truth.

"The soul is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," God tells us through the prophet Jeremiah, "Who can know it?"⁵⁶

We don't recognize the blindness of our souls until the life of Christ appears within us, the spirit of truth who cannot lie.

Paul writes to his Christian friends who received this new life, "Your life is hid with Christ in God, and He *is* your life."⁵⁷

This new life is a mystery that surpasses human understanding.

The cross is foolishness to them that perish.⁵⁸

The new life is God's merciful work of grace, received by all who lose their human spirit to receive the new life of Christ who replaces our old spirit that is dead with His spirit of truth that will never die.

God's Christ Spirit renews our minds, transforms our souls.

As we receive this Christ life, self-deception dies away as our souls are transformed by His truth.

We begin to rest.

We begin to live in eternity.

Our old self spirit is crucified by the Godly Sorrow triggered in our souls by Christ at Calvary. We accept His sacrifice for *us* and confess it was for our sin that He died.

God gives more of this new life each day as His Spirit changes our souls, reminding us of the price Jesus paid to redeem our souls from the death grip of self's darkness.

⁵⁵ Isa 55:9

⁵⁶ Jeremiah 17:9

⁵⁷ Colossians 3:3-4

⁵⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:18

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Christ displaces our self and clothes our souls with His Spirit.⁵⁹

We receive His love and begin the life of Him who *is* love!

Born again.

Our self spirits replaced by His Holy Spirit.

Our souls clothed by God in Christ instead of self.

We feed on His presence within us, the bread of life, the water that ends all thirst.⁶⁰

We continue to be tried, troubled, and tempted. We still are growing. We need exercise. There's much more truth (about God, the world, and our self) that we must learn. Wisdom doesn't come easily. Habits of self must be broken, left behind. Self lets go slowly at first, more easily as Christ grows *within* us, but it takes a lifetime to find the fullness of God's love and rest completely.

First, our old self must be set aside, forever put away.

Christ says, "Unless a seed is sown in the earth and dies, it cannot become the fruit-bearing plant it was designed to be."⁶¹

A seed is just a seed.

If it never let's go of its "right" to continue being a seed, it will just dry up, wither, and die. It must let go of being a seed so it can become the new thing it was designed to become.

The *life* within the seed does not die when the seed stops being a seed. The only thing that dies is "being a seed".

As soon as the seed lets go of being just a seed, it becomes something new and beautiful, as God intended.

To experience what God intended, the seed is transformed.

The seed abandons its ego so-to-speak.

The seed gives up its "I am" nonsense.

Then the life within the seed realizes its true potential and finds the wonder of what being a seed is *really* all about!

Christ teaches this principle of seeds to explain we *must* let go of who we think we are before we can receive His life within us.

So long as we're stuck in our "I am" syndrome, our soul is glued to self and cannot imagine being anyone else.

⁵⁹ Gal 3:27

⁶⁰ John 4:14, John 6:35

⁶¹ John 12:24

The unavoidable fact is that every seed *must* change or die.
Similarly, our souls cannot remain glued to self and live forever
any more than a seed can remain a seed and not dry up and die.

We cannot live forever while remaining who we are.

We must be changed.

Self must die, and Christ must become our new life.

There is no other way.

The wonder of God's loving grace is that we *can* let go of our
self-life because Christ died for us and lives today!

We can trust Him to keep His promises.

We have to die anyway!

So, why not die to self today and live His life eternally?

The seed finds rest by letting go of self.

Our souls find rest by surrendering our old life of self to receive
eternal life through the power of God's indwelling Spirit.

Only by letting self die can our souls be free to live in the light.

God shows us the frailty of our self that is certain to die, as He
reveals within us His spirit of truth who *never* dies.

Our conscience is touched by the mercy of that price paid for
our souls on Calvary's cross, and as we *truly* begin to ask from our
hearts to be forgiven for our self-ness and the pain our self caused
others, He begins to replace our self with Him.

Our souls are clothed with His Spirit.

Our souls are transformed.

We enter eternal life by His power of grace through truth.

In this way *alone* we are raised to new life with Him.

In this way *alone* we become resurrected and glorified souls.

In this way *alone* we are born again.

We begin to "under-stand" God's strength is made perfect in
our weakness.⁶²

Paul says, "I enjoy my times of weakness, for then the power of
Christ dwells within me. When I am weak, then He is my
strength."⁶³

⁶² 2 Corinthians 12:9

⁶³ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

When Soul Sees Self

This mystery of the Gospel is powerful and sharp as any sword, able to discern between soul and spirit.⁶⁴

This mystery makes victorious Christian living possible.

There is no substitute. All else is sinking sand.

So long as we rebel against this truth, living by our old human self-spirit, we know only things our self-spirit knows, self-directed things, self-willed things, counterfeits: lust, ambition, envy, strife.

Until His Spirit gives eternal life to our souls, we remain slaves to self's sin,⁶⁵ unable to save ourselves, imprisoned by bondage to our flesh-bound self, *certain* to die when our human spirit dies.

The potential for new life within each seed will just wither and die if the seed ignorantly insists on forever remaining a seed.

When we kick self to the curb to receive Christ's life within us, He gives us new gifts: love, joy, peace, mercy, and forgiveness.

He plants *true* love in our hearts, making us more like Him each day, according to the plan ordained by God before He set the stars in space.⁶⁶

His Spirit within us brings mercy and peace, forgiveness and joy, gentle forces that change us, and we are transformed as His Life displaces our "I am" self-life.

We begin to *desire* things God wants us to desire and *do* things God wants us to do.

Our wills begin to *want* what God wants.

Our minds begin to *think* God's thoughts.

Our emotions begin to *feel* what God feels as we look upon the world around us and see the needs of others not so fortunate as we.

We enter His rest as He enters us!

Our self-will, self-ish thoughts, self-directed emotion and many other ugly things about our self begin to fade. It doesn't happen all at once. God wants us to appreciate the work He is doing, to *know* it is He who is doing the work and not we, and that takes time.

Slowly, but certainly and gloriously, things of self (bitterness, envy, strife, ego, and our "I am" syndrome) wither away and die.

⁶⁴ Hebrews 4:12

⁶⁵ Ephesians 2:1-3

⁶⁶ Romans 8:28-31

We rest in the growing knowledge that God *is* in control.

We are released from the turmoil and confusion of life, by the inner presence of the One who brings peace.

As we continue growing by the life of Christ's Spirit within us, our souls are set free from the bondage of flesh. We see beyond the boundaries of our earthly tabernacles and, one glorious day, we will receive *new* bodies, incorruptible and eternal, bodies in which our souls will live forever with Him in eternal love.

#

OUR DESIRE

Powerful Motive

The desire for rest is powerful and pervasive.

As I began work on this chapter, building on the idea of its title, I realized that almost everything we do is motivated by our desire for rest, the urge to escape the anguish of stress, the longing to be free from struggle, yearning to leave our labors behind and enter the peace that alone can dwell where rest is!

A proof of this powerful motive is the ubiquitous purchase of lottery tickets. Those who plunk down a dollar or the bulk of the weekly paycheck to buy a chance at effortless riches are certainly motivated by hope of quitting work to enjoy a life of restful leisure.

Less obvious, perhaps, is the mundane deprivation most of us endure to save money or make *more* so someday we may rest in a comfortable retirement. Though we may enjoy the work we do, most of us would rather not be restrained by bosses and schedules. We'd rather be free spending time enjoying hobbies, travel, sports.

We'd rather rest than work.

When we *are* at work, there's always a gnawing undercurrent. Subconsciously we wish the day to go quickly. We anxiously await that 5:00 o'clock whistle, Friday or the first day of our vacation.

We rarely hear co-workers say, "Drat! It's time to quit and go home!" To the contrary, all of us are glad to see the end of work when we can rest from our labors.

If we believe we can improve the quality of rest we hope to enjoy someday by working harder today, most of us will do so, and many burn themselves out and end up in an early grave instead of on the beach of their hoped for vacation at the end of their career.

If we want extra cash for a weekend vacation, we may work late a few evenings. Our motive isn't more money. Our motive is the deeper rest we seek when the time for rest arrives.

We work harder now to enjoy a sweeter rest when it's time to get away from stress and struggle.

We were programmed to behave this way by our parents and teachers. We were told, "If you don't have what you want, work

harder. Work hard enough, and one day you'll have all you desire. Rest is achieved by working."

That's what they said, and to many of us it's a sacred litany.

Yet there's error in its implication that things lead to happiness.

It insinuates that gold is the good we need to finally be at rest.

It is a lie.

Many sacrifice the best of life in pursuit of riches, hoping to secure luxurious leisure in retirement, only to lose everything to circumstances, illness, reverse of market trends, or the collapse of economies. Their worked-for someday never comes! The carrot on their stick is rest, if only they knew this truth, but they are so eager to win that future day of rest, they risk *everything* in its pursuit.

They work for early retirement, missing pleasures they could be enjoying today, then die young from the adverse effect of stress on their physical system ... all because of our shared desire for rest.

It isn't smart.

Yet most of us do it anyway.

Vacation and retirement aren't the only rest we work for, either. Our appetites for food, drink, sexual pleasure, and other physical and emotional gratification are driven by our desire for rest, the motive to let go, to be relieved of tension. Hunger, thirst, and desire for intimacy are among the most powerful forces in our lives. They bring pleasure when satisfied, and pleasure is a form of rest.

When we are thirsty we yearn for a refreshing glass of water or some other beverage because we know a drink will stop the stress of thirst and let us rest from its tension.

It's the same with eating, sexual urges, and every human desire.

The desire for satisfaction is actually our shared desire for rest.

Until we're satisfied we cannot rest.

Satisfaction *is* rest ... rest from being unsatisfied!

When we receive what we desire, stress is relieved. We rest.

Imagine *any* human motive that's not ultimately linked to your desire for rest, relief, satisfaction, ease.

Even people who enjoy stress don't wish to prolong it forever.

We all want to rest.

When Soul Sees Self

None of us wishes to be engaged in perpetual struggle. Even a workaholic yearns to take a break from his labors now and then.

Every game we play, every sport, every competition, the goal is to be at rest when the game is over. The winner's rest is sweetened by victory. The loser's rest is knowing his loss is history, and he can rise to play the game again another day.

The score is counted, the timer runs its course, the final goal is reached. The struggle ends. The players rest.

Who'd be so foolish as to run a race with no finish line? How could such a race be won?

Who would play a game that has no end? When would the score be counted and the winner declared?

Who would start a project that can't be finished? What would be the point?

In most societies, success is measured by the quality, degree, and amount of comfort one can afford ... comfort being a form of rest, the absence of dis-comfort and nerve-pounding labor.

Driving an expensive air-conditioned car marks one man more successful than a neighbor who bumps along with rattling fenders and stinky exhaust. We may think it's their cars that measure the degree of their respective success when, in fact, it is the restful way the richer man rides as he adjusts his power leather seat, raises his power-windows to listen in perfect quiet to concert hall music, or with the merest touch of a finger on a hand-carved wooden steering wheel controls the direction of his powerful, gleaming machine.

It's not the machine that marks his success.

Another enjoys the spacious pleasure of a well-furnished home with deep-pile carpet, lovely view, and every kitchen gadget and entertainment amenity a lavish income provides, while others live in fetid squalor, huddle under bridge abutments, sleep in cardboard boxes, and warm themselves at night under blankets of discarded rags and yesterday's newspapers.

It's not the expensive home that marks the one man's success but the degree of restfulness he enjoys while others struggle just to keep warm or scrape something to eat from refuse containers.

Consider the well-dressed yachtsman reclining on the after deck of his multi-million dollar boat. If we yearn for what he has, it's really not the boat we want so much as his ability to rest, to live a

life filled with pleasures that most of us hopelessly labor for all of our lives. It's not his yacht or fancy clothes. It's how he lives.

Most people on our planet live a wandering, uncertain life with precious little rest as they scratch for food and what little comfort they can find ... food and comfort others take for granted. The poor long to rest from their perpetual struggle, to enjoy a satisfying meal or spend one night of sleep beneath a roof that does not leak.

Both wealthy and impoverished reach for this same goal.

Foolishness thinks rest comes from plenty.

True rest comes from within when a soul is at rest with truth.

“Come to me,” Jesus urges all who labor and are heavy laden, “and I will give you rest.”⁶⁷

Counterfeit Rest

Is it any wonder so many are unhappy?

Seeking rest by working harder makes no sense, yet millions of people work extra overtime or hold two jobs to buy things they can't even take time to enjoy!

Children come home from school to an empty house, because both parents are away working to buy things that will never replace times of rest spent together as family. They throw life away in pursuit of things their children would gladly trade for more time with loving parents.

People scrimp and save month after month to enjoy a single week of vacation, missing the joy that could be theirs today and every day.

The rest we try to secure for tomorrow by working harder today is counterfeit.

Hard work and thrift are good things, of course. It's wise to work and save. Only the idle rich can avoid work altogether. Most of us work diligently and avoid squandering our paychecks so we, too, may one day enjoy a bit of idleness. Hard work and thrift are recommended.

However, working our fingers to the bone, denying ourselves and loved ones the simple pleasures *this* day can provide in order

⁶⁷ Mat 11:28

When Soul Sees Self

to secure restful pleasure we hope to enjoy some distant tomorrow that may never come is *unwise*.

Christ said, “Take no thought for tomorrow, for tomorrow will take thought for itself.”⁶⁸

All we truly have is today, this solitary, ever-changing *moment!*

It’s important to be prepared for what the future may hold, but it is *impossible* to grasp tomorrow in the talons of today!

Today is the only time we really have.

Missing the rest God freely offers every instant is one of the big mistakes of life. Giving up rest we could enjoy right now in hope of securing peace and comfort later on is just plain silly.

Working, saving, and planning should never cause us to deny ourselves the rest we can enjoy *today*. If our industry, thrift, and plans for the future depend on struggles that disrupt our rest right now, we’ll surely miss the rest we hope for when the long-awaited day arrives. When that tomorrow is at last today, we’ll be trapped in old habits of struggle and lose our rest to the battle that by then will be our natural state.

Jesus invites us to rest with Him *right now!*

Jesus invites us to trust Him to provide not only things we need today (our daily bread), but all we will require tomorrow.

He says, “Take no thought for your life, what you shall eat or drink, nor for your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than meat, and the body more than clothing? Observe the birds of the air. They do not sow, nor do they reap or gather into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much better than they?”

He admonishes, “If God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow thrown into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you? Therefore, take no thought, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘By what shall we be clothed?’, for your heavenly Father knows you need these things.”

He advises, “Seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and *all* things shall be given to you.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Mat 6:34

⁶⁹ Mat 6:25-33

He reminds us, “The kingdom of God is *within* you!”

Are you seeking the kingdom of God that’s *within* you?

Consider the flowers, as Jesus suggests, and see that all flowers need is to let God live through them, *within* them.

All we need is to let God live through us, *within* us.

Then we find rest.

All our working, saving, and scheming for tomorrow can never buy rest today. The rest we hope for in some far away tomorrow is impossible to gain today, nor can it be bought with money and things.

True rest is Christ’s gift to us now, and it’s free for the asking.

True rest flows from His kingdom *within* us.⁷⁰

Jesus says, “You cannot serve both God and mammon.”⁷¹ That word “mammon” is too often mistranslated as money or things, the substance of this world. Things and money is *not* what the word stands for. The Greek word is *mammonas*, which means not things but *faith* in things.

We cannot put our faith in things and in Christ who lives *within* us at the same time. We must choose in whom we seek our rest.

Every religion teaches this.

Mammon worships wealth and things, a false god promising to fulfill our dreams and satisfy our desires with the false security of stuff that all too easily rusts, dissolves, and disappears. Money, fancy cars, big houses ... just stuff.

Putting faith in stuff is mammon.

Mammon is the god greed worships.

Mammon cares more for one’s house than one’s spouse.

Mammon gets and keeps, instead of giving and enjoying.

Pinning hope on tangible security prevents our finding rest.

Jesus says, “You cannot serve both God and mammon.”⁷²

Faith in things is sin, and sin breeds death.⁷³

⁷⁰ Luke 17:21

⁷¹ Luke 16:13

⁷² Matthew 6:24

⁷³ Romans 6:23

When Soul Sees Self

Earthly riches can *never* buy the sweet rest that is truly the most powerful desire of every human heart.

The psalmist advises us, “Delight yourself in the Lord, and *He* shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to Him. Trust Him. Wait patiently for Him. *Rest in Him.*”⁷⁴

When we rely on rest promised by things, we aren’t relying on God, we aren’t trusting Him, we aren’t waiting patiently for Him, and we certainly are *not resting*.

As Jesus says, “You *cannot* serve both God and mammon.”⁷⁵

It is impossible.

God will gladly give us the “desires of our heart” *if* we delight ourselves in Him, wait patiently for Him, and *rest* in Him.

Mammon brings death.

Mammon measures success by material wealth.

Mammon believes financial prosperity secures the “good life”.

Scripture does not say money is the root of all evil but that *the love of money* is the root of all evil.⁷⁶

We love money when we seek rest in things, desire prosperity more than peace, willingly destroy our lives for riches, struggle for more and grasp at everything we can reach with our wallets.

We aren’t waiting patiently on the Lord to supply our need, nor seeking *first* His kingdom and His righteousness.

So, we find no rest.

Mammon can no more give rest than a dry well can give water. It has no rest to give. It is the *opposite* of rest.

Yet, many continue to dip their buckets of hope in the dry well of things, while Jesus offers a “well of water springing up unto everlasting life.”⁷⁷

His provision satisfies.

His provision refreshes.

His provision is secure.

⁷⁴ Psalms 37:4-7

⁷⁵ Luke 16:13

⁷⁶ 1 Timothy 6:10

⁷⁷ John 4:14

We who drink *that* water never thirst again.⁷⁸

We find supply for all our needs and eternal rest for our souls.

Mammon is a liar.

Things (house, boat, bank account, car, country cottage, garden, hobby, etc.) that promise rest outside of Christ' eternal love are counterfeit.

Their promise is a lie.

Irresistible Urge

This book would be mere hypocrisy if we did not agree as fallen creatures that no matter how much we love the Lord and seek His will, there's within us each and every one an undeniable desire to satisfy our longing for rest ... *no matter what the cost*.

We yearn for comfort, ache for peace, crave affection, long for acceptance, strive for a sense of self-worth, struggle for security, and reach for a future when we can rest from all our labors.

So we work for things ... *each and every one of us*.

To deny this is an empty pretense.

We may claim to be "above such things", to have arrived at an advanced state of Christian sacrifice and celibacy, but those who know us (better than we know ourselves) are not convinced. They see us struggling for more stuff, always more stuff.

And, God knows our hearts *completely*. He sees all.

Where's the benefit in kidding ourselves?

We *all* of us are driven by the urge to enter blessed, wondrous, peaceful *rest*. It is desire that cannot be denied.

There are none of us immune to the destructive effects of being deprived of it for any length of time. We cannot live without sleep, any more than we can for long deny ourselves satisfaction of other biological and sociological hungers and thirsts.

Most important of these are our emotional necessities:

- Love
- Acceptance
- Value

⁷⁸ John 4:7-13

When Soul Sees Self

- Security

If we're denied *any* of these needs (biologically or emotionally) we may be overcome by passions that drive us to find satisfaction in ways destructive to ourselves and others. If our needs are denied too long, stress may cause emotional illness, mental instability, or even manifest as physical ailments.

Some believe denying their needs is an act of righteousness, but God *intends* us to have and to be motivated by these needs.

Self-denial such as fasting or celibacy for a season has its place, but if it's an attempt to be righteous, we are being deceived by our self, and self-denial is merely a cover for self-approval, self-praise, and self-satisfaction.

God *created* our need for food, water, and sexual satisfaction as well as our need to be loved, acknowledged, valued, and secure.

Our needs are part of His plan.

He made us this way.

He wants to satisfy our needs in ways that honor Him and give us victories in this life.

Our greatest need is Christ.

We need Christ to replace self.

When our need for love is satisfied by His love, we discover what *true* love is, and we are blessed as we bless others with His love, instead of self's counterfeit.

When our need for acceptance is satisfied in our discovery that God truly *is* forgiving our past, knowledge we experience as Christ guides us with nail-pierced hands to our new life that never ends, we know acceptance as we could never before imagine.

When our need for value is satisfied by seeing how He is using us to heal broken hearts, encourage those who've lost hope, feed the hungry, and proclaim this Gospel to all the world, we see how valuable He is making us by His Presence *within* us.

And, when our need for security is satisfied by that "earnest" of our Salvation, the blessed assurance we receive as we see firsthand that He is, indeed, working *in* us to fulfill His eternal purpose, we find that supernatural sense of rest our souls are seeking for.

God is in Christ, and Christ is in us ... secure forevermore!

Our need for love, acceptance, value, and security draw us ever nearer to Him who alone can fulfill those needs completely.

Paul writes to the fledgling church at Philippi, “My God will supply all your need through His riches in glory by Christ.”⁷⁹

God will supply *all* our need through Christ’ Spirit within us!

It’s not something *outside* us.

It is His work *within* us.

Demands of self no longer grip our souls, insatiable as they are. The “things” self demands can never satisfy our souls, nor is self ever satisfied with “things” once they’re acquired. Self wants more and more stuff in which it can hide from the destiny of death and eternal darkness that awaits the self-driven soul.

Christ sets our souls free from self.

Christ wraps His loving arms around our souls and, as we begin to see the enemy of self in its desperate attempt to hold on, we kick that ugly liar out and start growing in God’s grace!

Being set free from self-ishness.

Released from the prison of pride.

Watching ego wither as our souls see how foolish ego is.

All our needs are supplied by Him who lives within us.

We find joy and lasting satisfaction in everything – food, drink, sex, relationships ... *everything!*

We become new creatures, just like Jesus said we would.

Our new way of finding satisfaction is far better than the old!

No longer ashamed of our needs, we see they are God-ordained, a sacred part of His intention.

Through our necessity God draws us to His sufficiency.

Our need for sleep is one of those necessities by which we learn.

We can’t stay awake forever. Some deprive themselves of sleep by meditation, self-hypnosis, or cat-naps during the day, but there are none who *never* sleep. Our bodies can’t withstand the stress of remaining awake day after day. One may refrain from sleep 24 or 48 hours as may be necessary in emergency or war, but sooner or later we must close our eyes and go with Morpheus to that sweet land of dreams God intends us to visit.

⁷⁹ Phil 4:19

When Soul Sees Self

Sleep teaches trust.

We are vulnerable while asleep, exposed to danger we cannot see with our eyes closed nor hear when we are deep in dreams. We take a chance each time we go to bed at night, uncertain if assassins may sneak through a window in our room and stab us in the throat while we snore away in ignorance of all that's going on around us.

Silly? Maybe now that you're adult, but not so silly when you were a little child, wanting the hall light left on or asking parents to check carefully behind the closet door to make sure all was well.

My childhood prayer was, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul will take."⁸⁰

I remember being afraid to go to sleep.

I remember fearing I would never wake.

My need for sleep, of course, overpowered me every time, and I fell asleep each night in spite of my fear. For more than 70 years I've crawled from my bed each morning more or less on schedule, and I've learned to trust God for my safety through the night.

Samson was the strongest man who ever lived, yet vulnerable as he slept. His strength was attributed to his long hair, which was never cut from the day of his birth, but he fell in love with a woman named Delilah who was ruled by her self and its desires. She fell in with Samson's enemies who sought the secret of his strength so they could trap him. She tried for days on end to pry the secret from him by temptation and seduction. Finally, hoping to get what his self wanted with her, he revealed his secret, "My hair has never been cut. That is my strength."

Samson was wrong. His hair was not his strength. But, self had its way. He wanted to enjoy pleasure with Delilah, and it cost him dearly. When he shared his heart with this godless woman, God's strength left him. He stood alone with only mortal strength.⁸¹

Samson rested his head on Delilah's lap, fell asleep, and she cut his hair before calling her confederates who waited outside to take him prisoner. Samson was led away by a force he could easily have thrown off the day before. They put out his eyes. He lived the rest

⁸⁰ The New England Primer, Benjamin Harris, Boston, c.1690.

⁸¹ Judges 16:20

of his days a blind man wandering in the darkness his self brought upon him.

If Sampson hadn't slept, of course, this calamity might not have occurred, but it wasn't just sleep that made him vulnerable. Strong as he was physically, he did not see the danger of letting self get its way. He was helpless while asleep, but he was more helpless when he let his self talk him into revealing his secret to obtain what his self wanted. So, this mighty man fell victim to a pair of shears in a woman's fragile fingers while he slept.

He should have trusted God instead of self that was determined to have that woman's love.

He slept ... in more ways than one.

God never sleeps.

We can't avoid it.

The night Jesus was arrested, a few of his disciples walked with Him to Gethsemane where He asked them to wait while He prayed alone. He asked to be delivered from the cross that soon would torture Him to death, then mercifully *for our sakes* He surrendered, "Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done."⁸²

His agony was so great blood broke from his skin like beads of perspiration. He suffered unspeakably for our souls and the souls of His disciples.

Yet, when He finished praying He found His disciples sleeping.

They could not stay awake.

Weariness weighed too heavily.

Even as Jesus prayed to be delivered from the cross they slept, and who is so self-ish as to blame them? Sometimes it's impossible to stay awake when slumber calls us to close our eyes in sleep.

We learn to trust Him while we sleep.

"Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong. We are weak, but He is strong."⁸³

In my weakness He perfects His strength in me.

My need for love, acceptance, value, and security persistently presents me with my weakness.

⁸² Matthew 26:42

⁸³ The Love of Christ, Anna Bartlett Warner, 1858.

When Soul Sees Self

Yet God is faithful, calling me to rest in His complete provision for the needs He created in my life.

#

GOD'S PLAN

The Creation

In Genesis we read, “On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and He rested on the seventh day. God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from His work.”⁸⁴

That was the first Sabbath, the beginning of the seven day week we still observe today in every nation on earth.

It is a special part of God's plan for us to rest with Him.

The word “rest” in Genesis is the Hebrew *shabath*, i.e., to cease from exertion, to stop working, to let go of struggling.

God didn't rest because He needed to be restored, as we do.

God rested to show us a principle. He wants us to rest with Him as He rests with us in fellowship, and he wants us to rest with each other in fellowship ... not by ourselves alone.

The unthinkable task of setting stars in space, stretching necks of giraffes to just the right length, and making woman of Adam's rib were labors beyond the creative power of any being other than our God. It's impossible to imagine the energy it took to make all that is. Infinite force went into Creation. Every star, every planet, all the seeds of life in all the plants and animals on earth, beneath the sea and in the air ... all in just six days.

To those who say one day to God was as a thousand years today we respond, “So what?”

What difference does it really make if God created all that is in just six 24-hour days or six billion years? Why argue how long it took (unless we argue to be seen by others as someone very wise)?

We know it is done.

We know men did not do it.

Is anything too difficult for Him?⁸⁵

Creation is God's work, a fact only fools deny.

⁸⁴ Gen 2:2

⁸⁵ Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:27

When Soul Sees Self

No scientists were here to watch it happen and record the length of time it took, so what harm is there in saying (as scriptures from multiple religions record) it was done in just six days?

And on the seventh day God rested.

Who knows how it all began?

Who will *ever* know in this life?

Does it *really* matter?

There are and will be theories—Big Bang, Steady State, Donut, Threads, Lemniscate—but these are only theories men propose to explain in human terms what must forever be a mystery.

Only God knows how or when it all began or how long it took.

What things existed before there was *anything at all*?

What time was it before time began?

How long ago is the beginning?

How far away is the end?

Questions for children to ask and parents to explain.

God.

We can probe these enigmas till our brains turn to mush, then at the end of all our mental gymnastics and foolish debates we will have no more certainty about it than when we began.

Creation is a mystery.

It *cannot* be known by human reason.

Scientists can only offer theories of how the universe “began”, mathematical models to help us understand the behavior of moving objects and electromagnetic fields, but ultimately we cannot know the why of it or how it came to be.

It is.

Of that alone we can be sure.

We take it on faith.

God did it.

When I was a little boy, my grandfather gave me a pair of small plastic dogs, tiny Scotch terriers, one black, one white, each with a small bar magnet glued to the bottom of its feet.

I was fascinated by their interaction. If I moved them tail to nose or nose to tail, they attracted each other by an unseen force that

increased in strength the nearer they approached until they *snapped* together all at once.

If I tried to move them nose to nose or tail to tail, however, they repelled each other with an unseen force that got stronger as I tried to push them together with my little fingers.

The force between those magnets acted across empty space!

The magnets exerted a repellent or attractive force without actually touching, yet there was *nothing* in between.

I was captivated!

Why didn't the force wear out like the batteries in my Captain Video flashlight?

Not only was the unseen force invisible, but it seemed to last forever. If I put the dogs away for a few days or months, then got them out again to play, the force was still there, undiminished!

Moreover, the force acted through solid material. I could put the black dog on one side of a piece of paper and the white dog on the opposite side, and *still* the force operated. I tried glass, cardboard, plastic, wood. All had no effect at all. The invisible force worked right *through* most of the stuff I tried!

Iron disrupted the force between the terriers, for the dogs were then attracted to the metal instead of to each other, but the force was still as strong and still *invisible!*

What *was* this strange force?

Where did it come from?

Why didn't it wear out?

Who understood it?

To those who say, "The force is magnetism, and the interaction between the two little dogs obeys the inverse square law," I smile appreciatively, seeing no reason to argue with apparent wisdom, but knowing such people have no idea *why* it works as it does.

Anyone can assign names to scientific mysteries, measure them in various situations, and pronounce they *understand* because they can describe and quantify. The fact remains that no one *knows* what made those little dogs attract or repel each other as they did. No one knew then, and no one knows today. Theories that predict magnetic forces to the nearest millionth gram cannot explain what magnetism *is* or how it came to be!

When Soul Sees Self

All such theories are guesswork.

They describe.

They don't explain.

God's mystery remains.

Other things with no possible explanation include gravity, light, space, and time. These four realities can be measured and predicted with amazing precision, but they *cannot* be grasped by reason. And they are just four of many mysteries, an infinite number of enigmas we will never fully understand.

Measured? Yes.

Predicted? Yes.

Understood? No.

They simply *are* ... as God *is*.

No one knows why apples fall from trees. To say gravity makes them fall isn't saying much.

Johannes Kepler, who first described the properties of planetary orbits and the speeds of bodies circling other bodies in elliptical paths, could only *describe* the effects of gravity—he couldn't tell us what it is or how it came to be.

Isaac Newton offered theories scientific observation confirms. For example, he guessed the gravitational attraction between two bodies in free space would decrease as the square of the distance between them increases (that an object twice as far away would be attracted by one-fourth the force). Our sensitive instruments today show he was right.

Yet neither Newton nor anyone else knows what gravity *is*, why it behaves as it does, or how it came to be in the first place.

Quantum scientists describe and predict with uncanny accuracy the behavior of bodies operating near the speed of light, but these mathematical geniuses squabble over theories of gravity, unable to agree on what it is, why it behaves as it does, or how it came to be. Some say it's particles they call gravitrons, others insist it's bends and folds in the fabric of the space-time continuum (whatever *that* might be). None can tell us what gravity is or where it came from!

The fact is, "No one knows!"

Light is yet another mystery. A great deal is known about light. Light and its strange behavior has been studied for as long as men

remember. We know long light waves are infra-red heat. Longer waves can be bounced off objects to measure distance or quickly cook a potato. Very long waves can be modulated to send music and speech around the world, even under polar ice caps to talk with men in submarines.

Waves shorter than those we see in the visible spectrum behave differently. Ultra-violet being longest of waves shorter than visible light, is more penetrating than infra-red or visible light. Shorter still are X-rays that “shine right through” solid objects, acting more like tiny particles than waves. Shorter yet are beta rays (high-speed electrons) that have properties of both light *and* matter. Neutrons and other sub-atomic particles are extremely short waves of light that appear to have mass and occupy fixed positions in space.

Light *is* matter!

We measure and predict light's behavior in laboratories.

But, we don't know what light *is*.

Your Bible says, “God is light.”⁸⁶

Who dares dispute it?

Science cannot *explain* light, magnetism, gravity, time, or a lot of other stuff modern science claims to “understand” as it criticizes those of us who choose to believe God *is*.

Nobody knows the “why” of things or where they came from.

God hides His mysteries, like riddles that become more abstruse the harder we try to sort them out.

And, who will ever tell us what *space* is, how far its boundaries extend, or what if anything is *beyond* its alleged boundaries?

Astronomers today claim they can see the farthest edge of outer space, where they say the beginning of time is. It's true! They do! They claim their instruments detect as far as far can be, as if there were nothing beyond what they insist is “the edge of the universe”!

How wise they must think themselves, too old to remember how we small children lay on our backs looking up at a starry night sky and asking, “Where does it end, and what lies beyond that?”

Silly scientists!

We were wiser as children.

⁸⁶ 1 John 1:5

When Soul Sees Self

Time is the troubling loophole of science through which we see the great unexplainable they struggle to capture in their magic box of mathematics. They use “virtual numbers” to cleverly force the mysteries of reality into enigmatic equations on blackboards. They then proclaim they understand. To accomplish this impossible feat, they equate the measurement of time with lineal distance like feet, miles, and light years. They tell us time has the same properties as physical distance (because their magic math requires them to).

Since none of us can be in two places at once, it was long ago recognized that a new math was needed, a math that can be where we cannot, in two places at once, equating time with distance!

No one complained because the math worked, let us send men to the moon and back, take close-up pictures of the farthest planet, build nuclear bombs, and confirm indeed that God is dead.

Self is insane.

If time did not tick apart the moments of our lives, everything would “all at once” exist—instead of being separated by the train of nows, like separate beads on a string, each following another in a sequence that makes sense of what we know and do.

Do we move *through* time as one might ride a bicycle from one end to the other of some country town that remains unchanged by our passing through, or does time move through *us* as fuel passes through an engine, empowering the mechanism and, in the process, being burned up, consumed.

What *is* time?

Where did it come from?

Where is time going?

Did it have a beginning?

Will it ever have an end?

How long, *really*, is a second or a year?

We measure time by ticks on a mechanical or digital clock calibrated by the microwave frequency used to emit photons from a chamber of cesium gas in a Colorado laboratory.

But all we do is *measure* its passing.

We have no idea what time *is*.

Nor why two plastic dogs repel each other nose-to-nose!

What if time stopped?

Would we be forever stuck where we are right now?

Who's to say?

We measure.

We predict.

We do not *under-stand*.

Where did *you* come from? If you say you came from a sperm and egg united, then where did the sperm and egg come from? Who is our ultimate parent? When did life begin ... and why?

When might be easy, but *why* not so much.

It's the *why's* of life that stump self-centered science.

Does anyone know *why* time is? Can anyone discern its secret or escape its immutable sentence? Is there anywhere we can step outside time for just a moment to survey it flowing by from some observatory immune to its effect?

Where is it taking us?

Are we captured in its irresistible flow?

Time, like space, light, magnetism, and gravity, is just one of the myriad inscrutables of God's creation. It *cannot* be known in any certain way. It is measured by clocks and calendars, while we are carried forward like flotsam on a river flowing toward a destiny we can't imagine, having started in a place to which we never can return.

If there are so many things that can't be known in any ultimate sense, why not allow that God made all that is in just six days and that He rested on the seventh?

Why do we resist acknowledging that some things *always* will remain beyond our cognitive grasp?

Why are we reluctant to agree that some things will stay hidden so long as we continue dwelling in these human shells?

Why can we not admit that some things are comprehended only by the mind of God and through the mind of God?

Why can we not take pleasure and find fellowship in agreeing we are only human beings after all, resting in that truth much as God rested when He completed His Creation, letting go of our war with reality?

There *is* a plan, a mystery known only to God, by which His rest *and ours* will one day be revealed to us, a time in which we

and our God will enjoy sweet fellowship together at the end of all our efforts to overcome reality by our rebellion.

The Sabbath

In the days of wooden sailing ships, the words of a shanty song were sometimes heard on deck as men worked at their chores, “Six days shall you labor and do all you are able, and on the seventh scrub the deck and scrape the cable!”

At sea in ships under sail, each day is pretty much like every other. There were no churches with polished pews to fill, no shady streets with lovely strolling ladies bedecked in bustles, bonnets, and brightly colored bows, bristling with sunny smiles. There were no manicured lawns or white picket fences to gossip over. There were no gardens with delicate flowers to pick.

In the days of tall ships and iron men, there was only the odor of pine tar and salt air, continuous groans of creaking wood, acres of canvas, miles of rope, rusty iron fittings, *and plenty of work to do* changing sails, mending spars, serving rigging, scraping paint and painting everything again and again and again.

A sailor’s work knew no Sabbath.

Work at sea on a sailing ship was day and night, night and day, morning to dark, nightfall till dawn. What rest they had was made possible by dividing the crew into teams called watches, allowing men in one watch to rest four hours while men in the other watch attended to arduous, never-ending demands of a massive machine of wood, rope, canvas, and a deep blue sea beneath.

In a few ships (if weather was good) the men were allowed to assemble aft of the mainmast once a week to hear the skipper read from the Good Book. In some ships the cook prepared sweetened barley cakes or an extra helping of whatever the men were allowed for food. There was no Sabbath in any traditional sense, however.

There was no day of rest.

A full-rigged sailing ship required constant labor.

Yet Scripture commands us, “Remember to keep the Sabbath day holy. Six days shall you labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work, not you, your son, daughter, manservant, maidservant, cattle, nor the stranger within your gates; for in six days the Lord

made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is therein, yet He rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.”⁸⁷

This commandment is *one of the Ten!*

Observance of the Sabbath is not optional.

The Ten Commandments have not yet been repealed.

We are directed to keep one day in seven holy, to do no work that day, nor allow our sons, daughters, servants, beasts of burden, or even strangers to work for us that day. It is God's decree.

“Keep the Sabbath!”

Of course, we modern self-wise people do *not* keep the Sabbath.

Those who attend church are anxious for the preacher to finish his sermon so they can rush to a restaurant and give orders to their waitress (a stranger) who relays their request to the cooks (hiding in the back where they can't be seen chopping onions). They watch as their waitress sets dishes before them, asking her to bring the ketchup or another glass of water. When they leave to go home (to see some sports event on TV), they leave their dirty dishes to be cleared away and washed by some young boy or girl working to raise money for college or provide for a widowed mother.

If we don't hit the couch to watch sports on TV, we fight the lawn sprinklers or paint the garage. We may run to the hardware store for a sack of nails where strangers will do our bidding on the day God told us not to work *nor make others work*.

I know some believe Sunday is “The Lord's Day” (*Domingo* in Spanish), the first day of the week, and that Saturday (*Sabado* in Spanish) is the seventh or Sabbath day of the week, yet very few observe *either* day as the day of rest God commands ... so all the argument over which is which seems empty when we see in both that people either work or cause others to work for them.

Sunday or Saturday, there is no Sabbath in today's self-society.

The things of God are blurred, obscured, ignored, excused.

The day of rest is, for most self-styled Christians in these busy times, just another day to eat out, shop, work in the yard, etc.

⁸⁷ Exodus 20:8-11

When Soul Sees Self

All seven days we work or let others work for us (waitresses or football players). We shop, go out to eat, or catch up on chores we didn't have time for during our five-day work week.

We abuse the Sabbath.

We don't rest.

We don't allow others to rest.

God ordained a day of rest to promote fellowship, time to share with others on an equal footing, rich and poor alike.

It's not just for us to rest.

It's for our neighbors' rest as well.

He calls us *all* to rest on His Sabbath.

God explains clearly in the Book of Law, "The seventh day is the Sabbath of your God. No one is to work. *Your manservant and maidservant are to rest as well as you.* Remember, you were once servants in Egypt, and I brought you out. Keep the Sabbath."⁸⁸

The Sabbath is one day out of seven in which those who serve us may rest as well as we!

Why did the ear-scratching preachers stop teaching this?

It is a time to remember, a day to reflect on the childhood of our past when we were still in bondage to our sinful self nature, railing and cursing enemies, unable to control passions, angry, defensive, with no peace and no rest.

Those who imagine the Sabbath is an option fail to understand that God ordained it for *fellowship*: man with God, God with man, and man with man, equals all, *under-standing*.

God is "no respecter of persons"⁸⁹ but sees us all as equals and loves us *every single one* ... as we should love each other!

So, God urges us to rest one day in seven and let our neighbors and servants rest as well as we, a day when we treat each other as the equals that we are ... regardless of social status or circumstance of servitude!

⁸⁸ Deuteronomy 5:14-15

⁸⁹ Acts 10:34

The Sabbath of Years

Not only did God ordain the seventh *day* to be a Sabbath day of rest but also the seventh *year!*

That's right, one year in every seven, too.

A seventh year of rest!

It's what God desires for us.

In the Book of Exodus we read God's command, "Six years you shall sow your land and gather in the fruits thereof, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie still, *that the poor of your people may eat*, and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner you shall deal with your vineyard and your olive yard."⁹⁰

Again, the purpose is to benefit others.

In Leviticus we read a similar directive, "Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in the fruit thereof, but the seventh year shall be a Sabbath of rest unto the land, a Sabbath for the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard."⁹¹

God wants us to rest one year in seven, "that the poor of your people may eat."⁹²

Agricultural experts recognize the wisdom of this command. It's essential to allow farmland to lie fallow once in a while, i.e., to let it rest for a season to be restored in mineral nutrients so future crops may flourish. If land is used year after year to grow crops, the soil's vitality is lost. The crops grow weaker season by season until, if the practice is continued long enough, the land becomes worthless and *must* be left to lie fallow until the soil nutrients are replenished. People in Haiti are starving at this very hour because their land has been raped by constant use and will no longer support a decent crop, so people are starving!

Love instructs.

Self won't listen.

Self demands what it can't have.

⁹⁰ Exodus 23:10-11

⁹¹ Leviticus 25:3-4

⁹² Ibid.

When Soul Sees Self

The children of Israel demanded to know, “What shall we eat the seventh year if we’re not allowed to sow or gather a harvest?”⁹³

God assured them, “I will command my blessing upon you, and the sixth year shall yield fruit enough for three years. Then, in the eighth year you may sow again and, until the new harvest comes in, you will eat the old fruit stored up from the sixth year.”⁹⁴

God invited his children to trust His provision.

He makes the fields blossom, and it is He who gives the harvest.

If we refuse to rest as He commands, allow our fields to rest and our neighbors to rest as well, we cannot be surprised when our lives fail to reap good harvest, societies crumble, and the less fortunate rebel, riot in our streets, and run to angry religions for relief!

“If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and observe all His commands to *do* them, He shall greatly bless you, giving you the land to possess as an inheritance. And, you shall lend to many, but you shall not borrow. You will reign over many, but they shall not reign over you.

“Do not harden your hearts, nor refuse to give to those in need.

“Especially beware lest your wicked hearts refuse to release the debt of them who owe you.

“For, if you give to others I will bless everything you lift your hands to do.”⁹⁵

God says He will provide *if we obey*.

If we do *not* obey, however, it is certain we will suffer greatly, whether by stunted crops in our fields or an impoverished class of rebellious souls rioting within our cities, murdering, pillaging, and destroying our children’s future hope of peace and *rest*.

God never *forces* us to obey.

God desires us to obey from our *hearts*, something we do when His law is written in our hearts⁹⁶ by Christ’s presence *within* us.

The power to obey is not ours.

⁹³ Lev 25:20

⁹⁴ Lev 25:21-22

⁹⁵ Deuteronomy 15:4-11

⁹⁶ Jeremiah 31:33

It is a willing desire God gives to those who receive Christ in their hearts.

A little boy asks his daddy, "How can I be good? I don't always obey you, but I *want* to obey!" The wise father smiles, knowing the important part is in place. His boy *wants* to be good. He *wants* to obey. The seed is sown.

Paul writes to the Christians at Rome, "I do what I wish not to do, and what I wish to do I do not."⁹⁷

Dare we imagine we are more righteous than Paul?

Dare we imagine we always do right and never do wrong?

Even Paul did not do as he knew he should. He wanted to do right, but admits he was unable to perform it.⁹⁸

In his heart, however, he had the Love of Christ guiding him to do as God desired, counseling him to ignore self.

Whittier expresses our human plight and hope we have through God's redeeming love in one of my favorite poems.⁹⁹

At Eventide

John Greenleaf Whittier

Poor and inadequate the shadow-play
Of gain and loss, of waking and of dream,
Against life's solemn background needs must seem
At this late hour. Yet, not unthankfully,
I call to mind the fountains by the way,
The breath of flowers, the bird-song on the spray,
Dear friends, sweet human loves, the joy of giving
And of receiving, the great boon of living
In grand historic years when Liberty
Had need of word and work, quick sympathies
For all who fail and suffer, song's relief,
Nature's uncloying loveliness; and chief,
The kind restraining hand of Providence,
The inward witness, the assuring sense
Of an Eternal Good which overlies
The sorrow of the world, Love which outlives

⁹⁷ Romans 7:15

⁹⁸ Romans 7:18-19

⁹⁹ At Eventide, John Greenleaf Whittier, 1878.

When Soul Sees Self

All sin and wrong, Compassion which forgives
To the uttermost, and Justice whose clear eyes
Through lapse and failure look to the intent,
And judge our frailty by the life we meant.

We are frail indeed and foolish to imagine we can transcend our humanity while trapped in these mortal shells.

Only by God's redeeming grace can any of us escape the self we've been and know the joy of being souls alive by Christ's eternal will.

God judges what we wish to be, not what we are.

What we wish to be is planted in our hearts by his indwelling spirit of truth, transforming us by Christ' love, mercy, gentleness, peace, and kindness.

The only force that can make us truly good is our desire to *be* good, and that desire comes only by God's presence *within* us.

First we must make room for Christ to live within us, to give us the desire to obey from our hearts. Then we can begin leaving the pain of our dark rebellious past behind.

None of us possesses the power to become righteous or achieve any lasting success in our own strength. We need to be transformed by God's indwelling presence, His laws written in our hearts. Only then can we celebrate the power of His Glory flowing through us.

Only then can we begin to know His truth and enter His rest.

The Year of Jubilee

Not only did God ordain one day out of every seven days and one year out of every seven years, He also ordained a Sabbath rest to be observed in the year that followed the seventh of Sabbath years, i.e., the 50th year.

This was to be the Year of Jubilee.

“You shall count seven Sabbaths of years (seven times seven years) and the space of seven Sabbaths of years shall be forty nine years. Then you shall sound the trumpet of the jubilee on the tenth day of the seventh month, in the Day of Atonement. The trumpet shall sound through all the land, setting aside the fiftieth year as holy, proclaiming liberty to every inhabitant throughout the land. It shall be a jubilee. You shall return to every man the things that

are his, and he shall be returned to his own family. You shall neither sow new seeds nor reap the things that are grown. You shall neither gather grapes nor dress the vines. You shall eat out of the fields and not from a harvest. The fiftieth year is a jubilee. It shall be holy. And, whether you buy or sell, you shall not oppress one another.”¹⁰⁰

Again God's purpose: that we “not oppress one another.”

God calls *all* to rest.

“God sees us not as Jew or Greek, bond or free, male or female, but all Abraham's seed, heirs to His promises, united by fellowship in Christ's love.”¹⁰¹

God's goal is for us to *rest* together as He dwells in us!

Rest with neighbors as well as with Him.

Rest even with our enemies!

There is no option.

The Royal Law is, “Love your neighbor as thyself.”¹⁰²

One *cannot* love Christ while refusing to love his neighbor.

We are called to love our neighbor as we love our own souls, not putting our self above them or requiring them to work for us without a time of rest. God wants us to share His blessings as brothers and sisters ... not as masters and servants.

We can never find rest at the cost of others' suffering.

When we see others struggling we should think, “There, but for the grace of God, go *I*,” then go and help them.

All is by the grace of God.

But for the grace of God you'd not be reading my book.

But for the grace of God I'd not be writing it.

I and you and everyone else, for that matter, would be drunken murderers hiding from the police, angry at the world for things our self has done, bitter, diseased, dying alone.

So we learn to forgive.

¹⁰⁰ Lev 25:8-14

¹⁰¹ Gal 3:28-29

¹⁰² James 2:8

When Soul Sees Self

When we refuse to forgive, there's no excuse. We only hurt our souls. It's not that we are punished for refusing to forgive. It's that our choice sends us to a destination that is *not* a resting place.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ our Lord.”¹⁰³

Our unforgiveness hurts us.

It doesn't hurt others nearly so much as we imagine. Most folks we refuse to forgive go merrily about their lives as if we don't exist and aren't the least impacted by our self-ishness. So long as we are unforgiving and bitter, they'd rather have nothing to do with us, so we are the losers, not they.

God allows us to reap the grim consequence of disobedience to Christ's command, “Love one another, as I have loved *you*.”¹⁰⁴

We were none of us altogether innocent when soldiers nailed His hands and feet to that old wooden cross.

None of us!

What if He did not forgive?

What if He blamed us for His sufferings, as we blame others for ours and harbor bitterness within our self-controlled souls?

Where would we be now?

Even the Old Testament warns, “You shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”¹⁰⁵

And again, “The stranger that dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”¹⁰⁶

We are strangers in a strange land.¹⁰⁷

We have all been through an Egypt of our own.

Jesus tells us, “The first commandment is this, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second commandment

¹⁰³ Rom 6:23

¹⁰⁴ John 13:34

¹⁰⁵ Lev 19:18

¹⁰⁶ Lev 19:34

¹⁰⁷ 1 Peter 2:11-12

is like the first, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no greater commandment than these."¹⁰⁸

"Do not commit adultery. Do not kill, steal, bear false witness, or desire what is not yours."

He then adds, "If there be any other commandment, it is briefly this: "Love your neighbor."¹⁰⁹

Love that helps a neighbor fulfills the law.¹¹⁰

To say one loves his neighbor while oppressing him is delusion.

God is not deceived.

If we aren't loving others, we aren't in God's will and Christ is not in us.

It matters not how loudly we protest to the contrary.

James admonishes those who love with words, "If a brother or sister be naked and hungry, and you say 'Go in peace. Be warmed and filled,' yet you give them nothing to wear or eat, how have you benefited them at all?"¹¹¹

John writes in the first of his three Gospel letters to the brethren, "Let us not love in word alone, but in deed and truth."¹¹²

God instructed the children of Israel, "If your brother be fallen into poverty and suffer in decay with you, then you should relieve his distress. Even if he is a stranger or a traveler stopping on his journey to a far-off land, you should relieve him. Let him live with you. Charge no interest. Make no profit. Fear God."¹¹³

This is love.

Words are cheap.

Love has a price.

Pay it gladly and find your resting place.

¹⁰⁸ Mark 12:30-31

¹⁰⁹ Rom 13:9

¹¹⁰ Rom 13:10

¹¹¹ James 2:15-16

¹¹² 1 John 3:18

¹¹³ Lev 25:35-37

The Seventh Millennium

Some Bible scholars believe God not only ordained one day in seven as the Sabbath day, one year in seven as the Sabbath year, and one year to follow seven sevens as the Year of Jubilee. They also say He ordained a Sabbath millennium—one-thousand years of rest to follow the first six-thousand years since He breathed life into Adam and gave humanity words so creature might converse with his Creator and be saved.

We know from Adam's first breath until the night Jesus was born is approximately 4,000 years. Since the first Christmas 2,000 more have passed. That's 6,000 years, give or take a few.

I write these words in June 2015.

The seventh millennium is approaching, if not already here.

There are missing days and months, shabby calendar-keeping, but the first day of the seventh millennium cannot be far away.

The exact moment of its official start may not coincide with the falling ball in Times Square this winter, but the seventh thousand years of man cannot be far and soon may usher in its long-awaited thousand years of blessed rest.

The millennium topic triggers heated debate in many churches. However, none dispute that Adam was created approximately 6,000 years ago (from best studies available) and it's time for the seventh thousand years to begin.

God plans something very special for His Sabbath Millennium.

Many say Christ is coming to establish His Kingdom on Earth, that the lion will lie down with the lamb, that wars will cease.¹¹⁴

John speaks in his Revelation, "I saw thrones, and to them that sat upon them judgment was given. I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Christ, and for the word of God, which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark on their foreheads, or in their hands, and they lived and reigned with Christ *a thousand years*."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Isa 11:1-10

¹¹⁵ Rev 20:4

Prophecies are unclear. No mention of a *seventh* thousand years is in the Bible, but mention is made of a seventh *day*, and elsewhere that a day is like a thousand years to God.¹¹⁶

Many say the Bible assures us of a seventh millennium, and that the thousand year reign of Christ on Earth will begin the first day of those seventh thousand years.

Bible scholars do not know if the reign will begin then or some other time, for Jesus said, "It is not for you to know the times and seasons the Father has put in His own power."¹¹⁷

The seventh millennium may not be the thousand years the Bible says Christ will rule Earth. Perhaps it's some *other* thousand years unrelated to the first six.

Yet, certain we are of many evidences of change now upon us. Never before has so much power been controlled by military forces of governments. Always in the past it has been possible for armed men to rise up in protest of their leaders' excesses and pull down despotic rule, replacing it with a milder form of governance by which people can exist in peace and safety for the most part.

The American Revolution is an example. A tiny band of farmers and merchants defeated the army of a great monarch, obtaining for their sacrifice a new way of life in which people could decide their fate and not be victimized by edicts of a distant throne.

Such bravery faces stiffer barriers today.

It's unlikely any band of farmers and merchants will ever unseat a military power possessed of smart bombs, nuclear submarines, jet fighters, or missiles that can seek and destroy distant targets anywhere on the planet. It has never been so impossible to alter governments as it now is. As people grow deaf to voices of reason in our past, and leaders pander to demands of multitudes who insist new ideas are better than the old, that government is the remedy for every human problem, control of political power will continue moving farther from the people's reach until, at last, *all* power will be wielded by a tiny few *or perhaps a single person who cannot be unseated.*

¹¹⁶ 2 Pet 3:8

¹¹⁷ Acts 1:7

When Soul Sees Self

At this very hour men dream of a worldwide regime led by one man having absolute control over everything. They are dying for that dream and killing innocent people in the process!

All military power will be under his or her command.

All rebellion will be crushed as quickly as it is discovered.

Never before has such a thing been possible.

The world will be under one flag.

There'll be rumors of peace, but the end will come suddenly.¹¹⁸

Many Bible scholars believe Christ is going to appear in Glory to defeat the enemies of His Church and establish a reign of peace to last 1,000 years. At an hour in the not too distant future, He may send an angel to sound the trumpet of jubilee and usher in an age of rest such as man has never known.

Isaiah saw that day and wrote, "He shall judge among nations and rebuke many people. They'll beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, nor shall they learn war anymore."¹¹⁹

Isaiah says, "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb. The leopard shall lie down with the baby goat. The calf, the young lion, and the stall-fed cow shall dwell together in peace. A little child shall lead them. The cow and bear shall feed, and their young ones shall lie down together. The lion shall eat straw like the ox. The infant child shall play unharmed with the poisonous snake, and a weaned child shall safely place his hand in the den of the viper. None shall suffer hurt, and none shall destroy ... *for the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* And in that day Christ shall stand as an ensign for His people. To that ensign shall the people seek, and His rest shall be glorious."¹²⁰

What rest that will be, not a day, not a month, not a year, but a *thousand years!*

He *is* our rest, our fortress, and our sure defense.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ 1 Thessalonians 5:3

¹¹⁹ Isaiah 2:4

¹²⁰ Isaiah 11:6-10

¹²¹ 2 Samuel 22:2, Psalms 18:2,

The Night

God set the stars and moon in space to rule the night, ordaining by His perfect will that we should work while the sun shines and rest during hours of darkness.

He made the night so we'd be unable to till fields and struggle perpetually without respite.

In years past it was impossible to work after the sun went down. The night was for rest, as was the Sabbath. It was time God gave us to enjoy sweet fellowship with friends and family.

Today's electric lights and other technological devices make it possible to work long after the sun settles in the West. We labor day and night. Some work "swing shift" beginning at midnight and returning home when the rest of us are starting the day with our first cup of coffee and morning news.

Night and day are not so different as once they were.

There is coming, however, a night when none will work, a night into which all will walk and never return.

That night is certain.

It is not so far away.

None escape.

No candle of our making can dispel the darkness of that night.

The light we hope for there is the light of God's eternal mercy.

Your Bible says there is a city in that place beyond our life in which there is no darkness at all.

In the book of Revelation, John describes his vision of the city that lies beyond the night of death. "The twelve gates were pearls. Every gate a pearl. The street was pure gold, as transparent glass. I saw no temple, for the Lord and the lamb are the temple of it. The city had no need of sun or moon to shine, for the Glory of God lightened it, and the lamb is the light thereof. The nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory and honor into it. The gates of it shall not be shut at all. There shall be no night there."¹²²

The night that waits us is but a moment, a curtain through which we step into the glorious light of God's eternal truth.

¹²² Rev 21:21-25

When Soul Sees Self

We shall all be changed when we pass through that night.

For souls whose life is Christ, there'll be rest in that tomorrow.

For those whose life is the treasure of earth, “where moth and rust corrupt, and thieves break through and steal,”¹²³ there will be torment, gnashing of teeth, and eternal darkness forever.

What surpassing joy that “God so loved the world,”¹²⁴ that we may enter His rest *today* by inviting Christ to live within us *now*, confident He alone can be entrusted with our souls, certain His life is eternal life and His rest is perfect rest.

#

¹²³ Mat 6:19

¹²⁴ John 3:16

GOD'S PURPOSE

For Refreshment

God invites us to rest in refreshment, regeneration, reassurance, remembrance, redemption, repentance, and revelation.

These we receive from God alone.

We *cannot* create them ourselves.

They are freely given.

It is God's way.

Those who refuse continue to struggle and die.

Those who accept find rest and life eternal.

Isaiah wrote, "They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint."¹²⁵

The word "wait" is the Hebrew *qavah*, i.e., to look for patiently.

Looking patiently is resting.

The one for whom we wait is certain to appear.

We are not anxious.

We are confident, so we rest.

As we wait patiently, He renews our strength.

We are refreshed.

If we are impatient, we're like the cook who stands over his pot expecting his watching will make the water boil more quickly. God moves in His own time.

He renews our strength *if* we wait patiently.

He wants us to rely on Him.

He wants us to acknowledge our need.

He wants us to ask Him to dwell within us.

So we ask, wait, and are refreshed as we see His work begin.

The first Psalm praises the refreshment that comes to those who wait. "Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the

¹²⁵ Isa 40:31

When Soul Sees Self

scornful. His delight is in the law of the Lord. He meditates in the law of the Lord both day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by rivers of water, yielding fruit in its season. His leaf shall not wither, and whatever he does shall prosper.”¹²⁶

To live as a tree planted by a river of nourishing water is rest.

To yield fruit when the time is right and not worry if the fruit does not promptly appear is rest.

To know our lives are secure and all we set out to do will be blessed with success is rest.

Rest is his who ignores the counsel of ungodly men, does not go where the rebellious go, refuses to judge his neighbor, delights in the principles of Christ.

We who know God’s judgment, judge no man and are judged by no man.¹²⁷

We rest in the mercy of Christ who saves us from such things.

He is our law, written on the tablets of our hearts.¹²⁸

We are new creatures by His life *within* us

We rest in the newness of life He gives.¹²⁹

We live, yet nevertheless not we, but He lives *within* us.¹³⁰

The sweetest song of refreshment is the most famous psalm of all. “The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for He is with me. His rod and staff comfort me. He prepares a table before me in the presence of my enemies. He anoints my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the House of the Lord forever.”¹³¹

Our God is a gentle shepherd.

¹²⁶ Psalms 1:1-3

¹²⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:15

¹²⁸ Jeremiah 31:33

¹²⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17

¹³⁰ Galatians 2:20

¹³¹ Psalms 23

He keeps watch for our souls, longing to fellowship with us as a shepherd abides with his sheep, caring for us, leading us, making us lie down in green pastures.

He restores our souls.

He leads us in *His* righteousness.

As we walk through this valley of the shadow of death, we rest in assurance that He who already passed through the night of death and arose from the tomb has prepared a place of rest for us who have Him within us.

We need fear no evil.

He has prepared a table for us in the presence of those who hate us, and they are astonished at His grace.

He anoints us with the oil of His love.

Our lives are filled to overflowing.

His love pours through us into the lives of others.

His goodness and mercy endure.

We are certain of a resting place in *His* eternal house forever.

This is His refreshment and renewal.

This is rest.

We who are called of God (no matter where we are along the path that leads to His perfection) are called to be refreshed and be renewed, to be transformed as well as converted, to be as children, baby lambs resting in the arms of our loving shepherd.

We are refreshed in the water of His love flowing through us.

We are transformed by His forgiveness.

We rest in the work He has accomplished for our sakes already and rejoice in the work He is doing in us and through us now!

For Regeneration

Paul encourages us to “be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so you may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God.”¹³²

The perfect will of God is that we be *regenerated*, transformed.

¹³² Rom 12:2

When Soul Sees Self

The regenerating transformation results not from our labor to be righteous or even to “be Christlike”, but by the righteousness of Christ who comes to live *within* us.

Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again.”¹³³

Nobody understood . . . not Peter, John, James, and certainly not old Nicodemus who responded by asking if he must go through the womb once more!

The mystery of regeneration was not revealed to any of them during Jesus’ life on Earth. He hinted at it, but it was not explained, because it is only discovered when He is found *within* us and, even then, like gravity and magnetism, it can only be described.

It is The Gospel Mystery.¹³⁴

Jesus told Nicodemus eternal life begins by being born again.

Nicodemus did not understand regeneration, being renewed, transformed, leaving his old life behind, allowing the new life of Christ *within* to have preeminence. He could not understand nor could any of the disciples, for they’d not yet experienced what was about to change the world!

God’s Holy Spirit alive *within* them and someday soon within us all when the Sabbath Millennium dawns!

We need to be re-generated, not re-adjusted, re-awakened, or re-lived. Those three words imply we once *were* adjusted, awake, or alive and only need a little tweaking here and there to get us *back* to what we ought to be, what we once were.

We never were what we need to be!

That’s the whole point of the Gospel.

We must be born again!

We start over.

We begin becoming what we never were before.

We are not called to *be* Christ-like.

We are called to let Christ *be* us!

Yes, it *is* a mystery.

It *is* beyond our cognitive grasp.

It is amazing grace!

¹³³ John 3:7

¹³⁴ The Gospel Mystery, Graves, Amazon, 2015.

God's Purpose

It is God's perfect gift, a baby born to die for you and me so He can be the life of our eternal souls, the Light in our darkness, Love that knows no bounds.

Done with self by the time our bodies die.

Transformed by the re-newing of our minds.

This isn't just repair of something broken. It's the complete replacement of self. It is God embracing our souls in the protection of Christ's nail-pierced hands forevermore, no longer victims of pride and ego, no longer haunted by desire for things and praise of people, no longer lost.

Souls clothed in Christ are re-born!

Christ knocks at the door of our souls, desiring to come in, and we are "born again" when He enters and lives His life *within* us.

We cannot make ourselves new.

We cannot make ourselves "like Him" ... though many try.

It is *His* life that makes us new.

It is *His* blood that washes away the stain of sin.

It is *His* wisdom that erases the deceptions we once believed.

It is *His* healing that relieves the ache of past disappointments.

It is *His* nail-pierced hands that bind our wounds.

We cannot heal ourselves.

We cannot fix what's broken!

We can do nothing but open the door and invite Him in!

Then regeneration begins.

Self is seen as our enemy.

Christ is our Salvation.

We are changed.

We are children once again, loving our Father, born again by His will, His mercy, His grace.

Our new birth by Christ's love is God's work.

It is His plan.

It is the Gospel.

It changes lives as nothing else can ever do.

We are regenerated, and there's no going back.

When Soul Sees Self

The mystic beauty of re-birth is that we do not make it happen. We *cannot* make it happen. It's beyond our ability.

We may prevent it by rebellion and fear, but we cannot make it happen any more than a baby can make itself alive in its mother's womb or force its way into the world before God's appointed time.

Nor can any preacher, pastor, priest, mullah, or medicine man give us magic words to repeat or daily practices to perform. If we believe we can wiggle our way into the kingdom by words or work, we are fooling our souls, like billions of lost souls today who just don't get it *because it's not yet been revealed to them!*

Paul says they cannot "get it" because it is spiritually discerned, revealed to us by Christ himself once He begins to live *within* us, once we begin to experience His work, His life, His wisdom. Until then we are blind, and if we teach some other way then we are the blind leading the blind in a darkness leading to eternal destruction.

The only life that never dies is *His* life.

So, we pray to be regenerated and leave the work to Him.

Waiting patiently.

"It is God who has made us and not we ourselves."¹³⁵

"We are His workmanship."¹³⁶

There is no other way.

We must be born again, and the only thing we can do is pray for Christ to "come alive" *within* us ... then wait patiently.

Nicodemus was one of the most learned men of Israel, yet he was stumped when Jesus told him, "Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."¹³⁷

He did not yet have the Spirit of Christ *within*, so he could not see the Kingdom of God nor understand being born again!

He responded, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter his mother's womb a second time?"¹³⁸

Like most humans on this planet, he believed God was outside, up in heaven, that each of us is our own person, separate from God.

¹³⁵ Psalms 100:3

¹³⁶ Ephesians 2:10

¹³⁷ John 3:3

¹³⁸ John 3:4

This is what other religions call “duality” or “maya”, the trap of thinking we are separate from God, that God is *outside* and we are *inside*.

We are blind until the life of Christ is seen *within* us.

God must open our eyes.

Jesus said, “Unless you are delivered from your mother’s womb by physical birth and also from the darkness of your rebellion and pride, you will never see the Kingdom of God.”¹³⁹

The Kingdom of God is *within* us.

But, so many of us are filled to the brim with “self”.

There is no room for Him at our inn.

God refuses to push self aside until we are brought to our knees and plead for His life to be revealed *within* us.

He is the tiny mustard seed, waiting for us to invite Him to come alive and grow *within* us and be our life.

Once we give Him permission to show our souls the truth that self has been hiding from us, He gently begins to reveal Himself, and we become new creatures, delivered from darkness by His light that renews our minds and regenerates our souls.

Being born again has nothing to do with our bodies. It’s birth of a new person within us, the Christ Person, the true love in our lives, love as we never knew love before, advent of a miracle, the dawn of our eternal life.

We “enter His gates with *intuitive* thanksgiving, and enter His courts with *intuitive* praise ... for the Lord *is* truly good. His mercy is everlasting.”¹⁴⁰

We are regenerated.

God’s will doesn’t hang over our heads like Damocles’ sword, ready to smite us the first time we stray from the narrow path set out for us by His Law. If it were thus, we’d have no hope at all, for all of us have strayed too far from His Law to ever find our way back on our own, i.e., without His grace.

We’d have no hope at all if it were up to us to regenerate our souls and keep our souls clean.

¹³⁹ John 3:5-6

¹⁴⁰ Psalms 100:4-5

When Soul Sees Self

Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.”

God forgives our blindness!

We don’t have to worry if we’re good enough to go to heaven.

None of us is good enough.

We *cannot* be good enough in our own power.

So God waits for us to ask for His power and His presence.

God waits to *be* our wisdom, our righteousness, our strength.

He waits for us to confess our need for His life *within* us.

We still try to be good, to be loving, to give of ourselves to those in need, and that’s not a bad thing. Indeed, by the prompting of His love in us, we try harder than ever.

Yet, we *cannot* achieve perfection by trying.

He perfects us by His doing *within* us.

It is cheering to trust the encouragement of scripture, resting in the promise God makes us through Christ, certain He will keep His promise *forever*.

Jesus said, “God loves you so much that He sent me to die for you, so you would believe in His Spirit within me and, by the faith born in your hearts by my Spirit living within you, that you may enter everlasting life. God did not send me to condemn you, but that by His Spirit in me you can be saved. Whosoever believes in my Father’s Spirit in me shall never die.”¹⁴¹

We can *all* be born again.

We can *all* have a new beginning, a fresh start.

We can *all* be forgiven.

The slate of our shortcomings can be wiped completely clean.

We can become new creatures.¹⁴²

We can live by the law of Christ written in our hearts, the law of liberty, the law of love!

Jesus said more to Nicodemus about being born of God’s Spirit, adding, “The wind blows wherever it wishes. You hear it, but you

¹⁴¹ John 3:16-17

¹⁴² 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15

cannot tell where it comes from or where it goes. So is every one that is born by the Spirit of God.”¹⁴³

When Christ is risen in our hearts, we long to do what's right, we want to love others, we desire to be all we can become, we hate our self and its self-ishness.

We so yearn to love others that remembering our failures turns us away from future error, guided by His truth.

His salvation works *through* us according to His Will, and we tremble as we see His Work making a difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us.¹⁴⁴

By His life *within* us, loving our neighbor becomes natural, intuitive, like wind blowing wherever it wishes.

We don't have to think about it.

We don't have to struggle with it.

We just let His life live *within* us and *through* us.

It's *wonderful!*

Whoever has Christ's life will never die.

He knocks at the door of our soul.

Fling that door open wide and invite Him in!

It matters not who you are or what you've done in the past. He knocks at every door ... even the doors of those who spitefully use us, persecute us, and judge us.

God is not a respecter of persons.¹⁴⁵

He seeks to live in each and every one of us.

“We are the people of His pasture, the sheep of His hand.”¹⁴⁶

He is our shepherd, and we are His sheep.

He is the potter. We are His clay.¹⁴⁷

Millions deny the regeneration He offers. The fault lies with self who holds on tenaciously. Yet, God has chosen the foolish things

¹⁴³ John 3:8

¹⁴⁴ Philippians 2:12

¹⁴⁵ Acts 10:34

¹⁴⁶ Psalms 95:7

¹⁴⁷ Jeremiah 18:4-6

When Soul Sees Self

of the world to confound the wise, imperfect things like us to demonstrate His perfect plan of grace.¹⁴⁸

That perfect plan is beginning to emerge in these present times as never before seen.

We are being changed by this emerging awareness of grace.

Some still wear professed Christianity as a badge of distinction they earn in the eyes of others by good deeds or church attendance. They proclaim themselves to be *born again!* They are militant for Christ. Their claim is a battle cry that unites them against all who are not as they. Thinking themselves to be something when (like the rest of us) they are *nothing* but by God's grace, they deceive themselves.¹⁴⁹

Some claim to be specialists for Christ, spiritual powerhouses, prayer warriors. They know the lingo. They appear to rejoice, yet dispute among themselves, denying the very grace by which they claim to be saved. They are wolves posing as sheep,¹⁵⁰ blind leaders of the blind.¹⁵¹

They have not yet discerned the mystery of Christ *within*.

Intoxicated by signs and wonders, they intrude into things they have not seen, vainly puffed up in the mind of their blind self.¹⁵²

They need forgiveness for they know not know what they do, deceiving others whom they lead away from truth.

It was so in Jesus' day.

Souls truly regenerated by Christ's love display the fruits of His Spirit: intuitive love, intuitive joy, intuitive peace, intuitive long-suffering, intuitive gentleness, intuitive goodness, intuitive faith, intuitive meekness, intuitive temperance, intuitive righteousness, and intuitive knowledge of truth.¹⁵³

Their righteousness is not of themselves.

They are not imitations of Christ.

They are bearers of His Spirit alive within them.

¹⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

¹⁴⁹ Galatians 6:3

¹⁵⁰ Matthew 7:15

¹⁵¹ Matthew 15:13-14

¹⁵² Colossians 2:18-19

¹⁵³ Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 5:9

This wisdom from above is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy, filled with good fruits, without partiality, without hypocrisy, and sown in peace of them that make peace.¹⁵⁴

We are admonished to judge spirits to see if they're of God or not, warned to test them, for all spirits are not of God, and many false prophets are in the world.¹⁵⁵

We can *know* if a spirit is of God or not and resist such spirits and the condemnation they sling at our souls because of what our self has done. No evil spirit can discourage us nor steal our peace. We have Christ's Witness within us, judging righteous judgment, showing us which spirits are not of God.

There's no bitterness, wrath, or anger where God's Spirit is.¹⁵⁶

There is no envy or strife.¹⁵⁷

Those who are clamorous, malicious, and speak evil of others grieve God's Spirit.¹⁵⁸ They may say they're "in Christ", yet if they are angry with spouses, children, friends, co-workers, or their neighbors they are "in darkness still",¹⁵⁹ and Christ is not in them.

Souls cursed by bitterness, wrath, anger, envy, and strife are *not* clothed with God's Spirit.

Such characteristics are of self, not Christ.

They say they're in fellowship with Christ yet walk in darkness, filled with lying spirits,¹⁶⁰ deceiving themselves, leading astray all who follow them into damnation.

By counting themselves righteous, they are at war with reality.

They are not born again.

Truly born again souls are willing to be wrong, forgive without reservation, love with absolute sincerity, and pray to be more fully filled with Christ's Spirit. They are kind, tenderhearted, childlike, and self-judging.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁴ James 3:17-18

¹⁵⁵ 1 John 4:1

¹⁵⁶ Ephesians 4:31-5:1

¹⁵⁷ James 3:14

¹⁵⁸ Ephesians 4:30

¹⁵⁹ 1 John 2:9

¹⁶⁰ 1 John 1:6

¹⁶¹ Ephesians 4:32-5:1

When Soul Sees Self

They know as only born again sinners can that God is changing them by Christ's presence *within* them, His work, not any act of self. They *know* they are being saved, and they *know* it is all His work and none of their own.

This mystery is the mustard seed Jesus talked about, planted in them by His hand and for His purpose, and they rejoice as they see the seed of *His* faith within them growing day-by-day.

It's a miracle!

They are brothers and sisters, not backbiters, slanderers, cruel, or greedy. They do not sit in scorn of others.¹⁶²

They *experience* His grace and know they are only what they are by grace and grace alone.

They forgive, not from any generosity of self, but because they *know* they are forgiven even when they don't deserve to be! They know the meaning of that blessed word "for-giveness", that giving is the key, giving others what's been given them.

They cry out to God, "Father, forgive *me*. Change *me*. Use *me*. Let your love flow through *me*. Regenerate *me*. Empower *me* to show your love and mercy to a lost and dying world."

Truly born again believers judge themselves, not others.¹⁶³

People are attracted to such souls, for Christ *is* their beauty.

How does this change come about?

What makes the difference?

What causes it to happen?

How do we become regenerated?

How are we born again?

We ask.

We plead.

We know we are headed toward disaster if Christ does not come live within us and guide us to the better life He has planned for us.

It is a lifetime process.

We ask. We plead.

¹⁶² Psalms 1:1

¹⁶³ Matthew 7:1

As He shows us our continuing desperate need, we cry out daily for His mercy that alone can set our souls free from self.

Then, as we experience the change He works, gratitude moves us to care for those who don't yet know what we are receiving.

We confess we are sinners and ask God to give us more Christ to overcome and forgive the sins of self. The power flows from Him who lives within us by His grace. We ask with hearts broken by the memory of our past horrible deeds and His bleeding hands and feet.

He answers those kinds of prayers.

Then he begins the process of transforming us. It is not *our* power that transforms us. We do not transform us. We cannot transform us. We are transformed by the renewing of our minds,¹⁶⁴ as God imparts to us His wisdom, strength, and beauty.

We learn to rest in this truth, free from condemnation, immune to evil accusations, free from the shackles of laws we never could keep.

We walk a *new* path some folks call "the way".

It is the road of life eternal.

It is a highway through our desert¹⁶⁵.

Many are called to this regeneration, but few are chosen.¹⁶⁶

The way seems foolish to those who perish.¹⁶⁷

It doesn't make sense to them.

Yet, it is the power of God to us who are saved.

We are free.

We stand in His liberty,¹⁶⁸ souls purchased from self's slavery by Christ alone,¹⁶⁹ set free not by our efforts but by His grace.

¹⁶⁴ Romans 12:2, Ephesians 4:23-24

¹⁶⁵ Isaiah 40:3.

¹⁶⁶ Matthew 22:14

¹⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 1:18

¹⁶⁸ Galatians 5:1

¹⁶⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:20

When Soul Sees Self

“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who try to build it. Unless the Lord keeps the city safe, it is useless for the watchman to stay awake.”¹⁷⁰

This truth is hidden from those who are wise, righteous, or good in their own eyes.

Every good gift is from our Father, given freely by His grace.¹⁷¹

It is He who has made us and not we ourselves.¹⁷²

It is His righteousness in us that is good.

It is His wisdom in us that is wise.

It is His strength in us that is powerful.

“All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one into our own way, and our iniquity has been laid upon Jesus.”¹⁷³

The work ethic we are taught in Western culture is antithetical to the message of Christ’s Gospel, for we cannot work our way into the grace of God.

The gift of God is eternal life with *Christ*,¹⁷⁴ a gift that cannot be purchased with labor, sacrifice, or all this world’s money.¹⁷⁵

It is not for sale.

Nothing we can do will make God our debtor or require Him to repay us with His grace. Only by allowing the work of love that Christ is living *through* us to a lost and dying world can we know the wonder of eternal life.

Eternal life is already begun if we love Christ and trust Him to live within us, to guide and counsel us, and to save us from self.

We resist His grace and lose the joy of salvation by believing He is our co-pilot, that we can attain righteousness if we only have a little help from Him now and then. Such thinking is not the product of a mind transformed by the Gospel. That is our old way of thinking. It is death, not life. It is not eternal.

¹⁷⁰ Psalms 127:1

¹⁷¹ James 1:17

¹⁷² Psalms 100:3

¹⁷³ Isaiah 53:6

¹⁷⁴ Romans 6:23

¹⁷⁵ Acts 8:20

The Gospel will never make sense to a world that refuses to see we are not, as William Ernest Henley wrote in his poem *Invictus*, masters of our fate, and captains of our souls.

We are not!

Millions are taught by false religionists that they have power to overcome sin. They mock the only hope they have of escaping this world alive. I know, for I was such a man before He smiled at me with eyes of compassion. Jesus examined my heart, just as He must have looked on Peter that night the rooster crowed after that old fisherman denied him.

I stood guilty in His sight, unable to wash my hideous sin away.

The world refuses to acknowledge their need for Christ. To do so would require them to conclude their old way of life is wrong, that their old idea of “being righteous” by trying harder is wrong.

Christ *within* transforming souls by *His* work is salvation.

This makes no sense to them that perish.¹⁷⁶

Too many of us are still in our heads, not discerning that the Kingdom of God is in our souls or it is not in us at all.

The self of man cannot receive this truth. Self seeks to be equal with God, earning eternity by its own efforts.

René Descartes said, “I think, therefore I am,”¹⁷⁷ yet the “I am” in Descartes’s statement is not eternal. It is not God’s Name. It is merely “René Descartes,” a mortal self speaking about something he did not understand.

Only God is “I am” forever.

Self can think whatever it wishes, but truth remains. We are not “I am”, and God remains unchanged no matter what self thinks (or René Descartes, for that matter).

Self is finite.

God is infinite.

Self-thoughts are not His thoughts.¹⁷⁸

Self cannot begin to comprehend God.

That’s why God speaks to our eternal souls, not our heads.

¹⁷⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:14

¹⁷⁷ René Descartes (1596-1650), *Le Discours de la Méthode* [1637], IV.

¹⁷⁸ Isaiah 55:8-9

When Soul Sees Self

Head knowledge is not soul knowledge.

It's not what we think that makes us one thing or another, but what we believe in our soul.¹⁷⁹

“As a man thinks in his soul, so is he.”¹⁸⁰

“If any man thinks he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”¹⁸¹

Is it any wonder this way of grace by the life of Christ *within* seems foolish to many who think they are Christians already?

It is impenetrable to the mind of self.

It can't be figured out by logic and reason.

God hides it from the wise.¹⁸²

Many self-styled Christians believe they “got saved” by some church ritual, some supernatural vision, or some angelic voices. The evidence of their salvation is outside them. It is not Christ alive *within* them.

Their hearts aren't moved by mercy.

They judge things by self. They don't see the inky darkness in their souls. They fear what others may see on their outside, so they work to seem righteous to a watching world.

Either Christ is the shepherd of their souls, or He is not.

Either Christ is their life without end, or He is not.

Either they are truly born again, or they are not.

Many will stand before God's Judgment Seat, expecting to be approved for the good deeds they've done, yet unless they've been re-born, re-generated, and transformed by the work of His Spirit *within* (evidenced by peace, mercy, gentleness, long-suffering, self-judgment, forgiveness, and charity no man can counterfeit out of self-will alone), the Lord will say, “I never knew you.”¹⁸³

Were this not so great a calamity (nor so common among those who claim to be born again) there'd be no need to mention it. It is,

¹⁷⁹ Romans 10:10

¹⁸⁰ Proverbs 23:7

¹⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 8:2

¹⁸² Isaiah 29:14, Matthew 11:25, Luke 10:21, Mark 4:11, Romans 16:25, 1 Corinthians 2:7, Ephesians 3:1-12, Colossians 1:21-2:3

¹⁸³ Mat 7:21:23

however, a dreadful truth. Millions of souls are seduced by spirits manifesting themselves in external wonders and signs.¹⁸⁴

Truly born again people are *not* deceived. They don't operate in their own wisdom. They test spirits to see if they're of God.¹⁸⁵ They see through the masquerade of those who claim special powers and gifts, spirits that attempt to draw them from absolute reliance on God's mercy and grace. They are led by God and saved by Christ's work *within* them, not their own.

They cease from struggle and enter His rest.

They know there is nothing good in themselves except the will of God Who works good through them by His grace. They've put away judging others' unrighteousness, for they know Christ is our only righteousness, that our *self-righteousness* is filthy rags.¹⁸⁶

It is this knowledge that does the work of regeneration.

We rest in its glorious peace!

We confess we know only in part.¹⁸⁷

We wait upon the Lord.¹⁸⁸

Christ says we are branches. He is the vine.¹⁸⁹

We cannot bear fruit unless we're attached to the vine that gives us strength and by which we are fitted together with others.

Nothing self does in its own strength is of any lasting value.

All self does or ever *will* do is wasted effort unless it springs from the love born fresh in us each day by the presence of His Spirit in our soul.

Everything we build without His Wisdom is like a house built on sand. When inevitable rains of adversity come with their floods of despair, when winds of time wear away at our foundation, and the bitter trials of disappointment beat on our house, it will fall.

And, great is the fall.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Mark 13:22

¹⁸⁵ 1 John 4:1

¹⁸⁶ Isa 64:6

¹⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:9

¹⁸⁸ Isaiah 40:31

¹⁸⁹ John 15:4-6

¹⁹⁰ Matthew 7:26-27

When Soul Sees Self

If we build on our imagined wisdom, refusing to trust instead to the love of Christ within us, vainly rejecting the truth that we are nothing at all but what He desires us to be according to His own will, we lose what we hoped to gain.

This cannot be comprehended by the mind of man or woman,¹⁹¹ for it is revealed by Him only when He becomes our life.

To overcome our self, Christ builds us new upon the rock that is Him and Him alone.

In this we are more than conquerors¹⁹².

He is our victory!

We are regenerated and renewed as our souls are set free from self's struggle to be righteous in self's eyes.

We are transformed,¹⁹³ born again, free to love at last.

Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.¹⁹⁴

We need to admit our thoughts are limited and faulty, that only God's eternal mind is true. Then, when we're judged, we always overcome, for we stand not in our own righteousness but in the righteousness of Christ, and *none* can judge us there.¹⁹⁵

We can't be judged by man or woman.¹⁹⁶

We rest.

A woman caught in adultery was brought before Jesus to be judged and stoned to death for her transgression, according to the law. The men who brought her tested Him by asking, "What shall we do with her? The law says she must be put to death."¹⁹⁷

God in Jesus knew their hearts, even as He knows *our* hearts.

Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."¹⁹⁸

One-by-one the men dropped their stones and walked away in silence. Only Jesus and the woman were left.

¹⁹¹ Psalms 131:1, Psalms 139:6, Job 42:3

¹⁹² Romans 8:37

¹⁹³ Romans 12:2

¹⁹⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:17

¹⁹⁵ Romans 3:4-5

¹⁹⁶ 1 Corinthians 2:15

¹⁹⁷ John 8:4-6

¹⁹⁸ John 8:7

“What man condemns you?” Jesus asked.

“No man, Lord,” she answered.

Then he assured her, “Neither do I condemn you.”¹⁹⁹

This forgiving love of Christ overpowers our self-spirit, and by the power of His love we are born again.

His Spirit blows through our lives where it wishes and moves us to bless others by His grace.

It is His work, His Gospel.

We are constrained by His love.²⁰⁰ We do the will of God intuitively, for it is not we who do it. It is He who lives in us. It is all *His* doing!²⁰¹

Yet He will not live in us or empower us to do His will unless we ask, confessing we are weak, that He alone possesses all that we require, admitting our shame, our vanity, our need for mercy.

Then His work begins!

Christians are not perfect. We are far from it! We are human souls struggling through life like everyone else.

We aren't wise.

We aren't strong.

We do things we should not do.

We think things we should not think and desire what we should not desire.

We lose our tempers, sin, and fall.

Yet it is through this process our souls are transformed and regenerated.²⁰²

We grow in grace as we confess our need of grace.

We rest in the faith He plants within us by His presence and are assured of our salvation.

It is *all* by God's amazing grace.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ John 8:10-11

²⁰⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:14

²⁰¹ Philippians 2:13

²⁰² “Sin is necessary,” said Julian of Norwich, a 14th century Anchorite nun, “for God sees one way, and man sees another.” Man must accuse himself, she explains, so God may excuse him. What is Anglicanism, Urban T. Holmes, Morehouse-Barlow, Wilton, Connecticut, 1982.

²⁰³ 2 Peter 3:18

When Soul Sees Self

God in Christ and Christ in us!

We see ourselves in the Light of His forgiveness.

Being born again is not a choice *we* make. It's a choice *He* made before the stars were hung in space.

Paul writes, "He chose us before the foundation of the world that we would be made holy and blameless before Him in love. He predestined us to be adopted as children, according to His pleasure. He made us accepted."²⁰⁴

Christ chooses to save us by His Indwelling Spirit.

He is the Hound of Heaven, chasing us through life.

We run until He catches us, as Francis Thomson describes in his wonderfully inspired poem, "The Hound of Heaven".

*I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him, down the arches of the years;
I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways of my own mind;
And in the mist of tears I hid from Him.*²⁰⁵

We dissipate our lives in efforts to escape the truth that Christ loves us better than we love ourselves.

He yearns for us far more than we yearn for Him.

We hide from Him, as Thomson says, by struggling to prove ourselves worthy. Thereby, we miss the love that will not bow to our self-importance.

We are why He made the universe and all its beauty.

To dwell with us is His desire.

Yet we evade His love by working to deserve His love.

The love we seek is love He will only freely give.

We cannot earn it.

We are powerless to win what must be free or not at all.

"Little ones to Him belong. We are weak, but He is strong."²⁰⁶

Living a life of confessing needs and praising His sufficiency is what is meant by being born again. It is new life, regeneration that

²⁰⁴ Ephesians 1:4-6

²⁰⁵ From The Hound of Heaven, Francis Thompson 1859-1907.

²⁰⁶ From The Love of Christ, Anna Bartlett Warner. c.1911

comes from resting in His accomplished work, confident His will toward us is love, knowing we are powerless to make ourselves blameless, and joyful that He predestined us to be adopted into His Family “according to His good pleasure.”²⁰⁷

If salvation were *our* doing, if there were an edict from on high demanding complete obedience, there'd be no hope for *any* of us.

We cannot add one foot to our stature by taking thought.²⁰⁸

God calls us to turn from the toils of ego and rest in Him.

There is no room for boasting.²⁰⁹

We boast in the Lord, “which the humble hear and are glad.”²¹⁰

We boast no more of self's accomplishments.

We pray, “Be mercy in me so I may be merciful to others.”

We pray, “Be gentleness in me so I may be gentle to others.”

We pray, “Be kindness in me so I may be kind to others.”

We pray, “Be wisdom in me so I may show others your truth.”

Being born again is surrendering to God so He may have His way in your life completely ... His way.

There is no work we can do to make it happen, no ceremony or sacrifice. We ask for His life to regenerate us.

Self is replaced by His Spirit.

We rest.

For Reassurance

As we enter the resting place He offers through the Gospel of His Indwelling love, we are reassured.

In that place of rest we discover His presence and His peace.

He softly says to us, as Father to child, “Be still and know I am your God.”²¹¹

We cannot receive this reassurance until we let go of striving and rest in His merciful provision. We must first be still and listen for His Voice.

²⁰⁷ Ephesians 1:9, Phil 2:13

²⁰⁸ Matthew 6:27

²⁰⁹ Ephesians 2:9

²¹⁰ Psalms 34:2

²¹¹ Psalms 46:10

When Soul Sees Self

Short-wave operators know one *cannot* transmit *and* receive at the same time on a single frequency. It's like two people talking at each other simultaneously. Each hears what he himself is saying but cannot hear the other because his transmitter is blasting away.

To hear God, one must turn one's transmitter off and listen.

I remember operating a ham radio station in the wee hours of Ohio's winter nights as a boy. I tapped "CQ de WN8VNW K" in Morse code on an old brass key, shut down my transmitter, flipped my antenna switch from transmit to receive, clamped headphones over my ears, and *listened carefully*. If another ham picked up my feeble signal, I might hear his own feeble signal beeping faintly back at me from thousands of miles away! The 80 meter band on late winter's nights in those days was smooth as a magnetic pond on which the tiniest ripple, no matter how distantly begun, can be distinctly heard halfway around the Earth *if* one listens carefully. A tiny peep of electromagnetic energy pumped from a home-made transmitter into a wire strung from a backyard tree on the other side of the planet can be heard as clearly as if the other station were next door ... *if one first shuts down his transmitter*.

God urges us to shut down our transmitters.

He speaks with a "still small voice" *within* us.

We set aside distractions of this world and thoughts of self that crowd for our soul's constant attention so we can hear God's still small voice *and learn!*

Moses waited in Mount Horeb 40 days and 40 nights before he heard God's voice. He quieted self by not eating or drinking at all. He was seeking God by denying self. He knew God would reveal Himself when God was ready. Moses denied self the distractions of food and drink so his soul would be more sensitive to the divine presence he sought. Moses rested in faith. He was still.

Then, "The Lord spoke to Moses."²¹²

Elijah also went 40 days and 40 nights in the same mountain without food. He entered a cave where none could distract him. He was undisturbed by television, radio, billboards, family, or friends. He left the world behind him at the bottom of that mountain. Elijah hid in a lonely cave with one intention. He wanted to *hear* God.

²¹² Exodus 25:1

And, "Behold, the Word of the Lord came to him."²¹³

Jesus, too, left the noisy world of carpentry, family, bustle of dusty streets, clamor of children at play, angry shouts of drunken husbands, fearful screams of wives and children being beaten, and the clank of Roman armor. He went into the wilderness and there, for 40 days and 40 nights. He ate nothing, drank nothing, devoted to prayer and listening for His Father's Voice. He knew His Father would provide His needs.

And, His Father spoke clearly, protecting Jesus from harm.

Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were still when God spoke to them.

"Be still and know I Am," God says to us.

The children of Moses wandered 40 years in desert wilderness, afraid to fight the giants they found in the land God offered them, a land of milk and honey. They were terrified of the large men they were commanded by God to displace from that land. So, they wandered in the barren desert, far from the comfort they remembered of their days in Egypt where (though they were slaves) they ate well and dwelt in houses, instead of tents.

They wasted 40 years because they would not listen!

We hear God's voice, the "I Am" *within* us.

His voice assures us, *He is!*

We rest.

For Remembrance

God wants us to remember what He's done so we can trust fully in His promise to provide for our future.

God re-minds us.

After Noah and his family escaped the flood in an ark, God set a rainbow in the sky to commemorate the covenant He made never again to destroy the world by flood.

"I will look at the rainbow," God pledged, "and remember."²¹⁴

The Passover feast still observed by Orthodox Jews today was instituted to remember the night in Egypt when the angel of death passed over the houses the Jews marked by daubing lamb's blood

²¹³ 1 Ki 19:8-9

²¹⁴ Gen 9:15-17

When Soul Sees Self

over the doorways as God instructed. If the angel saw lamb's blood on a house, he passed over. If there was no blood, death entered and took all the children.

In the Egyptians' unmarked houses, there was great wailing and sorrow. God warned Pharaoh to release the children of Israel who had long been slaves in Egypt, and it took this harsh miracle to soften Pharaoh's heart so he would let God's people go.

Unto this day, Jews observe Passover as a time to, "Remember this day in which you came out from Egypt, from the house of bondage, for the Lord brought you out."²¹⁵

At Passover Jews remember, "You were slaves while in Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you from that place."²¹⁶

One of the Ten Commandments is, "Remember the Sabbath. Keep it holy."²¹⁷ We remember on the Sabbath those less fortunate than we, that they may rest as well as we.

God told Moses to command the people to put a fringe of blue around the hems of their garments "throughout their generations", that when they see the ribbons of blue they will *remember* the Lord's commandments and do them, that they will not seek after the desires of their eyes as once they did.²¹⁸

A time is coming, however, when *none* will remember God or His commandments, goodness, or mercy. "In death," the psalmist says, "there is no remembrance of God. None give thanks from the grave."²¹⁹

The time to remember is *now*.²²⁰

God wants us to remember from what we are redeemed.

Memory embraces reality instead of rebelling against truth.

The purpose of sharing Jesus' Last Supper of bread and wine is to remember *together*. Paul tells the church at Corinth how Jesus instructed them to share bread and wine as a memorial to Him.

²¹⁵ Exodus 13:3

²¹⁶ Deuteronomy 24:18

²¹⁷ Exodus 20:8

²¹⁸ Numbers 15:37-40

²¹⁹ Psalms 6:5

²²⁰ 2 Corinthians 6:2

Paul writes, “When Jesus had given thanks for the bread, He broke it, passed it to His friends, and said, ‘This is my body, broken for you. Eat it in remembrance of me.’”

After the same manner, He also took the cup and, when He had taken a sip, He said, ‘This is my blood, the cup of my new covenant with you. Drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show my death until I return.’”²²¹

Remembering is testimony to God's life in Christ and Christ's life in us. It's not just a time to look back but also to look forward to the certain, glorious day when the Spirit of Christ will fill us all to overflowing, clothing our souls with His eternal life of love, ushering in the promised peace on Earth at last.

When we die, however, there'll be no remembering. This is true for the wise and foolish.

The preacher Ecclesiastes proclaims he once believed wisdom greater than foolishness, “as far as light excels darkness,” but later realized one thing happens to them both. He says, “As it happens to the fool, so it happens also to me. Am *I* wiser than the fool?”

Then he adds, “This also is vanity, for all are forgotten. The fool and the wise man die the same death.”²²²

We are reminded to look back *and* look forward to understand and live more fully in God's grace today.

We learn by remembering.

Jesus says the Christ Spirit is sent by God to be our comforter, that He “will bring all things to your remembrance,”²²³ teaching us all things.

The comfort He brings is peace our self can never understand, because self is seeking acquisition of things and power it cannot retain, lost in the illusion some religions call *maya*, the mirage that makes self think God is somewhere “up there”, separate from us.

Born again people know He is our peace, so our hearts are not troubled.²²⁴ His Spirit comforts us with awareness of His presence within.

²²¹ 1 Corinthians 11:24-26

²²² Ecclesiastes: 2:13-16

²²³ John 14:25-27

²²⁴ John 14:1, John 14:27

When Soul Sees Self

The following verses remember what He's done for us, where we were when He found us, and how much we need what only He can give our weary souls.

By Blood

I hear no trumpets in fanfare
as I pray at the foot of God's Cross.
No battalion of drummers announces
my sin and my shame and my loss.
I care not for notice as I seek His grace
and before Him all treasures I toss.

For I'd purchased a future of sorrows
no labors of men could hide;
I had caused the death of my Savior,
who took up my foul cross and died,
For 'twas I drove the nails at Golgotha;
'twas I thrust the spear in His side.

But God! In His infinite mercy,
my error has cleansed by His love,
For He conquered the grave with its terrors,
and returned just like Noah's sweet dove
To offer a promise of unending joy
with Him in His heaven above.

Oh, wonder of wonders! He found me
'ere my soul into Hell had been tossed.
Helpless worm, I was hopeless without Him.
I was dead in my sins. I was lost
When He called me to look up to Calvary
and count what my errors had cost.

Now, no colorful banners precede me,
when with wonder His love I proclaim.
And, I dare not let other men praise me
for things He has done through His name.
For, I journey in wonder as you do,
His Spirit within me, a Flame.

And, my prayers find me helpless before Him,
as in groanings my heart does aim
To draw near to His Throne Room of Glory
and cry "Abba", His mercy to claim,

While off in the distance I hear the faint crow
of a rooster that's calling my name

To remind me, lest ever I doubt it,
that my soul once by sin was enslaved
In a prison my pride built around it.
For, by sin my foul life was depraved,
And my cup was not full 'till God filled it.
'Twas by blood that my soul was saved.

We need to be re-minded that we *too* were in bondage as the Jews were in Egypt. Our slavery was to self. Our captivity was the prison of pride. Our confinement was our insane desire to change reality, to live beyond the boundaries of truth, to make our own rules and, if that didn't work, to imagine what *is* to be whatever self wished it to be ... no matter who it hurt.

We did not rescue our souls from self's slavery. Our souls were bought with a price, delivered from the dominion of self, set free from the self-ishness of self, released from the darkness of self.

The bloody price was not the blood of bulls or goats. It was the precious innocent blood of Jesus, the lamb of God, shed freely on that old wooden cross to re-mind us.

To make us new.

Paul writes, "By grace are you saved through faith, and *that* [i.e., the faith] not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created by Christ to do those good works God long ago ordained we would do. Wherefore, remember," the apostle urges us, "that once you were without Christ, aliens and strangers from His Promise. You had no hope. You were in the world without God. But, though you once were far away, you now are made near to God by Jesus' blood."²²⁵

We should call each other to gather to remember together who we are, from what we were purchased, the price that was paid, the self from which we were saved.

We're no wiser nor more righteous than others who have yet to discover what we've been given, so together we pray for *them*.

²²⁵ Ephesians 2:8-13

When Soul Sees Self

“For by *one* offering,” the writer of Hebrews instructs us, “God perfected forever those who are sanctified. The Christ Spirit is our witness. The Lord said, ‘I will put my laws in their hearts, and in their minds I will write them, and I will no longer remember their sins and iniquities.’”²²⁶

How wonderful if we did not remember the iniquities of others but spent more time seeing the errors of self, remembering our own iniquities and the price that rescued our souls from eternal darkness.

To remember as God wants us to remember we must look at our “self”, give thanks for His mercy, and confess the truth lest we be caught again in the snare from which Christ is delivering us.²²⁷

We need to remind each other from what we’re being saved.

We need to admit we’re kept from falling *only* by His grace.

We need to know resting without remembering is dangerous, for unless we remember (looking back and looking ahead) we can fall in the darkness of self’s blindness once again, bending reality to what self wishes it to be, instead of seeing reality (*and self*) in the light of truth.

We need to pray continually for God to re-mind us.

We need to give God permission to re-mind us, so our souls can live free of self.²²⁸

For Redemption

Redemption is an event in the past.

We have *been* redeemed.

Our redemption began at Calvary, where Jesus gave His life to be a ransom for our souls, to save us from the consequence of self’s sin and self’s darkness through the power of His love and light.

Redemption is also an ongoing process today.

We are *being* redeemed.

Our old is *being* replaced by His new.

²²⁶ Hebrews 10:14-17

²²⁷ Hebrews 6:4

²²⁸ Romans 12:2

Our self is *being* replaced by His Spirit who reveals all things us us, but only one day at-a-time.

We are *being* “re-minded”.

He is turning our self-ish trash to treasures.

It's a day-by-day series of awakenings.

Total redemption is a lifelong process.

Someday we shall be *completely* redeemed and made like Him! When we leave this fleshly life of pride, temptation, and torment we will be *totally* redeemed “in the twinkling of an eye.”²²⁹

Our old corruptible will be replaced with His new eternal.

When the trumpet sounds for us to stand before our Maker on that day, we will experience the final work of God's redemption.

“Though it does not now appear what we shall be, we know that on that day when He appears *we shall be like Him.*”²³⁰

We shall be resurrected from our death as He was resurrected.

Our mortality will put on immortality.²³¹

All is God's doing!

None can redeem his own soul from self.

It is impossible for, by definition, redemption is an act done by one person on behalf of another, an exchange, something valuable given for another thing that by itself, i.e., until redeemed, has no worth at all.

For example, think of an old violin sitting on a pawn shop shelf. It has no value sitting there. It can't make music by itself. It needs to be redeemed by the valuable pawn ticket. The ticket has value. The violin has no value without the ticket because, until redeemed by the ticket, the old piece of wood and strings will silently gather dust, useless until the ticket is paid to redeem it into the hands of a violinist who can bring it to life and give it value.

Ocean transport companies store billions of dollars' worth of goods in harbor town warehouses. Those with the right to possess the goods are given warehouse receipts describing the property and conferring on anyone holding the receipts a right to take delivery.

²²⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:38-57

²³⁰ 1 John 3:2

²³¹ Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:53

When Soul Sees Self

Before the warehouse receipt is used to redeem those stored goods, only the receipt has value, while the stored goods just take up space in the warehouse, useless for all practical purposes.

We are much like warehoused goods or old violins sitting on a pawn shop shelf until God sends Christ to redeem us by His life.

In this transaction, God redeems our souls by replacing our old unregenerated self-spirit with *His* Spirit.

We are redeemed from death to life eternal.

Our self-directed behavior is replaced by outpouring love.

God wants to redeem each of us.²³²

He invites us to trade our dead self-spirit for Christ's life *within*.

What part do *we* play in this process?

Ask the warehoused goods. What did *they* do while waiting to be redeemed?

Ask the old violin. What could *it* do to make music once again until it was redeemed?

What can *we* do but wait and pray?

We cannot redeem ourselves.

Christ redeems us or we are not redeemed.

Christ is our Redeemer.

We rest in His work of redemption, rejecting the lies that tell us we are responsible for our redemption, that there's something more we must do than just wait expectantly and pray, that the path to rest is through labor.

Those self-willed lies lead to darkness and death.

Christ sets us free from bondage to self.²³³

We know redemption is the work of our Redeemer, not of labor, self-sacrifice, Bible study, prolonged fasts, ablutions, celibacy, or any other ascetic denial of happiness the lies would have us believe are necessary to obtain God's blessings and forgiveness!

We wait on Him, into whose nail-pierced hands our souls have been entrusted by the Father.

²³² 2 Pet 3:9

²³³ Gal 5:1

Our souls are purchased by His blood.²³⁴

Our redemption is His work.

We're confident He will complete the task He's begun, because we know He *has* begun it.

We experience His presence *within*, evidence of redemption.

And, in our hope of glory with Him we *rest!*

For Repentance

Nailed to the cruel cross Jesus completed His purpose.

He paid the price to purchase our repentance.

He purchased our repentance with His blood!

The prophecies were fulfilled, but the work was yet to begin!

The firm foundation of faith was laid secure for all eternity.

His blood was spilled to buy our Godly sorrow.

Yet, our *repentance* did not begin 2000 years ago!

We were not yet born, had not yet heard the Gospel story nor been touched by godly sorrow for the price He paid for us.²³⁵

It is in *this* age, today, that we turn from the habits and practices of our past *because we are ashamed and no longer want to be the self we once were.*

Our godly sorrow starts *today.*

Our godly sorrow makes us *beg* to be changed.

Our godly sorrow works *true* repentance.

All else is counterfeit make-believe.

Our repentance begins *now*, purchased by Jesus' precious blood long ago at Calvary's cross.

We don't want to live as we once did (with *self* in the driver's seat, seeking credit for self's good deeds, believing self is entitled to love, angry when life hurts, denying truth so self can get what self wants when self wants it) because Jesus died long ago on that cross to purchase our godly sorrow and lay the foundation for our genuine repentance and the redemption that follows repentance.

²³⁴ Ephesians 1:14

²³⁵ 2 Corinthians 7:10

When Soul Sees Self

The love of Christ in Jesus motivated Him to lay down His life long ago, so we would pray to be changed *today!*²³⁶

He fulfilled the old prophecies to offer us His Christ Spirit.

He alone is worthy of honor and glory forever.

We repent *today* because *He* paid the price on that Cross long ago when *His* work was finished, purchasing our godly sorrow with his blood to produce true repentance unto salvation.

He suffered so we could be saved from self.

Our godly sorrow *today* works our genuine repentance *today*.

Jesus' work was finished at Calvary.

Christ's work *within* us has just begun.

Godly sorrow works repentance.²³⁷

It is not sadness as the world sorrows. It is sorrow for the pain our self costs others, sorrow that makes us *want* to be changed, sorrow that makes us cry to God, "Please fill me with your loving Christ Spirit and change me *completely!*"

We cannot manufacture such sorrow.

Peter did not know godly sorrow until the rooster crowed after that old fisherman hid while Jesus was arrested and flogged. None of the disciples knew it until after Jesus died on the cross and God's Christ Spirit came to shine His loving truth into the night of their self-sufficiency, showing them they did not yet love Jesus as God intended them to love, shaming their souls to hate self, setting them free from self's clutches by this life-giving, life-changing sorrow.

It is not a sorrow unto death. It is sorrow unto life eternal.

Repentance is not something we can "do", no matter how often we are told we *must* repent.

Repent we *must*, but it can never be our own work.

Repentance is the consequence of godly sorrow.

Jesus died on a cross to purchase the sorrow by which our souls are saved.

Self will never understand.

The power to repent is something we *receive* from the One who purchased it for us with the price of His life, the One who was

²³⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

²³⁷ 2 Corinthians 7:10

foretold, the lamb sent from God to take away the sins of the world²³⁸.

Godly sorrow works repentance.²³⁹

Self dissolves in our tears.

For Fulfillment of Prophecies

There follow a few of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled to purchase our repentance.

He was born of a virgin, conceived of the Holy Ghost.²⁴⁰ Isaiah prophesied this over 700 years before the first Christmas. "The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and she shall call His name Immanuel."²⁴¹

He was born in a manger, a place where cattle feed, for there was no room for Him at the Inn.²⁴²

"When Herod saw he was mocked by wise men, he was angry and sent soldiers to kill the children in Bethlehem and the nearby countryside two years or younger, so it might be fulfilled which was foretold by the prophet Jeremiah, 'A voice was heard of lamentation, weeping, and great mourning without comfort, for the children are dead.'²⁴³ Herod killed thousands of infants, and there *was* great weeping.

"He dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'²⁴⁴

John the Baptist preached in the wilderness of Judaea saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, prepare you the way of the Lord and make His paths straight," as foretold by the prophet Isaiah, 700 years earlier!²⁴⁵

²³⁸ John 1:29, 1:36

²³⁹ 2 Corinthians 7:10

²⁴⁰ Mat 1:20

²⁴¹ Isa 7:14

²⁴² Luke 2:7

²⁴³ Mat 2:16-18

²⁴⁴ Mat 2:23

²⁴⁵ Mat 3:1-3

When Soul Sees Self

Jesus “dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah who said, ‘The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light and, to them who sat in the region and shadow of death, light is sprung up.’”²⁴⁶ Christ is surely the light of the world.

“They brought many to Him who were possessed with devils, He cast out the spirits with His word, and He healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah who said, ‘He, himself, took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.’”²⁴⁷

Jesus fulfilled other prophecies of Isaiah. “Behold my Servant I have chosen, my Beloved in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon Him, and He shall show judgment to the Gentiles. A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench, till He send forth judgment unto victory. In His name shall the Gentiles trust.”²⁴⁸

Christ spoke to the worldly-wise of His day in parables, who “seeing see not, and hearing hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, who said, ‘By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive.’”²⁴⁹ The Gospel is a mystery revealed by grace we cannot earn.

He entered the city of Jerusalem (where He would soon be crucified) “sitting on a young donkey”²⁵⁰ as was prophesied long before.

They came to arrest Him “as against a thief, with swords and staves”²⁵¹, as the prophets foretold. “Then all the disciples forsook him, and fled.”²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Mat 4:14-16

²⁴⁷ Mat 8:16-17

²⁴⁸ Mat 12:17-21

²⁴⁹ Mat 13:13-14

²⁵⁰ Mat 21:4-5

²⁵¹ Mat 26:55

²⁵² Mat 26:56

He was betrayed with “30 pieces of silver”²⁵³ as Jeremiah prophesied.

When He was nailed to the cross, soldiers gambled for His robe, for it was woven without a seam, and they didn't want to cut it in pieces between them “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, ‘They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.’”²⁵⁴

He was numbered “with the transgressors”²⁵⁵, as scripture foretold, crucified with men whose crimes earned them that death of shame. Jesus did not deserve to be there. He had done nothing worthy of punishment.

Judas, who ate bread and drank wine with Him as a friend, “lifted up his heel against me”²⁵⁶ as was prophesied by the psalmist.

They hated him “without a cause”²⁵⁷ to fulfill the law of Moses.

A sponge dipped in vinegar was lifted to His parched and dying lips. When He tasted it, He said, “It is finished,” and He gave up His Ghost.²⁵⁸

The work of His Gospel was finished.

The sacrifice was paid.

The redemption for our souls—His blood, His life, His soul.

When they saw He was dead already, they didn't break His legs. Crucifixion hangs men by their outstretched arms. It's impossible to breathe unless one has strength enough to push up with the legs so the diaphragm can draw breath. Once the legs are broken, one cannot push up, so suffocation causes death (not bleeding). Since Christ was already dead, it was not necessary to break His legs, and another prophecy was fulfilled.²⁵⁹

One of the soldiers at the execution forced a spear into Christ's side to make certain He was dead, “and forthwith came there out blood and water [indicating the heart was pierced, ‘water’ being

²⁵³ Mat 27:9

²⁵⁴ Matthew 27:35

²⁵⁵ Mark 15:28

²⁵⁶ Psalms 41:9, Acts 1:16

²⁵⁷ John 15:25

²⁵⁸ John 19:28-30

²⁵⁹ Psalms 34:20

When Soul Sees Self

the clear fluid that surrounds the heart], and he that saw it [John, who wrote of it] bare record, and his record is true. These things were done that the scripture would be fulfilled, ‘A bone of him shall not be broken,’ and another that says, ‘They shall look on him whom they pierced.’”²⁶⁰

“And when they fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb. But God raised Him from the dead, and He was seen many days by them which came up from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people.”²⁶¹ He returned to life after three days in the tomb and was seen by many people who recorded what they saw in writings.

He then ascended into heaven (the ancient prophecies of His kingdom having been fulfilled in His birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, witness, and ascension), whereupon He rested at the right hand of God the Father. It is *there*, in that resting place with Him, seated together with all the saints in that heavenly realm, we give thanks from our hearts, forgive from our hearts, rejoice from our hearts, and know what is the hope of His calling.²⁶²

In that rest we are drawn to repentance, for we are touched by godly sorrow when we see Him crucified ... *for us!*

He is the spotless lamb offered for our sin.

He is our Savior, suffering for us.

He is the one acquainted with grief.

He is the sacrifice by whose wounds we are healed.

He is the cause of godly sorrow that rends our hearts as we see His sacrifice for us, the godly sorrow that alone has power to work true repentance in our hearts.²⁶³

We are changed from death to life.

The following poem speaks from a repentant spirit purchased long ago by Him who is my hope, the One who lives in me by God’s unspeakable grace.

²⁶⁰ John 19:33-37

²⁶¹ Acts 13:29-31

²⁶² Ephesians 1:18

²⁶³ 2 Corinthians 7:10

The Price Jesus Paid

Oh, Father, forgive me,
For I know I have strayed
Too far from Your watchcare,
Through valleys of shade
Where my heart has not counted
The Price Jesus Paid.

In my pride I ignored You,
And in childhood I played,
While You called to me daily
And came to my aid,
Whenever I needed
The Price Jesus Paid.

Yet, I used You unfairly
And never repaid
What so freely You gave me
To give. Yes, I strayed
And would not count the cost of
The Price Jesus Paid.

But then, as by shipwreck
My hope was dismayed,
And in terror of death
With my soul sore afraid,
I promised to work for
The Price Jesus Paid.

Yet, knowing my weakness,
You did not dissuade
Me from trying to make
That impossible trade
Of my unworthy deeds for
The Price Jesus Paid.

But, with patience You spoke
Through an humble crusade
Of believers who taught me
They, too, had betrayed
And devalued, as I had,
The Price Jesus Paid.

When Soul Sees Self

They urged me to ask You
To gently upbraid
My soul for its errors,
And I, though afraid,
Asked to learn of myself and
The Price Jesus Paid.

Then I turned to Your Book
And for wisdom I prayed,
Till You pierced through my darkness
With light like a blade
That revealed to my shame
The Price Jesus Paid.

For the Cross of Golgotha
And the tomb where was laid
The most precious of payments
That love ever made,
Now teach me to treasure
The Price Jesus Paid.

For Your Words oft remind me
Of others You've made,
Who are now like as I
And have not yet obeyed
To the death for to measure
The Price Jesus Paid.

Yes, I know we are sinners,
Both the lost and new-made,
And our puny performance
On this earth soon will fade,
When our worth will be judged by
The Price Jesus Paid.

But the Lamb who is Worthy,
Whose light will not fade,
Still offers Salvation,
And in love You have bade
Me to claim by Your Promise
The Price Jesus Paid.

So that now, by Your grace
Through Christ's blood, You persuade
Me to pray for Your mercy,

From guilt so deep-laid
I shall only escape by
The Price Jesus Paid.

Yet I know in my heart,
When to rest I've been laid,
You'll be true to Your Word
And, in Glory arrayed,
You will raise us to sing of
The Price Jesus Paid.

For Godly Sorrow

Jesus was murdered so our souls may live free of self.

Yet, His death *alone* does not save us ... no matter how fancily clothed or expensively educated some pulpiteers may pronounce their ignorant lie to the contrary.

He suffered for our sin so we would repent in godly sorrow and cry out in prayer for His forgiveness.

He was cut off from the living so we might weep and repent.

It is not His sacrifice alone that changes us but the sorrowful confession of our sin and acknowledgment of need for forgiveness that transforms our souls from within and works the mystery of true repentance in our hearts.

As we acknowledge the power of His love and ask God to give *us* that love and thereby change our lives, we receive the blessing of His Spirit within us, and the work of repentance begins in our hearts.

Godly sorrow works repentance, not willpower nor dedication to break self's bad habits, attitudes, and desires.

Repentance leads to greater knowledge of our sin and need, and the cycle of love is repeated.

We grow in grace.

His life flows more freely through our lives.

We learn more of His sorrow as we think of the pains we've caused others, and we are transformed by His Spirit within us.

Soul sees self.

Then we pray to be filled with Him and set free from self.

When Soul Sees Self

His Spirit begins to displace our self-centered, self-absorbed, self-important, self-ish self-spirit, and our soul comes alive as a new person, living by His faith, His love, His life, His character, His mercy, His victory.

Born again and growing in grace.

This is the mystery of the Gospel the apostle Paul celebrates.²⁶⁴

This is the firm foundation of our hope.

For Revelation

An interesting, but apparently little known etymological fact, is that our English word “revelation” comes from the Latin *revelo*, which is from *re-* (a prefix denoting repetition, recursion, etc.) and *velum* (a veil or covering).

The meaning is to veil again.

To reveal is to remove one veil and replace it with another.

The word does not indicate, as many suppose, the discovery of *more* knowledge but, rather, the replacement of old knowledge with new knowledge.

“If any man has Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. All things are new.”²⁶⁵

This is revelation.

Old things gone. All things new.

Since veils are head coverings (or curtains to cover passages to chambers such as the Holy of Holies in the Temple), revelation may be thought of as replacement of one covering with another. It is not merely removal of a covering. It is replacing an old covering with one that is totally new.

Revelation puts new in place of old.

Jesus said, “Nothing is hidden that shall not be known, for all will one day be revealed.”²⁶⁶

He says all will be revealed, covered in another veil!

Our old veil must be removed and a new veil put in its place.

²⁶⁴ Colossians 1:27

²⁶⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:17

²⁶⁶ Luke 12:2

There are many *false* revelations, deceits that pose as wisdom but are the same old human guesswork gussied up in fancy words, spiritual smoke and mirrors, satisfying selfs sitting in sanctuaries they erect to be told they are saved without being changed.

People fly to *anything* new, novel visions of reality, *avant garde* philosophies, far out faith, off the wall worship, anything that can replace their tired old covering with something new and give a sense of safety, a sense of belonging, a sense of moving forward.

But, true revelation removes *completely* our old self covering, replacing it with Someone we wear in confidence, a replacement that will *never* need replacing, stable and enduring, the Spirit of God in Christ in us, life-changing power *within*.

When our minds are re-veiled with God's Christ Spirit, things *do* become new, though we *cannot* see them all at once. We need time to grow. We may be born again, but we've got a long way to go before we become mature Christians and not novices.²⁶⁷

Christ is the new covering for our soul, replacing the old veil of self that's been deceiving our souls since the day we were born.

When God's Christ Spirit comes into us he brings wisdom, the dawn of understanding, the birth of eternal life.²⁶⁸

Our soul wears a *new* veil, a perfect veil.

Everything *is* new!

No teacher can impart wisdom to a student already convinced he knows. There must first be removal of the old before new can take its place. Unless the old is willingly surrendered (or ripped away by circumstance) the new cannot be seen.

If a person having the old is doubtful of the authenticity or sufficiency of the new that is offered, he will not surrender what he already has to obtain what may prove little better than what he already possesses.

Elijah asked the people, "How long will you halt between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him—but if Baal, then follow him." The people answered not a word.²⁶⁹ They *would* not receive revelation. They refused to put off the one to receive another.

²⁶⁷ 1 Timothy 3:6

²⁶⁸ Psalms 111:10, Proverbs 9:10

²⁶⁹ 1 Kings 18:21

When Soul Sees Self

Revelation is often a discovery we're compelled to make, an awakening triggered by error-terror or some traumatic experience in which we see what self has done, what self has gotten us into, whom self has hurt, where self is taking us, what will happen to us if we don't stop letting self run the show.

Revelation is seldom a comforting enlightenment, like learning something new and interesting. It is usually a painful tearing away of the old veil we trusted in for years.

It may be the collapse of a philosophy we've been following for a lifetime, awakening to the deceit or negligent ignorance of some leader, or discovery that some habit or practice we were sure was just and right is actually destroying us and others.

Revelation doesn't come without loss.

There must be a falling away so the man of sin *within* us can be revealed²⁷⁰ ... hence the term revelation, the replacement we need.

Then we eagerly wish to be transformed ... not before.

The old man must be exposed.

The old man must be forced to leave, driven out, before the new man can come in.²⁷¹

This always hurts ... *dreadfully!*

Ego rebels.

Others accuse us of madness.

But, regardless of the pain, there is *no* other way.

"When that which is perfect comes, then that which is imperfect shall be put away."²⁷²

This is the revelation of Christ in our lives.

Before Christ came in, our soul was covered with an imperfect veil. We saw the world and everyone in it through the self-centered blind eyes of self.

We did not have the Holy truth of Christ to be our Paraclete,²⁷³ our guide, the counselor Jesus promised would come to guide us in all truth.

²⁷⁰ 2 Thessalonians 2:3

²⁷¹ Romans 6:6

²⁷² 1 Corinthians 13:10

²⁷³ John 15:26

We could not yet see the truth *within* us.

Soul had not yet seen self.

We were self-ish.

Though we may have appreciated the slowly modulating hues of a colorful sunset, watched birds soar high above the trees in graceful flight, paused to listen to the timeless music of a mountain stream, or felt our heart stop at the view of a western canyon ablaze in the brilliant colors of a rising sun, self had not allowed our soul to be touched by the bloody sacrifice of Calvary's lamb.

We did not yet understand that every crimson drop He shed was freely given to redeem our souls from the darkness where our self was taking us.

We were blind.

We were lost.

When we heard the Gospel for the first time, we received it with joy. It was Good News to learn God loves us. It was amazing to discover He wants to transform us by His love so we can have eternal life. It was exciting, and we were anxious to get started. We wanted to be busy doing whatever was needed to secure this promise of life beyond the grave, hope for a home where joy outshines the stars, a future of security in uninterrupted bliss.

We left the struggle of the world and started struggling for His heavenly kingdom.

We did not understand the liberty of Christ's Gospel.

We were novices.²⁷⁴

We welcomed the promise and reached for it eagerly. We read our Bibles, prayed, went to church as often as we could, drove a Sunday school bus, helped set tables for Wednesday night church supper, taught a Bible class, shared chores around the building and grounds on Saturday mornings, gave of our money and time, attended seminars, listened to tapes, read books, passed out tracts, doted on sermons, devoured commentaries, and gobbled up everything we could get our hands on to learn more of what we were being told we must do to be a Christian. Whenever the doors of our church were open, we were there, hungry for the promise, anxious for the prize, prepared to do whatever was required.

²⁷⁴ 1 Tim 3:6

When Soul Sees Self

We weren't resting.

We were babes in Christ.²⁷⁵

We weren't ready for the fullness of the Gospel.

We were still excited by the promise of eternal life, forgiveness of sin, baptism for repentance, and such like doctrines.

We confessed that *all* have sinned,²⁷⁶ but we'd not yet learned where this would lead.²⁷⁷

We were certain we were on our way to Glory, but we had not a clue to the fiery trial about to beset us.²⁷⁸

We did not know how desperately our souls would cling to our old self and what our clinging would cost.

We did not see self, "desperately wicked and deceitful above all things".²⁷⁹

We had no idea what had to be revealed in us before we could receive the latter rains.²⁸⁰

We persisted as Christians in envy, struggle, and divisions.²⁸¹

Self was still in control, howevermuch we taught classes, gave sermons, sang in choirs, spoke in unknown tongues, conversed with angels, or gave the double-tithe.

We did not see self ... our *deceitful* self.

Revelation had not yet come.

We were wearing our old veil.

Proud of growing, knowing, showing, going, and sowing.

We began as novices ... each and every one of us!

There was much more we needed to learn.

Maturity comes slowly to us all.

In these early stages of Christian growth God begins the work of revelation, removing the old veil, but it is slow going at first.

A bit here, a bit there.

²⁷⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:1

²⁷⁶ Romans 3:23, Romans 5:12

²⁷⁷ Philippians 3:13

²⁷⁸ 1 Peter 4:12

²⁷⁹ Jeremiah 17:9

²⁸⁰ James 5:7-9

²⁸¹ 1 Corinthians 3:2-3

Line upon line.

Precept upon precept.²⁸²

Slowly we begin to see the foolishness we held to was nothing but the vanity of self.

Slowly His wisdom lifts our foolish vanity away.²⁸³

Revelation is not sudden nor fully complete in this lifetime.

More self must fall away.²⁸⁴

Much more than soul yet sees.

Revelation is stifled when self insists it already knows all one needs to know, that the revelation we've begun to receive is all the revelation we need.

We remain novices.

God intends to *grow* us to perfection, but *none* is perfect yet!

Revelation isn't complete this side of Paradise, for "the wisdom of the wise shall perish, and the understanding of the prudent shall be hid."²⁸⁵

Yet it *does* begin.

It begins when we see the glory of Christ *within* us.²⁸⁶

The scriptures at first reading speak of transformation reserved for some future day, but they *also* speak of transformation that takes place *every day* in the mature Christian's life.

Paul writes, "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away."²⁸⁷

That which is perfect is the Spirit of Truth who abides *within* us, renewing our mind, transforming our soul, replacing self with Christ, revealing reality we are too often unwilling to see.

This process takes place *during* believers' lives, though it isn't complete till we are set free of flesh at the moment of death, when our souls are joined with Him forevermore.

²⁸² Isaiah 28:10

²⁸³ James 3:17

²⁸⁴ 2 Thessalonians 2:3

²⁸⁵ Isaiah 29:14

²⁸⁶ Isaiah 40:5, Romans 8:18, 1 Peter 4:13

²⁸⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:9-10

When Soul Sees Self

Jesus promised, “You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”²⁸⁸

Pilate asked, “What *is* truth?”²⁸⁹

Pilate got no answer from Jesus for, if the stones had cried aloud, he could not have heard it. Truth stood before him in the form of God’s Christ in Jesus, even as the priests demanded His death! Pilate believed Jesus was a righteous man. He found no guilt worthy of the penalty of crucifixion. He would have freed Jesus had it not threatened his position. But, Pilate was afraid of the Jewish leaders, afraid they might write to his superiors in Rome, afraid they might cause him trouble with the Emperor. Nothing in the scriptures indicates Pilate cared at all for Jesus’ pain, and certainly nothing tells us he was willing to acknowledge Jesus as the lamb of God sacrificed for the sins of all humanity, including those of the Roman ruler. As far as Pilate was concerned, Jesus was just another prisoner condemned to die. Though he washed his hands to demonstrate he believed Jesus was innocent, he ordered the crucifixion anyway!

Pilate could not know “What is truth?” for the blind eyes and deaf ears of his *self* refused to perceive it, as our *self* also once did.

We are no different than Pilate when first we are called.

Yet, by the grace of God, we were told the story of Jesus, the Man of sorrows, the lamb who took the sins of the world on Himself and died so we could live.

We learned the tears of Jesus were shed for us, and we began to weep with Him.

His love began to grow in the tear-stained soil of our souls.

Each of the nails was for us.

The crown of thorns was for us.

The spear thrust through His Heart was for *us*.

And, God raised Jesus from the dead *for us*.

God now raises us for Him!²⁹⁰

We know He is the Prince of Peace, the lamb without blemish, the sacrifice by which our souls were purchased from our destiny

²⁸⁸ John 8:32

²⁸⁹ John 18:38

²⁹⁰ Isaiah 53:10

of death. We do not know because we read it in a book or heard it from pulpits. This revelation doesn't come to us in the eloquence of men's words or the logic of human reason. The revelation comes from God by the direct witness of His Holy Spirit of Truth *within* our souls.

Christ asked Peter, "Who do *you* say I am?"

"You are the Christ of God," the fisherman replied.

Then Jesus said, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you. The revelation of who I am is a gift to you from my Father in heaven. From this day you shall be called Peter [the Greek *petros*, a detached pebble] and on this rock [the Greek *petra*, a mass of connected rock, not the tiny stone that was Peter but to the massive connected rock that is *our shared direct* knowledge revealed to us not by the mind of our flesh nor the will of man but by the divine inspiration of God's spirit of truth] I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."²⁹¹

Christ's Church (i.e., the invisible, spiritual, and eternal mass of connected believers) is built on the direct revelation by which we know the truth of Christ by His Holy Presence in our lives.

This wisdom descends from above.

This mass of connected rock is the foundation of His Church.

After this famous testimony on which Christ's True Church is founded, Peter proved he did not yet know Christ in Jesus as He *really* is, for Jesus had not yet been sacrificed. His Soul had not yet been poured out for sinners such as we. Peter was still a blind self like you and me.

Jesus, knowing He was about to be arrested and killed, told His disciples they would be offended because of Him, that they'd be scattered. Peter replied with words of courage, allegiance, faith, resolve, and commitment. He said, "Though all men be offended because of you, yet will I never be offended." The spunky old fisherman had a great deal more to learn about his self.

Jesus turned and set the stage for something the self-praising fisherman wouldn't understand until morning. "Before the rooster crows at dawn you will deny me three times."

²⁹¹ Mat 16:17

When Soul Sees Self

Peter protested, “Though I be required to die with you, yet will I not deny you.”

And so did all the disciples.²⁹²

So deceived self is.

And, as Jesus said, Peter hid. He stood in the shadows while the soldiers stripped flesh from Jesus’ back with whips, accused Him falsely, mocked Him, spat on Him, and hit Him with their fists.

Peter remained at a distance, afraid to be recognized, afraid to be seen. Throughout that long night he hid, while Jesus suffered alone. Three times he was asked if he was one of Jesus’ disciples, and three times he denied.

It was nearly dawn when he denied the third time.

A rooster crowed.

Peter remembered ... and wept bitterly.²⁹³

Revelation began.

Godly sorrow was at work.

We don’t want to hear the rooster crowing in our lives. We dull our senses with addictions of one kind or another—alcohol, drugs, sex, work, sports, even religion. The last thing we want to know is how little we know, how short a distance we’ve come, how far we yet must go to reach the mark of His perfection.

We don’t want to see self’s depravity, lust, and faithlessness.

We don’t want to hear that rooster crow.

We imagine we are righteous enough as we are. Because we believe this, we remain stunted, unable to grow in righteousness.

We make promises, as Peter did, then forget them when the time comes for performance.

We associate with others who tell us how spiritual we are, and forsake those who need us to accept them in their sin, thinking we are better than they who are fallen.

We run from truth until truth catches us unaware.

Sooner or later the rooster’s crows can no longer be ignored.

We begin to see self and the soul-cleansing tears begin.

²⁹² Mat 26:31-35

²⁹³ Mat 26:75, Luke 22:62

The beginning of salvation.

All else is a lie.

Revelation cannot begin until we are shown we know nothing as we ought to know.²⁹⁴

Until we see our self no wiser than Peter, no more courageous, no more righteous, no more loving or faithful, we remain in darkness still.

God sends the rooster's crow so our soul can see our self.

Though it hurts at first to hear the truth, our eternal life cannot begin until we're changed *within* ... when soul sees self.

God takes no pleasure in our self-righteousness.

The only thing that truly counts, when all is said and done, is how our souls respond to Christ' love and how we share that love with others.

If we think our self is anything at all, we are deceived.

If we know we are nothing, that Christ in us is everything, then we begin to walk in the light as He is in the light.²⁹⁵

Our love for Christ becomes the law of God incarnate, written in our souls and demonstrated intuitively in our actions.

Love is the law.

The revelation of God in Christ in us.

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²⁹⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:2

²⁹⁵ 1 John 1:7

THE INVITATION

To Fellowship

“Come unto me.”

Those three wonderful words of invitation deserve a book all to themselves.

“I will give you rest.”

Rest is Christ’s promise.

Is there anyone who *doesn’t* long for rest? Is there anyone who isn’t glad for every escape from the tedium and pressure of life?

Isn’t it good to let it all go for an hour or so?

Rest is such a sweet gift, and Christ promises He will give rest to *all* who respond to His invitation.

Job, a man in sore distress of mind and body, oppressed on every side, a man in need of rest if ever there *were* one, praises God in the midst of his distresses with these words of wonder, “What is man, that You should set your heart on him?”²⁹⁶

Job asks, “Why do you care for *us*, God? What are *we*, that you should love us so?”

Why *has* God set His heart upon us?

Why *has* He created such a wonderful universe for us to enjoy?

“Why?” we ask, as Job asked.

What is God’s objective?

Why has God gone to so much trouble? Why did He make creation, the stars, plants and animals, man and woman? What is His purpose? What is His plan? What does God want?

I used to think God’s objective is man’s morality, that the thing God most wants is for us to be good. Isn’t that what we were taught in Sunday school? Isn’t that what our parents told us? That was the emphasis I received from those who taught me.

“Be good!” they told us, as if we had the power to be good.

“Love God!” they taught us, as if we had true love within us before God planted His love in us by Christ’s presence.

²⁹⁶ Job 7:17

“Don’t do this. Don’t do that. Keep clear of this other, and *never* do so-and-so!”

We were told God would be angry if we didn’t keep His laws.

We were warned that we’d go to hell if we were bad and burn forever in unending fire.

By the time we were in our teens, it was obvious to most of us that we were *powerless* to keep the law. We’d already *broken* it. And, unless there was something more than we’d been told, hell was our ultimate destination!

There was no way to keep from failing. We were children, bound to break at least one of those ten commandments with sin or thoughts of sin (that Jesus said is just as bad²⁹⁷).

If our teachers were right, *all* of us were doomed!

There was no hope.

Larry Crabb writes in his book Men & Women, “Either we live by external standards in the strength of moral effort, with grace as a warmly regarded side issue, or we live *by* grace in the strength of a new heart, enjoying the law as a needed and welcome guide and no longer hating it as a crushing weight.”²⁹⁸

Morality is certainly important. We should try our best to be as good as we can be. But struggling to be good is not God’s goal for us (Sunday school lessons to the contrary notwithstanding).

There’s something else God wants, something more important. Indeed, it is the most important thing of all.

It’s the purpose for which He made us, the reason we are here.

God wants *fellowship* with our souls ... not our selves.

We learn this in the second and third chapters of the last book of the Bible where Christ makes seven promises.

♥ He that overcomes will eat of the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God.²⁹⁹

♥ He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁷ Matthew 5:27-28

²⁹⁸ Men & Women — Enjoying the Difference, Dr. Lawrence J. Crabb, Jr., Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1991.

²⁹⁹ Rev 2:7

³⁰⁰ Rev 2:11

When Soul Sees Self

- ♥ He that overcomes will eat of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knows except he that receives it.³⁰¹
- ♥ He that overcomes will have power over nations, even as I received power over nations from my Father, and I will give him the morning star.³⁰²
- ♥ He that overcomes shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life but will confess his name before my Father and His angels.³⁰³
- ♥ He that overcomes will become a pillar in the temple of God, and he shall go no more out. I will write upon him the name of God and the name of the City of God, which is the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God. I will write upon him my new name.³⁰⁴
- ♥ He that overcomes will sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and sit with my Father in His throne. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come *in* to him and will dine with him, and he will dine with me.³⁰⁵

Behold! He stands at the door and knocks.

The last promises tell us God's purpose, the reason He created us, why He set His Heart on us, why He made His wonderful creation for us to enjoy.

He wants us to sit together in His Throne!

He wants fellowship with *you* and with *me*!

He wants us to be His friend.

God also wants us to fellowship *with each other*. We are called to rest with Him *together*. We are not called one at a time. We are called *together*. Salvation isn't for one or any special group of us. It is for *all*. We are called to receive God's dispensation of grace *together*, so we may fellowship with Him as *one*!

³⁰¹ Rev 2:17

³⁰² Rev 2:26-28

³⁰³ Rev 3:5

³⁰⁴ Rev 3:12

³⁰⁵ Rev 3:21

We cannot settle down to dinner with Him while we bicker with each other, find fault, judge, refuse to forgive, and insist on repentance from those who do us wrong.

Unless we receive each other as brothers and sisters, how can we expect God to receive *us* as His children?

It is not for our goodness or obedience. We are not good, nor can we *be* good, except as God *puts* His goodness in us by the mystery of His Presence.

Jesus refused to allow others to call Him good. He responded, “Why do you call *me* good? There is only one who is good, and that is God.”³⁰⁶

God’s purpose is not morality, for He alone possesses the power to make us moral or turn us over to a reprobate mind.³⁰⁷

God can choose to leave us in our depraved state of self-ness.

Grace is either all grace, or it is not grace at all.

God doesn’t seek us for *our* goodness but for our willingness to receive *His* goodness and thereby to enter into fellowship with Him and with each other.

We fellowship with Him as we fellowship with each other.³⁰⁸

To Overcome

In each of the seven promises written by John in his Revelation, we are told Christ’s promises are for those who “overcome”.

We haven’t power to be good, so how can we overcome?

What *is* it we must overcome?

To overcome means to rise above, leave behind, and be set free from some thing that has control of us.

What more than self has control of us?

We are called to overcome *self*.

But, by what power?

To say we overcome self by our self is a circular argument, for how can self overcome self?

We cannot overcome alone.

³⁰⁶ Mat 19:17

³⁰⁷ Rom 1:28

³⁰⁸ Mat 25:40, Mat 25:45

When Soul Sees Self

We need some power higher than our self.

The answer is God's Christ Spirit living *within* us, so we ask for Him to dwell in us, to defeat the power of self, to give our souls the victory that God desires above all else, to dwell in us and see us dwell in unity with others, saved by His *grace and not our self*.

"The victory that overcomes," John writes, "is faith that Christ is the Son of God—faith born *of God*."³⁰⁹

His faith overcomes the fear that drives our soul into hiding.

His forgiveness overcomes our guilt.

His counsel overcomes temptation.

His love draws tears of godly sorrow that overcome self's pride.

His strength overcomes our weakness to the world's seductions.

His riches overcome our love of money and things.

His righteousness overcomes our self-righteousness.

His wisdom overcomes our ignorant willingness to let another human be our spiritual leader.

His power overcomes everything that would displace God from our lives and establishes us as His own!

We are God's children.

Hallelujah!

He is our overcomer, and by *Him* we overcome our enemy, self.

And, because it's all *His* work, none can boast, none can rise above another, all are brothers and sisters, made one in this way by *Him* who is our resting place.

His love.

His Gospel.

God has not commanded us to overcome by our own power, for it can't be done. It is impossible. None would *ever* sit with Him in His Throne. None would *ever* dine with Him. All would be forever lost.

We are creatures made from dust, every one of us, yet God loves our souls and wants to spend eternity with us in blessed fellowship!

He has prepared a paradise for us to share with Him and with each other!

³⁰⁹ I John 5:4-5

He chooses us who can never measure up to His perfection.
This is how He shows His love to us.

God *forgives*.

Isaiah wrote, “We are unclean. Our righteousness is filthy rags. We fade as a leaf. Our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.”³¹⁰

Yet God chooses to make foolish things wise and weak things strong.³¹¹

What hope has the sinner who comes before God with a list of good deeds he has done, a list he hopes will merit God’s favor?

He has no hope at all!³¹²

Our hope is in Christ alone, for it is He who calls us to Himself and seeks to *be* our righteousness.

Paul sought God, “not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through Christ, righteousness which is of God by faith.”³¹³

The grace of God is *truly* amazing!

Consider what Paul is saying. He sought righteousness “which is through the faith *of* Christ”.

Paul sought the righteousness “which is *of* God by faith.”

Paul tells us both faith *and* righteousness are *of* God.

Both are *His* work.

It’s not up to us to be righteous.

It’s not up to us to have faith.

We *ask!*

We *must* ask, however.

We deny our self-ish pride and surrender our souls to God.

His invitation is, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest.”³¹⁴

He asks us to *lean* on Him, to let *Him* be our righteousness, our strength, our wisdom.

³¹⁰ Isaiah 64:6

³¹¹ 1 Corinthians 1:27

³¹² Mat 19:16-23

³¹³ Phil 3:9

³¹⁴ Mat 11:28

When Soul Sees Self

God *is* calling us to fellowship with Him and with our sisters, brothers, neighbors, friends, co-workers, and even those we don't like very much!

He isn't calling us to strive for righteousness by Bible study, long prayers, self-denial, or any such exercises of human will. He offers us the righteousness of faith which is His free gift to us who ask with broken hearts.

This is the righteousness that overcomes.

This is the righteousness that *cannot* be bought with gold.

This is the righteousness that makes us *one*, so we can truly sit together in His throne and dine with Him.

This righteousness is Christ *in* us, the hope of glory.³¹⁵

The greatest gift of God to me is Christ *within* me.

By *Him* I overcome, and He makes me one with *you* in glory.

He is our righteousness, our strength, our wisdom.

We are made one with Him *by* Him, thereby one with all who walk by *His* faith and not the doubtful, fingers-crossed hope of self.

We can be confident (a word meaning to have "faith with") because the work is all *His* work, the faith all *His* faith.

My soul is secure in that eternal home He has prepared for me beyond the stars, where you and I will meet one day to share His joy forever.

It is all His doing, His wonderful plan.

To Worship

"Give thanks to the Lord. Call on His name. Make known His deeds among the people. Sing to Him. Sing psalms to Him. Speak of all His wondrous works. Glory in His Holy name. Let the souls of them rejoice that seek the Lord. Seek the Lord and His strength. Seek His face continually. Remember the marvelous works He has done, His wonders and the judgments of His mouth."³¹⁶

Paul encourages, "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice! Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and

³¹⁵ Colossians 1:27

³¹⁶ 1 Chronicles 16:812

supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ.”³¹⁷

The peace of God *which passes understanding* (peace that can’t be understood) will keep our hearts and minds *if* we rejoice in the Lord, *if* we let our moderation be known unto all men, *if* we take care about nothing (let go of worry), and *if* we ask with thankful prayers for God to fill our every need.

His peace pours into us as we praise Him and acknowledge His mighty works, confessing to others that all good things in us are of Him alone by grace.

We intuitively *confess* Christ to others, *praise* Him for what He is doing in our lives, and *thank* Him for abiding within us.

If our soul has not yet experienced His presence *within*, if we’ve not yet known the godly sorrow that opens our hearts to Him, then self shuts Him out. Self demands praise for its own righteousness, takes center stage in our life and, in its war against truth, finds no rest.

“The wicked are like a troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace for the wicked.”³¹⁸

The wicked are like the man invited to a wedding banquet who came in common clothing, refusing to celebrate with the others, refusing to honor his host. The servants were ordered to “Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”³¹⁹

Without worship, praise, and thanksgiving there is no rest.

Imitation worship is worse than no worship at all.

We can lift our hands as we see others do, bang our tambourine in time with music made by others, say strange words that sound like what we hear from others, fall backward as others do when the worship leader smacks our forehead, and be the loudest of them all to shout “Praise the Lord!”

But if our act of worship is an imitation, it is sacrilege.

³¹⁷ Philippians 4:4-7

³¹⁸ Isa 57:20-21

³¹⁹ Mat 22:11-14

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God is not deceived, though we impress others with our grand performance. Perhaps our self believes it, but it's still a lie!

True worship is intuitive. It flows joyfully from souls who are truly thankful. It cannot be controlled or "led". It is as natural as drawing breath.

It surrenders self in celebration.

It is our gift of love to Him who *is* love.

It is childlike adoration of our Father, spontaneous, voluntary, free of inhibition, giving Christ the glory for all our successes, and even giving thanks for our failures and setbacks that showed us our need for His Salvation.

Worship is sometimes silent, as we bridle our tongues to listen to His still small voice of comfort and assurance deep *within* us.

Worship is His love flowing to us, through us, and back to Him.

To Praise

God invites us to praise Him.

Surely God is good, but until we *praise* Him for His goodness, we deny ourselves a special blessing only praisers receive.

God inhabits our praise.³²⁰

So long as we struggle to overcome in our un-strength, seek to be justified by our self-righteousness, deceive ourselves and others by our un-wisdom, and continue in our mis-understanding, we're unable to offer praise as God desires.

Praise from souls in rebellion is pretense, meaningless jabber.

Praise means nothing until we acknowledge our wealth, homes, jobs, status, family, health, and even our lives are gifts God lets us use for only a very brief season.

They don't belong to us.

We did not cause them.

We cannot keep *any* of them by any exercise of self.

We are visitors in a weary world, strangers in a strange land.³²¹

Nothing is our own.

³²⁰ Psalms 22:3

³²¹ Leviticus 25:23, 1 Chronicles 29:15, Psalms 39:12

Until we stop self's busy-ness and see that all we have is what He lets us enjoy for this brief moment, we miss the love He wants us to enjoy, and our praise is empty words without meaning.

Anyone can say, "Praise the Lord!"

Only souls who know Him *within* can praise Him truly.

Only they know Him as He is, the living God, the way, the truth, the light.

Our daily bread is Christ within us, for He is the bread of life.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life,"³²² and taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

It is He whom we need to sustain us.

Praise celebrates this reality.

Until we know this, we *cannot* be truly thankful nor offer praise, because only thankful souls know what praise is, for the one flows from the other.

It is poison for our souls to think self is responsible for the good that comes our way or that we're "lucky" (a word without meaning to Christians walking by faith in God's grace). Until we know Him *within*, we cannot offer praise from our hearts, for we are living by our self-will still.

God wants *all* our praise.

He is *in* our praise, and by our praise we *know* Him!³²³

Being zealous for Christ is not enough. Preaching, teaching, praying, and giving without knowing Him alive *within*, is without lasting value. Many are blind who think they see,³²⁴ ignorant because they think they know. They bring their accomplishments to receive a reward, and God says, "Depart from me. I never knew you."³²⁵

They stand in their own power, believing they have virtue of their own. They don't yet understand every gift is from above.³²⁶

³²² John 6:28-65

³²³ Psalms 22:3

³²⁴ 1 Corinthians 8:2

³²⁵ Matthew 7:23

³²⁶ James 1:17

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All we have, all we are, and all we do is by the grace of Him who made us and allows us to continue living in this fleeting moment.

“Dust we are, and unto dust we shall return.”³²⁷

Everything is by God’s grace alone.

His amazing, indescribable mercy.

Paul reminds us, “If a man thinks himself to be anything at all, when the truth is we are nothing (outside the grace of God) he deceives only himself.”³²⁸

And, again, “If a man thinks he knows anything at all, we can be certain he knows nothing yet as he ought to know.”³²⁹

It is this knowledge of not knowing that transforms our minds and prepares us to be re-minded, made new, born again.

Paul gives good advice to those tired of struggling for approval, lives tortured by family or friends who can’t forgive, souls longing to rest from the labor being right requires. “Let God be true and every one of us be false,” he writes. “Refuse to claim a single truth as your own. Give God glory for every good others see in you, and take responsibility for your errors. Then you will overcome when you are judged, resting in *His* victory.”³³⁰

Praise Him if you wish to know Him.

To Evangelize

“Go into all the world,” Christ told His followers, “and preach the Gospel to every creature.”³³¹

This “Great Commission” is hopeless but for Christ’s provision.

Many go.

Many preach.

Few preach the Gospel.

³²⁷ Genesis 3:19

³²⁸ Galatians 6:3

³²⁹ 1 Corinthians 8:2

³³⁰ Romans 3:3-4

³³¹ Mark 16:15

Instead they preach traditions,³³² denying the power of God, seeking honor for their self. From such we are told to turn away.³³³

Too many sermons begin and end without going beyond basic doctrines of faith and repentance. By threats of hell or impassioned entreaties to walk a truer mile, followers are urged to be baptized or receive the laying on of hands as certification of their entry into eternal life.

The focus is on resurrection and eternal judgment.³³⁴

There is much more to the Gospel, yet many go no farther.

The Gospel is not merely the promise of heaven for those who believe. It is the life-changing power of God transforming souls by His mercy, converting them to Christ's likeness, inviting them to eternal fellowship with Him *today!*

The Gospel is not pie in the sky by and by, as some deride.

It certainly is not a system of rewards and punishments meted out by an impudent task master.

The Gospel is not a plan for selective uprooting of weeds in God's wheat field nor gathering only good seeds into His garner.

Yet this is the message taught by too many, lies destroying lives, laws fancied up in the language of grace, burdens piled upon guilty souls unable to carry the weight, crushed thereby and lost.

Lies leave my eternal destiny to *me!*

It is not the Gospel of grace your Bible presents.

It is dead, without power.³³⁵

The Gospel of grace *is* power without limit.

Love unfeigned.

Genuine kindness.

Mercy that truly cares.

The Gospel is our guide leading us gently, as a shepherd leads his sheep, giving us a better life in *this* world as well as the next.

It is intimate fellowship with God in Christ *within* us.³³⁶

³³² Colossians 2:8

³³³ 2 Timothy 3:5

³³⁴ Hebrews 6:1-2

³³⁵ 2 Timothy 3:5

³³⁶ John 17:23

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It is not force or constraint, labor or laws.

It is rest!

By Christ's presence within, our struggle is over.

Our war with reality is behind us.

We move on from the doctrine of baptisms, laying on of hands, of resurrection from the dead, and of eternal judgment³³⁷ and press toward the mark of being totally *transformed* by the power of His Gospel, resting in *His* work!³³⁸

Leading others to the Gospel is Christ's love working *through* us! It requires no special schooling, master plan, schedules, mass mailings, or door-to-door canvassing. It flows naturally from possession and celebration of His life *within* us whom He is redeeming and transforming.

It needs no structure, gimmicks, or certain evening of the week to go door-to-door "soul winning".

We are saved from self's struggles by His blood (not *our* doing).

Intuitive thanksgiving wells up in our souls like living water.

We long to share the Gospel with others, because it grows more precious to us as we see others rejoice in what we share with them, and we rejoice with them. We *want* to share Christ, because His love within us constrains us to do so.³³⁹

We know *we* cannot save them.

We cannot save ourselves.

Though others told us of the Gospel and entreated us to give our lives to Christ, to confess our sin and need, to ask for His salvation, we did not receive the truth from them. We received the truth from God, as Peter did,³⁴⁰ by direct revelation from our Father.

There's no other way.

All else is head-knowledge, self-deception, ruin.

Others spoke from pulpits or made it possible for us to read books (like this one) but truth is not revealed to us until God pushes self aside to show our soul the price of Love.

³³⁷ Hebrews 6:1-3

³³⁸ Philippians 3:14

³³⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:14

³⁴⁰ Matthew 16:17-19

Then godly sorrow starts its work, true repentance begins, and salvation is secured.

The price was paid at Calvary.

Our godly sorrow is His victory, giving birth to lasting joy.

There's no other way we can be saved.³⁴¹

What if we were never told about Jesus? What if Christianity were banned before we were born so we never heard the message of God's grace and salvation through the love of Christ? What if no preacher told us the message of repentance and faith? What if there were no Bibles, no churches, no songs of joy on the voices of believers, no celebration, no hope? What if none proclaimed the Good News of an empty tomb? What if all churches and cathedrals with their towering spires and stained glass windows were gone? What if radio and TV ministries were unheard of? What if the Gospel were illegal, and none were alive who remembered?

We'd have no hope of heaven, no reason not to sin, no reason not to bend reality to suit our purposes, no reason not to steal as much affection as we could from others, no reason not to take our fill of love where we could find it, drink ourselves unconscious, lie about our taxes, and amass as much of everything as we could get!

Nor would we be the only ones engaged in such loose living, so we'd have to labor day and night to stay ahead of our competition. Perhaps we'd have to murder, lie, and steal. There's just so much to go around so, if we're reaching for all we can get, we mustn't be fussy about who we hurt in the process.

There'd certainly be no rest.

We'd all be hiding in our chosen darkness—drugs, sex, alcohol, food, fast cars, gambling, pornography, violence, or some other intensity of life to keep our minds off the inevitable eternal night that waits.

If there were no Christ to promise life beyond the grave, we'd probably embrace alternative mystic faiths or follow some strange structured religion. Perhaps we'd worship dogs, as Egyptians did. We might bow down to golden calves, totem poles, or giant statues of Buddha. Whether we worshipped dogs, calves, wooden poles, or fat bronze men in whose laps we burned incense, it is fairly

³⁴¹ Acts 2:21, Acts 4:12, Romans 10:13

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certain we'd give our money and our praise to *other* mortals who'd make merchandise of our pathetic fears.

We'd eagerly listen to charlatans who'd charge us to tell how we can escape death's darkness by becoming gods ourselves, that death is but a momentary individuation of the deific and perpetual cosmic forces of unity that follow knowledge as we seek our higher form of consciousness ... or some other empty nonsense.³⁴²

We might even start our *own* religion—grasping the golden opportunity to profit financially by promoting fear to gain power over pocketbooks of guilty souls, glutting on the emotional needs of others—while secretly inside ourselves we'd endure with them the same torment of time, absence of hope, and terror of death.

We humans cannot rest until we have answers to questions *all* of us ask about eternity, of what's beyond the moment when at last our heart stops beating.

Fortunately, we *have* a Bible, churches, preachers, and liberty to worship as we please. These are ours because of sacrifices others made many yesterdays ago. Millions lost their lives so *we* could go to church on Sunday, read unexpurgated copies of the Bible, praise the Lord till our hearts' content, and rest in Christ's eternal love.

Before we were born again, someone cared enough to pray for our soul. It may have been when we saw them with a Bible in their hand and proudly exclaimed, "I can't believe you're reading *that!*" Perhaps our friend challenged *us* to read it on our own or even tried to read it *with* us.

We may have claimed to be an atheist. We may have said, "God isn't real!" Perhaps, wanting to seem intellectual, we said, "I'm agnostic."

Whatever we were or did, there's not one of us who started out as a believer praising God for His precious gift of Christ *within!*

Some friend prayed for us, while we read literature by atheists.

We rebelled at the God we thought rejected us.

We hardened our heart against the love we were certain would hurt us one day if we let it in.

We laughed at those who worshipped the God who refused to give us what we thought we deserved.

³⁴² Malarkey, in other words!

When we heard a preacher on the radio or TV, we instinctively changed the dial or channel.

We were lost ... every one of us.

Then God broke through our defenses, and soul saw self.

We wept with godly sorrow and pleaded for Christ to come in.

Now Christ loves through *us*. Perhaps the *same* friend who prayed for us now needs *our* love, forgiveness, and prayers. Or, maybe there's a friend we've not yet met who needs comfort and forgiveness, a soul who needs the hope and rest we've begun to receive.

"Freely you received," Jesus tells us.

"Freely, therefore, *give!*"³⁴³

If we want Christ to grow in us, if we see we're not yet what He wants us to become, if we recognize there's room to be changed even more, if we want God to pour His grace more fully *into* our lives, then we must let Him pour it *through* our lives to those who need it desperately, those who are hurting, those who are lonely, those who are frightened, those who are weak as we once were.

The Gospel of Christ is the best thing we can share with friends. If we lose a friend by sharing the Prince of Peace who is making us alive, we lose *nothing*. If our friend is won to Christ, we've gained a priceless treasure we could never otherwise obtain.

Our acts and expressions of genuine heartfelt love clear us from the consequence of our *own* sins,³⁴⁴ but we must share intuitively from our soul where He lives. That is where He wants to dwell in those with whom you share His message, so that's where others need to see Him ... *within* you, flowing *through* you.

They don't need reason and logic to convince them to open their hearts to Christ' love.

Reason and logic are head stuff.

They don't work in our soul where the work is needed.

Reason and logic have no power to redeem souls!

³⁴³ Mat 10:8

³⁴⁴ James 5:20

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Above all we should shun doubtful disputations.³⁴⁵ Aggressive verbal tactics never instill truth. Arguments are only evidence that He is not yet overruling self.

Samuel Butler wrote, “He who agrees against his will is of his own opinion still.”³⁴⁶ We *cannot* convince anyone of anything they don’t believe in their heart already.

Why argue for the Gospel? We weren’t won by argument. We *cannot* be won by argument, nor can others.

We were won by love *or we are not yet won and deceive our souls to believe otherwise!*

Souls believe unto righteousness, not biological brains.

Souls confess unto salvation, not biological brains.³⁴⁷

We may understand in part with our biological brain,³⁴⁸ but we *believe* with our soul and confess with our soul, for He who saves us is *in* our soul ... not our biological brain.

If we have His Love we want to share His love. We want to tell of His wonderful mercy. We want to let the hope we have shine through our eyes and arms and lips to those who need hope.

We remember when we were without hope.³⁴⁹

They are where we *now* would be, but for God’s grace.

We need to tread softly with them, love them into the kingdom, and prove the Gospel by the evidence they see within us.

To Receive Christ

Christ asks us to invite Him to live *within* us.

This is the mystery of the Gospel.

Christ *in* you is the hope of Glory!³⁵⁰

But, what can this mean?

How can one person live inside another?

³⁴⁵ Rom 14:1

³⁴⁶ Hudibras, pt. III [1678], canto III, l. 547.

³⁴⁷ Romans 10:10

³⁴⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:9-10

³⁴⁹ Ephesians 2:12

³⁵⁰ Colossians 1:27

How can Christ take up residence within me when there's barely room enough in here for *me*?

The answer is giving Him permission to drive self out to *make* room for Him.

Self decreases so He may increase.³⁵¹

Paul calls this the *mystery* of the Gospel, an enigma self cannot comprehend with its biological brain.

Until God unveils His mystery *within* us, we are incapable of understanding.³⁵²

Yet, our understanding the mystery is God's desire.

Celebrating the mystery is perfect worship.

Celebrating it *together* is perfect fellowship – His True Church.

Experiencing God's life within us is life-changing.

It is where eternal life begins!

It transcends our limited human wisdom and teaches us truth.

It defies explanation.

It is inscrutable.

Yet, God does live *within* me and will live in you, if you invite Him and make room by surrendering self.

He transforms our souls by His counsel of love and wisdom to make of us what He desires us to be ... His children.

Othello recounts Desdemona's response to his unvarnished tale of love, "She swore in faith, 'Twas strange. 'Twas passing strange. 'Twas pitiful. 'Twas wondrous pitiful."³⁵³

So seems to me the unvarnished tale of Christ' love for us.

'Tis strange.

'Tis passing strange.

'Tis pitiful.

'Tis wondrous pitiful.

Such love to give Himself for me and make my soul His home.

It is beyond my understanding.

It is indeed a mystery.

³⁵¹ John 3:30

³⁵² Mat 16:18

³⁵³ Othello, Act I, Scene 1, William Shakespeare

When Soul Sees Self

Christ in me, my hope of glory.

All else is sinking sand.

The Spirit of Christ who indwells us is the personality of God, transforming our souls by planting in us His attributes of peace, mercy, forgiveness, patience, and unfeigned love.

That's not to say a man who gets angry or says monstrous things in a rage does not have God's Spirit but, when we rage and fail to be forgiving, He speaks to us within, reminding us our self is not yet completely yielded to His life. Our souls are not yet completely enjoying the liberty He offers when self surrenders to His Spirit.

God is gentle.

God forgives.

True love is like that.³⁵⁴

Resting in Christ's process of redemption, we confess our sinful self-nature and admit to others there's no good in us that could ever merit salvation.

We ask God to forgive us and send His Christ Spirit to fix us, never to leave or forsake us.

His work in us has begun. It began before we confessed and asked for His mercy, for our very desire to ask is His doing, His amazing grace.

We may not yet be kind and peaceable.

Others may not always see Christ's character in our behavior.

Yet, He is in us if we asked Him to come in, and He's already growing like a tiny mustard seed when first it's planted.

We don't become Christlike overnight.

His Spirit has to replace self so He can save our soul.

When soul sees self and godly sorrow works repentance, we are assured Christ is within us, because we know it is Him revealing the truth we shuddered to see. Our godly sorrow and repentance is His work, the down payment of His love that assures us of eternal life with Him.

³⁵⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

But, when soul *first* sees self, the work has just begun. There's lots more work ahead as minds are re-newed, souls transformed, and we begin to grow in grace.³⁵⁵

We are certain He is in us and therefore certain of eternal life, for His work drew us to sorrowful repentance.

His love made it possible for us to ask for mercy.

He is at work *within* us, not on the outside others see.

He came in when our soul saw self, confessed our need, and on our knees in prayer pleaded for His mercy to change us!

Now we need to trust Him and His Work.

We need to exercise the faith He is giving us.

As we begin to experience His motives, His desires, His mercy for others, His kindness, His wisdom, we need to praise Him and show our gratitude openly.

Self fears what others think.

Souls who are born again do not.³⁵⁶

As we tell others, self is displaced to make more room for Him to grow and overflow!

Self must decrease so He may increase.³⁵⁷

“With the heart man believes unto righteousness, but with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”³⁵⁸

Believing in secret is not enough!

Many believe in secret and are not saved.

The evidence of our salvation is in our speech, what we say, to whom we say it, and how we say it.³⁵⁹ If we are ashamed of Jesus, we know God's Christ Spirit is not in us! If we are embarrassed or worried what others may think of us if we talk about Jesus and the joy of being born again, then self still sits in the pilot seat of our life, and God is still our co-pilot.

³⁵⁵ 2 Peter 3:18

³⁵⁶ Romans 1:16

³⁵⁷ John 3:30

³⁵⁸ Romans 10:10

³⁵⁹ James 3:2

When Soul Sees Self

Sad, but many are frozen in the self-driven fear of what others think, ashamed of Christ, afraid to admit it even to themselves, and lost as geese in a snowstorm.

Once the spirit of truth comes to live in our hearts, all that pride and fear goes out the window with yesterday's trash. We do care about what others think, but in a new way. That's why we joyfully tell them what's going on in our lives, that we are being changed from within, that we are living a new life, that soul has seen self, and God's Christ Spirit is setting us free!

Christ's presence within us changes how others treat us.

Some withdraw, afraid of the truth, but most are drawn to Him in us, if we are celebrating His love.

He *is* love.

Most people are attracted to love.

We love more. We are more lovely. We make more room for Him to grow within us, seeing nothing about our old self-life can compare with His eternal life within us.

He makes His presence known in how we deal with others, our tone of voice, our kindness, patience, peaceableness, mercy, and other characteristics of God that are displacing the old self-nature that once controlled us.

It is Him others see.

It is Him *we* see.

We mature in a new way.

Christ *is* our life.

“When Christ who *is* our life shall appear, then we also shall appear with him in glory.”³⁶⁰

This is not the second coming, for Paul writes to Timothy about our “holy calling” which, he says, “is *now* made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.”³⁶¹

Paul says our calling “is *now* made manifest,” not that it will be *someday*.

Christ gives eternal life to us while we still live in human form.

³⁶⁰ Col 3:4

³⁶¹ 2 Tim 1:10

We discern His presence (as do others) as our self-spirit dies to make room for His Holy Spirit to grow and love through us.

The maturing that begins with His birth in us continues all our lives and at the moment of our physical death is totally completed. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,” Paul writes, “when the last trumpet sounds and the dead are raised incorruptible, we *shall* be changed.”³⁶²

“For now,” Paul tells the church at Corinth, “we see through a glass darkly, but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known.”³⁶³

We will someday be *completely* changed!

Our self-spirit doesn't let go without a struggle. Self is resilient as well as proud. It resists giving up. It wants to stay on the throne. Self insists, “I don't need to change. I can be good, patient, pure, kind, gentle, and loving apart from Christ.” Our self-spirit is subtle, competing with Christ, urging our soul to remain as it is, lost in the lies self tells.

Each soul must decide, “Whom will I serve?”³⁶⁴

If we are truly saved (i.e., born again) we serve the risen Christ. He is Lord of our lives. We honor God, not our self. We give Him glory and praise for every good thing, for He *is* “every good thing”.

Our soul is clothed with Christ.³⁶⁵ The transforming work of His indwelling Spirit starts at once. His love *begins* to take control and, in time, He has His way with us completely as we surrender self.

Our darkness is dispelled by His light.

Our self-ishness is dispelled by His love.

We confess with our mouths that we stand by Christ's strength alone, that our old ways were wrong (both for others and for us), that Christ is Lord of our lives indeed.

We no longer serve self as we used to.

We may continue to sin now and then, but we now have a choice that was never ours before, free to choose Christ's righteousness and deny our self-ishness.

³⁶² 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

³⁶³ 1 Corinthians 13:12

³⁶⁴ Joshua 24:15

³⁶⁵ Romans 13:14; Galatians 3:27

When Soul Sees Self

He sets us free, and we are “free indeed!”³⁶⁶

As the life of Christ displaces the debris of our dead self-spirit, our soul receives eternal life by His love. We become wise to the evil influence of lies we once believed. God’s spirit of truth drives out the lies our souls once believed.

Some of those old lies fueled rage or drove us into withdrawal. Some caused us to believe awful things about people who actually loved us, until we shut them out of our lives.

All lies seek to destroy us.

Christ alone can drive them out.

Many lies die suddenly. Others hide in our souls for years. But, as we pray each day for Christ to shine His truth into every dark corner of self, especially those corners self is afraid soul will see, the insidious, destructive darkness fades.

We are set free from falsehood by Him who cannot lie.

Light displaces darkness.³⁶⁷

A blind man tormented by the physical darkness by which his life is imprisoned may be touched by Christ and delivered forever from spiritual darkness, set free for eternity, though his eyesight is never restored. But an unredeemed soul with 20:20 eyesight who is satisfied with his view of life without Christ is a blinder soul in greater need of light.

Paul writes, “Now we see through a darkened glass, but then we shall see Him face to face. Now we know in part, but then we shall know even as we are known.”³⁶⁸

Many self-styled Christians suffer from retained lies. Instead of seeing themselves as mortals drawn to God by Christ’s redeeming grace, they cover their pride with manufactured meekness or hide their fear in pompous boasting. Lying self controls the throne, not Christ. Lying self exalts itself. Lying self deceives the soul until Christ reveals the truth.

Lying self radiates scorn for all who will not honor its lies.

It is the root of bitterness.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁶ John 8:36

³⁶⁷ James 1:17

³⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:12

³⁶⁹ Hebrews 12:14-16

Lying self hides in popular addictions, including religion if the doctrine happens to agree with its desires.

Lying self chooses his denomination based on how self wishes to live, what habits and behaviors self needs approved, what secret thoughts self wants to harbor without feeling guilty. Then, abiding by that denomination's doctrines, lying self may be honored by other members of that denomination and be promoted to prominent positions, even priest or pastor.

The judgment self administers, the rejection self radiates, and the scornful seat in which self sits are not of God.³⁷⁰

Christ is our wisdom.

Christ is our righteousness.

Christ is our sanctification.

Christ is our redemption.³⁷¹

Where is boasting? It is altogether excluded.³⁷²

We wait. We watch. We surrender.

God does the work through Christ *within* us, displacing self.

Lying self must make room for the spirit of truth. It cannot stay where Christ is. No darkness can resist the light.

The battle for our soul may continue long after we're born again. It may take years to be free from drugs, alcohol, sexual perversion, and spiritual deception. We are plagued by lying self that pesters and confuses us from time-to-time throughout our lives. For some with deeper wounds, God's spiritual surgery may require great loss and drastic change before our putrid lying self is finally subdued.

Yet, slowly, surely, self lets go as we give place to Him who is the only truth we ever know, the One who keeps our soul in good repair.

When we are weak, He is near and ready to protect us as soon as we ask in prayer.

When self's lies seek to drag us back to darkness, we need only ask Him to instruct our souls with truth.

³⁷⁰ Psalms 1:1

³⁷¹ 1 Corinthians 1:30

³⁷² Rom 3:27

When Soul Sees Self

He *is* the power by which we overcome.
His love is a mighty river of living water.
His Name is Truth.

After praying the sinner's prayer or being baptized, there still is temptation, the lure of drugs, sex, money, power, and other lusts that seek to trick us into thinking we're still lost. If we resist them with self-strength, they will get the better of us. But, if we pray for deliverance that comes by His counsel *within*, the torment subsides and gradually disappears.

If we fall victim again to self's lies and give in to its seductions, Christ is faithful to lead us by His Light once more as soon as we ask.

We invite Him each day to do so, because we are prompted by His presence *within* us to pray for more grace, more forgiveness, more truth.

None is immune to life's temptations. He who claims otherwise is still deceived.

We are *being* transformed.

Until we see Him face-to-face when we shuck off this mortal coil, as Shakespeare put it, we need more truth, more Christ.

If others condemn us because we act or fail to act in some way they've decided bars us from continued fellowship with them, we just keep on praying! We pray for ourselves and for them. We pray for ourselves to be delivered from our sin. We pray for them that they be delivered from theirs.

We pray without ceasing!³⁷³

If we forget to pray, God re-minds us.

God is faithful and just to forgive all our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness³⁷⁴ ... *if* we ask.

We all sin. God hates it.

We sin and continue to sin.

But, it doesn't mean we aren't secure in Christ' love. It doesn't mean we aren't going to heaven. It just means we're human, as God created us to be, needing Him above all else.

³⁷³ 1 Thessalonians 5:17

³⁷⁴ 1 John 1:9

We fall short of God's perfection,³⁷⁵ so He can rescue us.

God forgives when we repent with godly sorrow.

Our slate is wiped clean again and again.

Slowly we grow stronger by His strength *within* us.

Lies hurt only those who believe them.

People who judge us falsely cannot hurt us. The lying self in them are *their* enemies, not ours.

We are protected from the fiery darts of enemies who accuse us of things that aren't true, and we return the attacks with love and mercy, remembering that but for Christ we'd be as lost as they.

Those who try to steal our joy by judging and accusing us need His love just as much as we.

Judging spirits aren't of God. Those who are bitter and envious, raging, unable to control their temper, railing and raging at us, are not submitted to Christ. This knowledge is our guard against the pain they can cause *if we forget the truth who lives within us*.

Jesus tells us to fear only the lies that can destroy our souls.³⁷⁶

We resist the darkness with the light of Christ's love.

On the other hand, we should listen for the truth from those who offer positive, loving criticism. We should look for the *truth* in what others say about us when they judge, examining our self lest we be just as blind as they. We should be anxious to see if there is something in us needing change, then plead for Christ to change it.

We should also remember how Jesus was judged. He dined with sinners, befriended prostitutes, plucked corn on the Sabbath, and was derided as a criminal dying on a cross.

We need not worry how lying selfs judge us.

We are being changed!

We are thankful, not fearful.

As old friends desert us, God sends *new* friends happy to know and fellowship with the Christ who lives within us, and we reap a harvest of friendships like we've never known before.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Romans 3:23, 5:12

³⁷⁶ Matthew 10:28

³⁷⁷ Gal 6:9

When Soul Sees Self

Whatever we ask of Him shall be done,³⁷⁸ so we ask Him to be our overcomer, to be the Light in which our soul can see our self, to be the Wisdom that rejects our self-ishness and pleads for His eternal love.

Wonder of wonders.

The unsearchable riches of His grace.³⁷⁹

To Enter Christ

Christ also invites us to live *in* Him.

It may seem strange to speak of living *in* Christ, yet it is no more difficult to understand than Christ living *in us*.

We rest *in* Christ as He abides *in* us!

Paul told the men of Athens. “As I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, ‘To The Unknown God’. I declare to you this God whom you ignorantly worship is God who made the world and all things therein, the Lord of heaven and earth. He does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor does He need anything men’s hands can make. He is the source of life, of breath, of all good things. He makes one blood of every nation of men on earth, and He determines the times and bounds of their habitation. Men, therefore, should seek Him, if happily they may discover where He can be found ... for He is never far from any of us.”

Paul then said, “In Him we live, move, and have our being.”³⁸⁰

The Greeks knew God as *Logos*, the uncaused cause, the creator and creation combined, the unseen hand that regulates the cosmos according to a fixed plan by which men can anticipate foreseeable consequences of human behavior, an impersonal deity.

But, Paul knew God in Christ the sacrificial lamb whose life *within* us is eternal!

The men of Athens already understood the concept of God in whom “we live, move, and have our being”.

But they knew nothing of the God who lives and moves *within* our being.

³⁷⁸ John 15:4-9

³⁷⁹ Ephesians 3:8-12

³⁸⁰ Acts 17:23-28

To Greeks, Romans, and even the Jews, God is *outside* them, and they move and have their being *within* God, *separate* entities, selfs apart from God.

Paul knew God in a *new* way that you and I can also know.

The Jews knew God by a name. When Moses met with God on Mount Horeb, he asked, “By what name shall my people call you?”

God answered, “I AM THAT I AM. This is my name forever. This is my memorial to all generations.”³⁸¹

In Hebrew this is one word: יהוה

“Yod Heh Vah He”

Churches teach He is “I Am”.

The verb “AM” in both parts of the name include past, present, and future. God told Moses to tell the children of Israel, “I am all that was, all that is, and all that ever shall be.”

The Jews knew God in this way.

They knew He was omnipresent (existing everywhere).

They knew He was omniscient (seeing everything).

They knew He was omnipotent (having all true power).

They knew they moved in Him and in Him had their being.

But truly born again Christians know Him in a *new* way.

We are being made One *with* Him!

We are *in* His Spirit and His Spirit is *in* us, transforming us.

We love in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸²

We live in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸³

We pray and sing in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸⁴

We are being justified in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸⁵

We are sometimes carried away in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸⁶

³⁸¹ Exodus 3:13-15

³⁸² Galatians 5:16

³⁸³ Galatians 5:25

³⁸⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:15

³⁸⁵ 1 Timothy 3:16

³⁸⁶ Revelation 17:3, Revelation 21:10

When Soul Sees Self

We are often fervent in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸⁷

We are purposed in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸⁸

We are joyful in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁸⁹

We are bound together in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁹⁰

We even sometimes speak in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁹¹

When we cannot speak we groan in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁹²

And, most importantly, we worship in His Spirit and by His Spirit.³⁹³

This is more than merely moving, living, and having our being *in* God as separate beings, selfs in quest of God's approval, as Paul described to the men of Athens.

It's altogether different being "in His Spirit by His Spirit".

It is participating in His Person, being part of His eternal being, as He is part of our internal being, no longer separated from God.

We commune with Him in a way that releases the power of His nature, the source of Christian victory.

As we abide in Him, He abides in us, and the power of His love flows through us to others *and* returns to us again!

We sing hallelujahs and give thanks *in* His Spirit by His Spirit.

We acknowledge the soul-transforming truth that is working the change others see in us.

To Be Certain

Is Christ making us new creatures, or are we merely acting out what we've been told we ought to be and do? Many allow self-styled teachers to confuse them with imitation righteousness, forged wisdom, fake mercy, false forgiveness, and made-up

³⁸⁷ Acts 18:5

³⁸⁸ Acts 19:21

³⁸⁹ Colossians 2:5

³⁹⁰ Acts 20:22

³⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 14:2

³⁹² John 11:33

³⁹³ 1 Corinthians 14:2

meekness that masks a hungry self secretly seeking praise from others and approval from God.

Counterfeit Christianity is all-too common. Selfs wearing crosses on their sleeves!

When Moses threw his staff on the floor in Pharaoh's court the once-dead stick became a living snake!³⁹⁴ It was a miracle.

Yet, just as quickly as the staff of Moses moved along the floor and hissed, the sorcerers of Egypt threw their staves down and *all* of them crawled and hissed like snakes!

Moses' snake ate the other snakes, but we should remember that those *other* snakes were once straight sticks in the hands of mortal men wielding spiritual power from the dark side, black magic that also works signs and wonders to deceive fools.

Jesus told us deceivers would come in His Name.³⁹⁵

We dare not let miracle workers become our spiritual leaders, claiming they do their marvels by God's power. Some are wolves in sheep's clothing.³⁹⁶ They deceive with odd signs and wonders.³⁹⁷ Some are filled with darkness that seeks to kill our souls by wooing us to follow them into their inky night.

Jesus denounced those who followed Him *because* of miracles, knowing miracle mongers are on the wrong path, that love has no requirement for miracles to prove its genuineness. Indeed, it is all too common for miracles to get in the way or even take the place of love.

"You won't believe *unless* you see signs and wonders."³⁹⁸

Lovers of Christ don't need signs and wonders to believe.

Signs and wonders are for *unbelievers*.

Christian authenticity is evidenced by Christ's character that is pure, peaceable, gentle, agreeable, full of mercy, without partiality or hypocrisy.

Signs and wonders are for wounded souls who need a special witness from God to draw them from their darkness to His light.

³⁹⁴ Exodus 4:1-7:17

³⁹⁵ Matthew 24:11, Mark 13:6, Titus 1:10

³⁹⁶ Matthew 7:15

³⁹⁷ Matthew 24:24, Mark 13:22

³⁹⁸ John 4:48

When Soul Sees Self

But, once we begin to experience Christ alive *within* us, we no longer need signs and wonders for confirmation. He is our proof.

We are in Him, and He is in us.

Wonders aren't required.

Each day that His love pours through us is wonder enough.

Each word He speaks to guide us from *within* is sign enough!³⁹⁹

Thomas was one of the twelve disciples, yet he was not with the others when Jesus first appeared after walking from the tomb. His friends exclaimed, "Thomas! We have seen the Lord! He is alive!"

Thomas replied dully, "Until I put my finger in the nail holes and thrust my hand into His wounded side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, while Thomas and the others were in a closed room with the door securely shut, Christ suddenly appeared in their midst and said, "Peace be unto you." Imagine their surprise and joy!

Then, turning to doubting Thomas, He said, "Reach hither your finger and behold my hands. Reach hither your hand and thrust it into my side. Be not faithless. Believe!"

Thomas answered, "My Lord and my God!"

I don't believe he reached to touch those precious wounds.

I believe he fell on his knees in praise and adoration, ashamed of his unbelief, transformed by godly sorrow.

Jesus then said, "Thomas, you believe because you've seen me. Blessed are those who have *not* yet seen and will believe."⁴⁰⁰

God in Christ need not be seen to be believed. He is real in our hearts. We experience His presence. The witness of His love is all we need to know He is at work within us. The fact that we are truly sorry for our sin, that we confess to others, and that we praise Him for the change we are experiencing as we grow more like Him each day is proof positive that He is real!

If God wants us to receive gifts of signs and miracles, we will have them and use them to draw others to Him, when He is ready for us to do so, when He has prepared us for that responsibility. If

³⁹⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:22

⁴⁰⁰ John 20:24-31

He does not want us to know Him by such evidence but prefers us to remain His children by love alone, we remain secure in His love.

We walk in Him.

We live in Him.

We rest in Him.

What we have cannot be taken from us!

His love flows *through* us.

If we're finding comfort in the presence of those with whom we once were nervous or embarrassed, we are walking in His Spirit.

If we're not so quickly jumping from our chair to scream at folks who disagree with us, we are walking in His Spirit.

If we're telling cashiers we received too much change because we want to do what's right, we are walking in His Spirit.

If we're showing mercy to beggars asking for a handout, we are walking in His Spirit.

If we're encouraging the elderly man who bags our groceries, we are walking in His Spirit.

If we're forgiving those who spitefully punish us and falsely accuse us, we are walking in His Spirit.

And in all this He is walking in us!

We don't *have* to walk on water to experience a miracle.

We have all the miracle we need.

Christ's love is growing *within* us!

Christianity is not a fad. It's not a club. There is no exclusivity, regardless what denominational zealots claim to the contrary.

Christianity is a love affair.

It is a walk, a constant prayer, a learning experience.

It is the school where we learn eternal truth, as soul sees self.

It is the why we love our enemies and reach out to those who need the hope God gives to all who seek His life.

The fruits of His Spirit by which we know He is in us are love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance.⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰¹ Gal 5:22-23

When Soul Sees Self

The wisdom of His Spirit is “pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and every good fruit, without partiality or hypocrisy, and sown in righteousness by us who make peace.”⁴⁰²

If His wisdom and His fruits are being produced in our life and blessing *others*, we *know* we are walking in His Spirit.

We need no other miracle, no other signs or wonders,

We have *His* witness!

He is all we need!

If His wisdom and fruits are *not* flowing from our lives to bless others, we *aren't* walking in His Spirit. The Spirit of God alone can produce God's wisdom and God's fruits. Only those who walk in the Spirit of God can demonstrate His wisdom and His fruit.

There are counterfeit fruits *and* counterfeit wisdom, of course, but the wisdom from God and genuine fruits of His Spirit do not grow in darkness.

Christ asked, “Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Every good tree brings forth good fruit. Corrupt trees bring forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.”⁴⁰³

None of us shows the fruits and wisdom of God's Spirit *all* the time. Sometimes we are drawn aside by *other* spirits, believing lies and acting on them. Yet the more we pray, asking God to overcome our foolish self and fill our life more fully with His grace, the more He washes our souls clean with our own tears of godly sorrow.

Don't be discouraged if you don't seem as “spiritual” as others. Lots of people claim to be “spiritual”, but the spirits in them are not of Christ.

Be patient. Wait upon the Lord.

Be thankful for where you are on the path to His perfection.

He gives you the desires of your heart over time and one day He will be the *only* desire of your heart!

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⁴⁰² James 3:17

⁴⁰³ Mat 7:16-18

FELLOWSHIP

Walking The Level Path

One of the beautiful results of receiving Christ's life within is stepping out of the pecking order of this competitive world.

One night long after midnight a farmer heard a great commotion in the hen house. Having learned of a chicken thief's activities in the area, he grabbed his double-barrel 12-gauge shotgun, pulled on an old jacket, stepped into his boots, and trudged out through the muddy backyard to the rickety structure alive with the exaggerated clucking of excited poultry.

"Who's there?" the farmer demanded in a loud voice.

"Nobody here but us chickens," came a frightened reply.

If we examine populations of many wonderful churches today, we'll find there *is* no one there but chickens—no chicken thief, no wolf, no mangy old dog, not even a demanding rooster strutting about, insisting on running the show. In many churches, the Spirit of God is alive in the people who share Christ together as equals. There *is* no pecking order. Leaders are servants, humbled by the price Jesus paid for their souls, afraid of self's tendency to think they are more than they are.

In other churches, as it was in the earliest days of the Faith, there are men and women who insist on being stars of the show, celebrity personalities, centers of attraction, bosses who demand respect and rule the roost to get it! This is not God's will.

John writes in his third letter of such a person. Many were going about visiting churches, sharing freely the Gospel they'd received from others, "But Diotrefes," John reports, "who loves to have the most prominent place among members of his church, refused to receive us. He spoke against us with malicious words and would not allow us in his assembly. Those of his own congregation who wanted to receive us, *he threw out!*"⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁴ 3 John 1:7-10

When Soul Sees Self

John who leaned on Jesus' breast at the Last Supper was kicked to the street by this Diotrefes, whose spirit is all too alive today in certain "churches".

John admonishes us to take care whom we place in authority. In the next verse he says, "Follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that does good is of God, but he that does evil has not seen God."⁴⁰⁵

In Christ we are equal ... *all* of us.

None has the right to forbid another who comes in the name of the Lord unless, of course, that person is clamorous, teaching some doctrine that opposes Christ, or so vile in his personal character as to bring shame on the reputation of the Gospel.

Competition for power among leaders and self-righteousness of those who feel their peculiar view of Christ and His Gospel is the only possible view approved of God is what causes those who *need* the Gospel to turn away. People hungry for Christ' forgiveness, mercy, and life are looking for a place of rest in a fellowship of souls who accept one another in Christian love, without hierarchies or other forms of pecking order.

The persistent pecking keeps many souls in sin.

Where there is disorder, we know there is darkness, for Christ will not abide if we refuse to "love our neighbors *as ourselves*".

We are all on equal footing with Christ.

Paul tells the Galatians, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for all are one in Christ."⁴⁰⁶

There's no difference in nationality, status in life, gender, or any other arbitrary fact by which we once were separated into artificial categories and judged by those who sought to rule us or put us to shame or derision.

In our new life none are preferred above another, for all share the one selfsame Spirit.

One Spirit.

One God.

⁴⁰⁵ 3 John 1-11

⁴⁰⁶ Galatians 3:28

One Church.

Paul tells us, “If you be Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”⁴⁰⁷ Imagine! Heirs *together*. Co-heirs! Beneficiaries of the grace of God, equally entitled to His goodness and mercy. None more entitled than another.

Paul assures us, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with us that we are children of God and, if children, then heirs, joint-heirs with Christ.”⁴⁰⁸

We are children of God and, like children of a loving father, not one of us is preferred above another.

All are children.

All are heirs.

One Father.

Many children.

The ground is level at the foot of the Cross.

Badges we wear in this world are absent in God’s kingdom.

None are higher to rule the lower nor lower to serve the higher.

All are one.

All equal.

One Spirit ... *His!*

There are no captains, lieutenants, or sergeants.

All are privates first class.

And, isn’t that how it *should* be?

We are soldiers of equal station.

We are either children of God—or we are not. There’s no other option, no other title, no other rank. As one preacher put it, “There are saints and there are ain’ts. We either are or we are not.”

Some disciples asked Jesus, “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

Jesus then placed a little child before them and said, “Unless you are converted to be as a little child you cannot see the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁷ Galatians 3:29

⁴⁰⁸ Romans 8:16-17

⁴⁰⁹ Matthew 18:1-3

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The measure by which the world measures us is not in God's eyes.

The One who is greatest is Christ.

The rest of us stand equal before Him.

None of us is great, none preferred, none entitled to rule others.

Christ alone is Lord!

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, asked Jesus to "Grant that we may sit with you in heaven, one on your right hand and the other on your left."⁴¹⁰

Jesus lovingly replied, "You don't know what you ask. To sit on my right hand or my left is not mine to give. The greatest among you must be servant of all, for even I have come not to be served, but to serve and to give my life a ransom for many."⁴¹¹

In the kingdom of God, "Rich and poor meet together. The Lord is maker of them all."⁴¹²

The servant is greatest among us, and He is the greatest servant as He ministers to our every need.

Self's struggle for supremacy is ridiculous.

Resting Together In Grace

The psalmist sings, "O magnify the Lord with me. Let us exalt His name *together*."⁴¹³

In another song, "How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like precious ointment upon the head. It is like the oil that ran down Aaron's beard, down to the skirts of his garments. It is as the dew of Mount Hermon and as the dew that descends on the mountains of Zion ... for there the Lord commanded the blessing of life evermore."⁴¹⁴

Scriptures that speak of our "togetherness" are too many to list.

Jesus confirmed our status as chickens when with tears in the Garden of Gethsemane He called to Jerusalem (and to those who

⁴¹⁰ Mark 10:35-37

⁴¹¹ Mark 10:38-45

⁴¹² Proverbs 22:2

⁴¹³ Psalms 34:3

⁴¹⁴ Psalms 133:1-3

were Jerusalem, those who put their trust in city walls and written laws). He wept saying, “Jerusalem! Oh, Jerusalem! You kill God’s prophets and stone them who are sent to you. How often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks beneath the protection of her wings, yet you refused me!”⁴¹⁵

God longs to gather us *together* as his huddling chicks.

Still many refuse, preferring the praise of others, seeking signs and wonders instead of Him whose sign will one day fill the sky with wonder when He comes again in power to astonish those who now reject Him or seek to stand in His place to rule the laity.⁴¹⁶

Many worship the creature instead of the Creator, “changing the truth of God into a lie.”⁴¹⁷

Many fail to stand together in celebration of the Gospel by their rebellion at God’s authority. This is different than “rebellion at the authority of church leaders”. The only authority a pastor, teacher, evangelist, or other church leader can possess is authority vested in him or her by the Gospel he or she shares with others. Authority in the church is not like authority in the world.

In God’s house, Christ alone is Lord.

Authority springs not from the office one occupies by consent and behest of a congregation or faraway bishop, but in the *truth* that is demonstrated as well as spoken from that office.

In Christ’s Church the only authority anyone has is truth.

A winning smile, seminary education, or growing list of literary credits and popular Christian television ministry are no substitute for truth.

We are called to worship God “in spirit and in truth.”⁴¹⁸

We are *not* to worship men nor their systems of theology.

We are not even to worship angels!⁴¹⁹

In John’s account of the Revelation received from God while he was on the Isle of Patmos, he tells of bowing down to a voice

⁴¹⁵ Matthew 23:37

⁴¹⁶ Revelation 2:16; 14:5

⁴¹⁷ Romans 1:25

⁴¹⁸ John 4:23-24

⁴¹⁹ Revelation 22:9

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that was the sound of “a great multitude”, “many waters”, “mighty thunderings”.

The voice said, “Hallelujah! The Lord God omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice, giving honor to Him, for the marriage of the lamb is come and His bride is ready. These are the true sayings of God.”

Yet, when John fell at his feet to worship him, the voice said to this simple man who loved Jesus with all his heart, “See you do it not, for I am thy fellow servant and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Christ. Worship God, for the testimony of Christ is the spirit of prophecy.”⁴²⁰

John was later overwhelmed by the majesty of what he saw and heard, and once again he fell down to worship before the feet of an angel which showed him mighty things, and the angel echoed the command he heard before. “See you do it not, for I am thy fellow servant and of thy brethren the prophets and of them which keep the sayings of this book. Worship God.”⁴²¹

To make another man or woman your “spiritual authority” is to rebel at God’s authority and make the Gospel a lie. We dare not put others in His place, whether they be pastors, priests, teachers, or our spouses. The angel of God said, “See you do it not!”

Others are just as we.

All are equal in the sight of God.

“There is none righteous, no not one.”⁴²²

When we put others in authority over us in spiritual matters, we short-circuit the teaching God intends us to receive by the witness of His Holy Spirit of truth within us.

If His truth is in us we need no instruction from men, for He will teach us “all things”.⁴²³

That’s not to say we should ignore counsel of others. We learn from experience and education of fellow saints who assist us to discern the truth through Christ’s indwelling Spirit. However, we

⁴²⁰ Revelation 19:5-10

⁴²¹ Revelation 22:8-9

⁴²² Romans 3:10

⁴²³ 1 John 2:26-27

dare not make other men our masters in the church, for they are also men.

Only God is God.

Only truth is truth.

And, truth alone is our authority.

We should listen to those who offer counsel or advice, but we must *always* look to God alone for truth for He alone *is* truth.⁴²⁴

If we make men our spiritual authority, we open our souls to the darkness and will be lost when those we elevated to the impossibly high station of our “spiritual authority” let us down!

“Offer sacrifices of righteousness,” the psalmist says, “and put your trust in the Lord.”⁴²⁵

It doesn’t matter how powerful a speaker may be, how mighty his miracles, how lowly his heart, how kind, how charming ... *all* men are only men. Apart from sharing straight from scripture they have only opinions to offer, opinions worthless in God’s kingdom.

Only truth has merit.

That a spiritual leader has 100,000 followers while another has only a few is no basis for believing the first fellow’s words are any closer to the truth.

We need *truth*, not pomp, popularity, or pulpit pizzazz!

We need leaders who stand on the level with us and point us to Christ as our *only* spiritual authority and head of His Church.

From all others turn away.⁴²⁶

The magicians of Pharaoh’s court were empowered by evil, yet they performed miracles as did Moses. Their staves *also* turned to snakes.⁴²⁷ Their performance was very convincing! Yet Pharaoh’s magicians served darkness. Their power to deceive was almost as great as the power God gave Moses, yet the snake Moses’ staff became ate the magician’s snakes. They served deception, not truth. Their source was darkness, not light.

⁴²⁴ Romans 3:4

⁴²⁵ Psalms 4:5

⁴²⁶ 2 Timothy 3:5

⁴²⁷ Exodus 7:8-12.

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Unless we are blessed with discernment to detect deception in spiritual matters, we may be seduced, following the wrong leaders like the city rats that followed the charmed flute of the Pied Piper from Hamelin and were led to their destruction.⁴²⁸

The writer of Proverbs warns, “The simple believe every word, but a prudent man looks well to his going.”⁴²⁹

The prudent man sifts the words of others for truth, dismissing the rest.

Agreement in truth is the glue that binds us to each other.

There may be enthusiastic praise, exuberant music, warm fellowship, and winning smiles . . . yet these are no indication truth is on the throne, unless there is agreement in truth.

James Russell Lowell wrote these lines that say it well.

Truth forever on the scaffold,
Wrong forever on the throne.
Yet that scaffold sways the future
And, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth God within the shadow,⁴³⁰
Keeping watch above his own.

We trust in God, not others.

Agreement in doctrine is no guarantee of spiritual authenticity, but it is *certain* that lack of agreement or lack of knowledge as to what doctrine people share signals dangerous error. Something is desperately wrong if people don't know what beliefs they hold in common beyond the elements of faith in God, repentance from dead works, and the hope of eternal salvation.⁴³¹

Perhaps the pastor or priest is ignorant, or the people may refuse to learn, or a powerful social clique in church hierarchy purposely misleads the people to attain some private goal.

You can be certain *someone* is in the dark if the people are not agreed on what the Gospel Mystery *is*.

⁴²⁸ The Pied Piper of Hamelin, Robert Browning (1812-1889).

⁴²⁹ Proverbs 14:15

⁴³⁰ From The Present Crisis, James Russell Lowell 1819-1891.

⁴³¹ Hebrews 6:1-3

If one leads with charisma and the rest follow like sheep with no notion where they are going, it is certain there'll be a great fall when the final account is taken.

“How can two walk together,” the prophet Amos asks, “unless they be in agreement?”⁴³²

This question (which should be posted in giant letters where young lovers purchase marriage licenses), is not something we can casually dismiss.

Sharing Christ is more than sharing fuzzy feelings.

It is life!

It is all of life!

If we are not agreed on essentials of the Gospel, principles of Christ, the mystery of grace, the power of God, and the frailty of man, how can we *hope* to be effective evangelists or do our job as teachers?

Paul *beseches us*, “by the name of our Lord Christ that you *all speak the same thing*, that there be no divisions among you, that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment.”⁴³³

If this were impossible, Paul would not beseech us to do it.

We *can* agree, if we are standing in His Spirit and He in us!

We *can* stop the lies that destroy love.

There is coming a time when we will surely stand together, secure for eternity in the union of His eternal family to which we are called. There'll be no disputing then, no vain glorying in self, no imagined wisdom, no emulations, no hypocrisy, no anger, no competing for the pulpit limelight.

“Then shall appear the sign of Christ in heaven. All the tribes of the earth shall mourn, for they shall see Christ coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His souls from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”⁴³⁴

⁴³² Amos 3:3

⁴³³ 1 Corinthians 1:10

⁴³⁴ Mat 24:30-31

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There'll be no divisions then!

No denominations.

No competing doctrines.

No pecking orders to climb!

In these perilous times today when darkness has control of our media, movies, music, and all other mechanisms of madness that plunge society into drug addiction, prostitution, and suicide, there *are* divisions—false christs and false prophets prospering by signs and wonders, leading the lost astray.

“But take heed,” Jesus warns. “I have foretold you these things. For, after the troubles of those days, the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. Then shall they see me coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and I shall send my angels and gather together my souls from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven.”⁴³⁵

We shall be gathered together ... “as a hen gathers her chicks”.

He will come when we are most scattered by teachings of false prophets who seduce many by divisive doctrines.

We rest in the knowledge of this truth. It is the confidence of our frailty. We trust in Him and Him alone.

We refuse to follow false teachers, regardless how marvelous the signs and wonders they perform, regardless of the enthusiastic entreaties of others who fall under their charismatic spell.

Christ is our spiritual head, not other men or women.

We heed the wisdom of that sage writer of Proverbs who says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”⁴³⁶

To depart from evil is more than abandoning worldly thoughts, drunkenness, debauchery, and dishonest dealings with neighbors. To depart from evil is also renouncing false doctrines.

To depart from evil is letting Christ ascend the throne of our souls, then bowing to Him and Him alone.

⁴³⁵ Mat 13:22-27

⁴³⁶ Proverbs 3:5-7

To depart from evil is to fear the Lord.

To depart from evil is to see this world's wisdom is counterfeit, seduced by political correctness, greed, and immorality offered in the guise of liberality and open-mindedness.

To depart from evil is to agree with God, i.e., to “con-fess”.⁴³⁷

To depart from evil is to learn from Him who abides *within*.

Christ *alone* is able to guide us on the path we walk together.

Paul calls us to “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. Let us hold fast to the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful who gave us His Promise), and let us consider one another to encourage love and good works.”⁴³⁸

We encourage each other in the faith.⁴³⁹

Fellowship is growing together, not just knowing together.

Fellowship nurtures grace, and spiritual maturity results.

God wants us restored to one another,⁴⁴⁰ done with divisions.

God wants us to love each other as He loves *us*.

We stand in unity when we rest in the assurance we are His workmanship, that there is one Gospel, one baptism, one promise of our faith ... and all is Christ's work, not ours.

No part is subject to separate interpretations, “For the prophecy came in old time not by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by God's Spirit. Yet, there were false prophets even then, as there shall be false teachers among you, privately bringing damnable heresies, even denying (i.e., not acknowledging the authority and power of) the Lord, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. Many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. Through covetousness with feigned words they will make merchandise of

⁴³⁷ The meaning of confess is to have faith (*fess*) with (*con*), to stand in agreement with another, to admit, which itself means to send (*mit*) alongside (*ad*).

⁴³⁸ Hebrews 10:22-25

⁴³⁹ Jude 1:16-21

⁴⁴⁰ Galatians 6:1

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you. Their judgment has been coming a long time. It won't wait much longer."⁴⁴¹

Beware of such teachers and come out from among them.⁴⁴²

By grace discern truth and trust only in truth.

Be not moved by men's convincing oratory.

Be not swayed by signs, wonders, or miracles.

Wait on the Lord ... and rest.

Trusting His Work

One of the most difficult (but *essential*) things we learn as we grow in grace and mature as Christians, is to acknowledge from what we are purchased. We count the price Christ paid to rescue our souls from darkness and death. We treasure that price and are so thankful that we *want* to do what's right and put away the life in which we once were lost.

We begin to see how terrible our old life *was*. How quickly we would fall back into error if Christ took away the blessing of His grace by which He keeps us moving toward His righteousness by the power of His love alive within us.

None can save himself nor, once saved, keep himself secure in his salvation by any effort of will. The path to safety, the rescue of our souls, is not *anything* we do. It does not result from taking thought or exercising human labor.

We were *wretched* when Christ found us, *sinking* when we took His outstretched nail-pierced hand, *lost* in a world of confusion and pain when He showed our souls the wickedness of self, *deceived* by lying spirits whom we served unwittingly.

There was *nothing* in us that could merit our salvation.

Not then.

Not now.

We were wretched, sinking, lost, and deceived.

Without Him we still are!

We were willing victims, lured by lust and pride, trapped in the sinner's spider net of deception and death.

⁴⁴¹ 2 Pet 1:20-2:3

⁴⁴² 2 Corinthians 6:17

We defended self, making excuses instead of asking for mercy.
We tried to justify our wickedness.

We blamed our circumstances, a traumatic childhood, poverty,
or other tragedy beyond our power to avoid.

Nothing was self's fault.

We couldn't see that we were sinners, that our failure to become
what we hoped for was a consequence of the pride and rebellion of
our human self-spirit.

Self was unable to admit and confess these things.

But God, who is rich in mercy, loved us so much that even when
we were dead in our sins He gave us His life.⁴⁴³

By grace⁴⁴⁴ we are saved, not by our self, lest any man boast.

God raised us to sit together with Him to demonstrate forever
the exceeding riches of his kindness toward us through Christ. The
grace by which we are saved is through faith we've been given by
God, not something we muster from some secret reservoir within
ourselves.

His faith in us is strengthened by exercise (i.e., grows stronger
as we trust Him to keep the promises He made to us through Jesus,
the prophets, and apostles), yet "our" faith is something we could
never have invented. It is His Faith imputed to us by a power we
could never gain on our own. It is the *gift* of God, given freely. It
is grace conferred on us when we were without faith, without hope,
lost in the lies we once believed.

None of us has any reason to boast.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ to accomplish the
good things God ordained we will do by *His* power.⁴⁴⁵

We rest in the finished work of Christ and in the continuing
work He is performing to perfect our souls and set us free.

⁴⁴³ Ephesians 2:5

⁴⁴⁴ Grace may be defined as a benefit freely conferred. It is the receipt of something good that has not been earned by the recipient and, in the case of Salvation, *cannot* be earned by the recipient. But it is so much more than this. It is God's Mercy that is always according to His will, to grant or withhold. God will not be our debtor.

⁴⁴⁵ Ephesians 2:4-10

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We rest in Him alone. We trust not the wisdom of men. We are all equals in His sight, “raised to sit *together* with Him.”⁴⁴⁶

Our rest is shared with all who believe by His grace to the praise of *His* glory.

Receiving His Strength

The strength of the Gospel is truth.

The exercise by which we mature in fellowship is the discipline of “speaking truth in love and thereby growing up in Him who is our head.”⁴⁴⁷

The Gospel cannot live where truth is not supreme.

We *learn* to speak the truth in love by listening.

We listen to others for truth.

However, we learn far more from listening to our *self*. We discover more of truth as we use our own two ears to judge every word that comes out of our own mouths.⁴⁴⁸ We grow by listening to what God says as we pay attention to our own words.

Listening to others *is* important but, when we listen to our *own* words, we hear God’s still, small voice telling us what our words disclose about our old self-life, i.e., the still unrepentant spiritual condition of our deceitful self.

By listening to our own words, we learn more of Him, and soul sees self ... or perhaps I should say soul *hears* self!

Are we speaking truth in love? Indeed, are our words loving at all? Are our words kind? Are our words merciful? Are our words gentle? Are our words completely, utterly, absolutely *true*?

Where is our heart?

In whom are we trusting?

To what extent is Christ on the throne?

Or, to what extent is self still demanding its right to rule?

By listening to words we say as we speak of spiritual matters, or when we pray, when we praise, and even when we talk about ordinary things like the weather, our plans for tomorrow, or how

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Ephesians 4:15

⁴⁴⁸ Matthew 15:11

so-and-so treated us yesterday, we discern our hidden feelings and beliefs ... and if we listen carefully we should be horrified at what kinds of thoughts remain hidden in our old self-spirit.

Jesus said, “Out of the heart’s abundance the mouth speaks.”⁴⁴⁹

If we truly want to know what evil lurks within us, if we want to know who is truly seated on the throne of our lives, we need only *listen* to our own speech!

Listen to the words that come out of *your* mouth.

Our words are windows through which we see the hidden nooks and crannies where self is hiding.

We also learn by listening to what *others* say to us, about us, against us, and in support of us. “In a multitude of counselors, there is safety.”⁴⁵⁰ If only one or two say we’re selfish, there’s a chance they’re in error, that we’re as generous as we think we are (or nearly so). If, on the other hand, a dozen who know us intimately are heard to gossip how we seldom pick up the tab at a restaurant, how our spouses go hungry, or how our children need new shoes, there’s a better than average chance we are skinflints and misers!

We learn about our self in what others say about us, but we learn the most when we listen to what *we* say and what *we* think.⁴⁵¹

It’s not wise to rely too much on opinions of those who criticize us, however. Others are frequently wrong about us, even when they are many.

Multitudes cried for murderer Barabbas to be set free and for Jesus to be crucified in his place!⁴⁵² Though they were many, they were not wise, being deceived by the temple priests.

Moses labored constantly to get his people to see the error of their majoritarian way (plainly opposed to God and even their own best interests).

Counsel of friends has value if it isn’t given too much weight.

We should listen to what others say so we can grow in Christ.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ Matthew 12:34

⁴⁵⁰ Proverbs 11:14

⁴⁵¹ Luke 6:37

⁴⁵² Mat 27:16-26.

⁴⁵³ Col 1:18

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However it's not wise to rely too much on others' opinions of us, whether good or bad.

We learn most not in what others say about what we do, what we wear, what we eat, what we see, or where we go ... but in the words we hear coming *from our own mouths*.

Christ said, "It is not what goes into a man that defiles him but that which comes out."⁴⁵⁴

We can know what's in our heart by hearing what comes *out*.

We examine self. When we see some need or shortcoming (as we surely will if we listen) we petition God in prayer to give us more of Christ to guide our souls with His wisdom.

James writes, "If any among you would be wise, let him show his works out of a good conversation with meekness of wisdom. But, if your hearts are filled with bitterness, envy, and strife, you are not wise, for such thoughts do not descend from above, but are earthly, sensual, devilish. Where envy and strife are there is confusion and every evil work. The true wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and every good fruit, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."⁴⁵⁵

Are we *listening* to our hearts? Are our words *wise*? Are our words peaceable, gentle, merciful?

Or are they bitter, envious, and ready for a fight?

Who is on the throne?

Paul implores the brethren to let their "conversation be as it becomes the Gospel of Christ, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith."⁴⁵⁶

Paul urges us to pay attention to how we talk, what we say, what is coming out through our lips. In this way we learn how far we are from Christ's perfection, how much more we need His mercy and soul-transforming power.

To the contrary, if we ignore our darkness, believe we have all the light we need, and stop asking for more grace by which alone we can be saved, we will remain in darkness *forever!*

⁴⁵⁴ Mat 7:18-23

⁴⁵⁵ James 3:13-17

⁴⁵⁶ Philippians 1:27

To grow strong we must see our weakness and ask for strength.
To grow wise we must see our foolishness and ask for wisdom.
To be more like Christ, we need to see our iniquity and pray for God's righteousness to displace our self-ishness.

We need to build each other up in this faith.⁴⁵⁷

Paul taught us to comfort our sisters and brothers with these words, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, then we also believe God will raise them who rest in the Christ of God who raised Him. This we say to you by the Spirit of God who dwells in our hearts."⁴⁵⁸

We strengthen ourselves by strengthening others.

As we grow wiser by Christ's faith we aren't so easily enticed by those who teach error.

We meet together, counsel each other, listen to our words as we speak of our faith, and share the comfort of knowing one day we will enter eternal rest, "not shaken in our minds nor troubled."⁴⁵⁹

Publishing Glad Tidings

The reason we are gathered together unto Christ is for His Glory *and* the publishing of His Gospel to others.

God blesses our fellowship, and our fellowship blesses God.

By our unity the Gospel is preached to others more effectively.

People do not respond to an uncertain trumpet.⁴⁶⁰

We stand together and go forward together.

A friend once said, "God needs no mavericks."

It is good to undertake things for Christ on our own, but it is far better to do them *with others in fellowship together*.

What we do on our own tends to bring glory to ourselves. We tend to get credit for our good deeds more often when we do them alone than when we do them together as a group.

What we do with others, on the other hand, brings credit to the One in whose name we are joined and for whose cause we labor.

⁴⁵⁷ Colossians 2:7, 1 Timothy 4:6, Jude 1:20

⁴⁵⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18

⁴⁵⁹ 1 Thessalonians 2:1-2

⁴⁶⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:8

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Christ calls us to be yoked with him *together*.

Mark writes in his Gospel, “Jesus called the twelve and sent them out two-by-two.”⁴⁶¹ He did not send them one-at-a-time. He sent them two-by-two. He did not send soloists or one-man bands. He sent pairs of followers, multiple witnesses to stand together, upholding each other as they went town-to-town telling the world of Him with credibility impossible when only one is telling with no second to back up what he says.

Throughout scripture we learn the value of many being one.

Much is said of being one in His Spirit of love and mercy.

Matthew remembers Jesus saying, “If your brother does you harm, go tell him his fault. Tell him between the two of you, with no one else present. If he listens, you have gained him back again. If he refuses to hear you, take one or two others, so that by more witnesses every word may be established.”⁴⁶²

We should first go alone to those who hurt us and attempt to gain them back. If they won’t hear what we have to say, we should take others to stand with us.

We go alone to restore fellowship.

We take others to bear witness of the truth.

When we attempt to evangelize, we should do so *together*.

Where two or more are gathered in His Name, he is with us.

God blesses us best *together*.

Of course, if we pray alone in the closet of our heart where none but Christ can hear us, He *will* listen and (if we ask according to His will) He will answer us in His own special way.⁴⁶³

Yet Christ promises more to those who join in supplication. “I say if two of you agree on earth as touching anything that you shall ask, it shall be done for you by my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶¹ Mark 6:7

⁴⁶² Matthew 18:15-16

⁴⁶³ Matthew 6:6

⁴⁶⁴ Matthew 18:19-20

The idea there is strength in numbers is nowhere more true than when we stand united by the love of Christ who abides in our midst when we are many in agreement.

He is our strength who binds us together by His love.

Wolves seek the single sheep that wanders from the flock.

The Good Shepherd calls us to enter the flock, His Church.

The preacher writes, "Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. If one falls, the other will lift him up. But, woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him. If two lie together they have heat, but how can one be warm alone? If one man can prevail against another who is alone, then two can withstand him. Better than two are three. A threefold cord is not quickly broken."⁴⁶⁵

Suffering In Fellowship

Finally, a reason for us to walk together is to share each other's sufferings and so become as Christ who bore our sins on the Cross.

We learn of Him in His Sufferings as we minister to those less fortunate than we, serving their needs, comforting them in their sorrows, visiting them in their loneliness, ministering to their pain.

If our fellowship is only singing and praising, never mixed with tears and sorrow for the bereaved, never assisting the poor, never standing together against a foe intent on doing harm to our brothers and sisters in the faith, we are missing a blessing Christ desires us to have, and we are deceiving ourselves.

Worship is more than joyful singing or even exuberant praise.

Worship is service to others.

Worship is sharing burdens.

Worship is work.

Christ is King of Kings, the Light of the World, and His victory over darkness and death is accomplished forever! Yet where He finds us today is a wretched place of pain and despair for many. He urges us to reach out to those who remain in bondage. He wants us to visit them so they can know His love.

He asks us to experience His sufferings.

⁴⁶⁵ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

When Soul Sees Self

By His stripes we are healed.⁴⁶⁶

By His wounds we are made whole.

We are strengthened as He uses us to strengthen the weak.

We are His church, united by His love.

It is strange to find rest at the foot of an old bloody Cross, yet surely that is where our rest begins.

There we stand together for Him and for each other.

#

⁴⁶⁶ Isaiah 53:5

RESISTANCE

Denying the Depth of Our Need

If this chapter could be omitted without losing my book's deep meaning, it would certainly have been the first to go, for it focuses on things that aren't easy for us to admit, things we don't want to change about ourselves, things we may not even recognize, things perhaps not enjoyable to read about . . . the depth and completeness of our *need* and our persistent, obstinate denial of our need.

Very few of us recognize our *real* needs.

The young have no idea what their *real* needs are. They know what they want, not what they need.

Rearing children requires denying them what they want while providing what they need. Children don't see the difference.

In late teens or early adult years, some begin to get a glimpse of what they need and start putting wants into proper perspective.

Most, however, remain blind to what they actually *need* until well into middle age or even twilight years.

Some never learn.

Most muddle through all our years seeking to fulfill our *wants*, failing to see our *real* needs.

We may not realize how critical our needs have become until we're faced with a crisis, when it's too late to avert disaster.

We imagine we're OK, when inside we are hungry, weak, blind, thirsty, and dying.

In our self-imposed blindness we're unable to help ourselves.

We deny our need, too busy chasing what self demands.

Self's demands blind us to what our soul needs.

Self gets in the way.

We don't know what we *truly* need.

And, worse yet, we don't know we don't know.

We are nescient.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁷ The condition of not knowing what one does not know, not even thinking about it, because it is not part of our knowledge base. We are blind to what we do not see and do not know it!

When Soul Sees Self

We know what we know but don't know what we don't know and don't know we don't know it!

All are nescient to some degree, not knowing we don't know.

Not knowing we don't know causes problems, because self is certain it knows everything it needs to know.

Boom!

We bump into walls.

We fall into holes.

We crash!

We fail at one thing after another, all because we *think* we know when, in fact, we don't know what we don't know ... and there's a lot we don't know and don't know we don't know it.

We are blind.

We see, as the Apostle Paul wrote, "through darkened glass".

Nescience is as much a part of being human as having a heart.

It defines us.

We don't know nearly as much as we think we know, and we don't have an inkling of how very much we do not know!

Yet there's hope as soon as we begin to see that we don't see, that we don't know, that we are blind to things of great importance, things we miss in our foolish effort to satisfy what self wants.

Being aware of our nescience is a first step toward knowing what our soul needs. It clears away corrupting cobwebs of conceit that clutter our minds and motivates us to seek wisdom and truth we would otherwise ignore ... the wisdom and truth we don't see quite yet.

Did you ever meet someone to whom you wanted to say, "You just don't get it, do you?" You see them struggling with this thing or that, and you'd really like to help, to be a friend. You try to love them, but they resist!

"I have no problem," they exclaim. "Mind your own business!"

They don't get it.

They don't see their need.

They think they're self-sufficient. Their self-mind is made up. Their soul is all wrapped up in self, and they can't see it.

Until God shines His light in our darkness, self struggles in the gloom of its self-imposed night, certain it can make it on its own, i.e., by its “self”.

Until we see that we don’t see *everything*, that someone else may know what we need and be able to help if we let them, we’re likely to strive on in our own self-centered way until we crash.

Many are oblivious to what’s clearly seen by others.

Martha was like that. She was in need, but she was nescient and didn’t know her need or even know she didn’t know. She thought she was doing OK. She was being self-sufficient. She was seeking to serve others (not in itself wrong, but often arising from wrong motives). Her self trapped her into ignoring her soul’s need.

Jesus came to visit Martha and her sister Mary one day. The two women were thrilled to entertain such a famous person. Jesus was the great healer people were talking about, the one who raised their brother Lazarus from the dead, kind, gracious, and (of course) the best conversationalist imaginable with impeccable manners.

Yet Martha ignored Him.

Mary sat at Jesus’ feet while Martha fussed about in the kitchen, making this and that, trying to please (to be sure), but missing the *real* value of Jesus’ visit. Filled with good intentions, she wanted to make her guest’s stay a comfortable and tasty time. She wanted to serve Him delicious food and pour the best beverages for Him to enjoy. Seeing her through the eyes of today’s rules of etiquette and protocol, Martha was being a good hostess.

Meanwhile, Mary sat at Jesus’ feet, seemingly insensitive to her guest’s comfort and her sister’s busy labors.

After peeling vegetables, paring fruit, cleaning fish, kneading bread, stoking the kitchen fire, and working herself to a frazzle, she got angry that her sister Mary wasn’t helping in the kitchen.

She entered the room where Jesus and Mary were talking and demanded, “Lord, don’t you care that I must work in the kitchen all alone? Tell my sister to help me.”⁴⁶⁸

Can you beat that?

Martha didn’t ask Mary to come help in the kitchen.

⁴⁶⁸ Luke 10:40

When Soul Sees Self

She blamed Jesus!

“Don’t you care?”

The part about herself she did not know and did not know she did not know, the part about which she was nescient is apparent to us as we read this scripture passage.

Martha’s self was working for recognition and appreciation.

Self is like that.

She believed she was *completely* giving, *completely* sacrificing, *completely* motivated by good intentions. Her self thought she was caring about her guest’s comfort as she struggled in the kitchen.

But Martha’s words to Jesus revealed that something else was going on, her hidden self-want, the *real* motive for her struggles in the kitchen, her refusing to rest with her sister at the Master’s feet, and her blaming Jesus!

She didn’t see her need.

Soul did not see self.

Self thought it was sacrificing, giving, holy, and wise.

Self wanted to be appreciated for all her hard work.

What her soul wanted was love, and Jesus knew it, but her self blinded her soul. She was nescient, just as we are.

So, self attempted to buy love with labor.

Labor can *never* “buy” love!

As a counselor once told a friend on the verge of divorcing her husband to escape her frustration with his failure to respond to her efforts to buy his love with labor, “It doesn’t work, does it?”

She jumped to the conclusion that the counselor was saying the problem was her husband. That’s what her self wanted to believe.

In her self-mind the counselor confirmed what her self wanted to believe, that the problem was her husband, when all the husband wanted was her love, not her labors or the debt she tried to buy.

She divorced the unhappy fellow a few months later, convinced he was to blame for not responding to her efforts as she thought he should. She worked so hard at trying to make him happy that she ended up hating him for failing to respond!

She never saw the truth.

Her self would not allow her soul to see the truth.

Only love begets love.

Love can never be a debt.

Nor can love be compelled from others.

If we're ever *truly* loved by anyone, it is Christ in us whom they love, not self, for self is not lovely or loveable.

Counterfeit love may be obtained, something that satisfies self and the needs and wants of another person's self, but *true* love flows from Christ to Christ, as Emerson explains in one of his essays on love.

True love flows from Christ to Christ *within* true lovers.

Jesus, filled with love to overflowing and caring much more for His hostess' peace of mind than for the finest meal she could prepare, called Martha from the kitchen and invited her to rest.

"Martha, Martha," he said to her, "you are careful and troubled about many things. Only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the good part which shall not be taken from her."⁴⁶⁹

Mary had her Master's love.

She basked in it.

She soaked it up.

She didn't try to earn it.

She knew she could not earn it.

Love cannot be earned!

Mary gave Jesus her attention, not trays of sweetmeats, raisins, and fancy breads.

Jesus wanted time with *her*, not anything she could do *for* him.

Love is like that.

Martha didn't understand her soul needed love. Self denied her soul's need. Self sought instead to buy love, and when self couldn't get what self demanded she lashed out ... as self often will.

She may have felt safer offering food instead of her presence. She may have been afraid to admit her *real* need, afraid she'd be rejected.

By working for love she avoided the rejection she feared.

Many of us are like that.

⁴⁶⁹ Luke 10:41-42

When Soul Sees Self

Martha was OK in Martha's eyes. She didn't want to think she needed *anything* (except for Mary to help in the kitchen).

Yet her hidden, hungry, human need for love remained.

She was denied the "love" she sought, because what she sought was not love at all but praise for her self, appreciation for her self, recognition of her self.

She denied her *real* need, because her soul was lost in self.

Many deny love because it doesn't come in the form we expect, the applause for our self-deeds, our self-worth, our self-sacrifice.

We'd rather work in the kitchen and complain about it, than risk letting someone truly touch our heart and possibly cause pain.

Perfect love casts out fear.

Genuine love isn't afraid of the nails!

We *all* need love, even those who run from it for fear of its pain.

For unseen reasons deep within, hidden in our past or locked in some dark secret too horrible to remember, we deny it. Most deny for fear of being hurt.

Rather than admit we have a need that never may be satisfied, we deny the need.

Rather than admit our need and allow others to love us, risking they may *stop* loving us, we fall into the trap that tricked Martha.

Self wants love it can control.

Self wants love it need not fear losing, love it can earn, love it will be owed in return, love self deserves, love self can demand!

As the old tuna fish ads used to say, "Sorry, Charley!"

Love doesn't work that way.

Love we think we control is never real and when the truth comes out (as it always does) we end up with nothing but bitterness that blames everyone but the self within us that caused our problem in the first place.

The idea is tempting. If we can control another's love, we don't have to fear losing it. We're in the driver's seat, so to speak. If we can *make* love happen (i.e., *buy* it with gifts, guilt trips, good sex, or some other form of gumdrop substitute for the real thing), then we think we can *keep* it by paying more of what it costs us.

We seek to avoid the risk of losing love.

And never do find the real thing.

We seek to make others need *us*, yet in our nescience we fail to see it isn't *us* they need but, rather, the outpouring love that flows only from the heart of Christ within us (if He is within us).

If we truly want to be loved, the best thing we can do is pray to God for Christ to fill us with His Love until there is no self-ishness left, no self at all, only a soul clothed in Christ, a new creature!

Otherwise, we actively resist love, quenching God's Spirit.⁴⁷⁰

Struggling to earn approval and affection from others, we make it impossible for them to truly love us. So long as we believe they owe us their approval and affection, that we can demand their love when they don't give it in the manner we wish, we create debtors, not lovers.

Debt can never be love.

Whatever we get in return for our labor is grudgingly given, for we demand it, expect it, believe it's our right to receive. The stuff that comes back to us, therefore, is never real nor long-lasting.

Love cannot be earned.

Love is a gift.

Our resistance to this truth is nearly impossible to let go.

The darkness of self is subtle.⁴⁷¹

Truth alone can drive it away.

When we are drawn by God to walk in His Light, speaking truth in love, the lies of our self are revealed to our souls. We see self for what it is and no longer wish it to rule us.

We see love must be a gift, not a duty.

We learn love is free.

We stop busying ourselves about things and begin to see God is waiting for our willingness to let Him love through us, not seeking what we may do for Him or others out of self.

Our weakness is utter weakness.

So, He asks us to admit our need and be filled with Him.

⁴⁷⁰ 1 Thessalonians 5:19

⁴⁷¹ Gen 3:1

Working to Earn Salvation

The apostle Paul warns us, “Work *out* your salvation with fear and trembling.”⁴⁷²

Many believe Paul is saying we must work *for* our salvation.

But, that is *not* what the apostle is saying.

We cannot work *for* our salvation.

It’s been purchased for us by the Blood of Jesus at Calvary.

Salvation is a free gift.

It cannot be earned, no matter how hard or long we labor.

Paul urges us to work *out* our salvation, not work *for* it.

Two different words.

“For”

“Out”

Those who work *for* their salvation are in bondage, never able to find rest in the liberty of Christ’s Gospel.

Indeed, in the very next verse Paul says, “It is *God* who works in you, both to desire and also to do the things that please Him.”⁴⁷³

It is *all* God’s work.

If there’s any “work” for *us* to do, it is resting in what He has done already, waiting on Him to complete the purpose for which He created us, being transformed by His grace, and allowing Him to love others into the kingdom by His work *within* us and *through* us, working *out* our salvation.

We *show* our salvation as a vine shows its fruit, working it *out!*

Jesus invites, “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

He then asks us to, “Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.”

He adds, “My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁴⁷⁴

A yoke is a beam by which two men or two animals share a single burden. The yoke is placed across both their shoulders so

⁴⁷² Phil 2:12

⁴⁷³ Phil 2:13

⁴⁷⁴ Mat 11:28-30

they can pull the burden together as one. By means of the yoke, their efforts are combined. They pull the burden as one person instead of two.

We take the yoke of Christ upon us to learn of Him.

There is no other way.

It is in this yoke with Him that we work “out” our salvation.

The yoke may be sorrows too heavy to bear alone, yet Christ is in the yoke with *us*.

The yoke may be divorce, separation, sexual abuse, deep loss, or loneliness so bitter that we claw the air at night in anguish and despair, yet Christ is in the yoke *with us*, and we are not alone.

The yoke may be the need to see ourselves as others see us, as God sees us, as we truly are, and again Christ is enyoked with us, easing the shock, forgiving our errors, encouraging us to continue in His Love, never forsaking us, never leaving us to struggle on our own.

We find our Savior with us in the yoke of faith, always present when we call, always ready to lift our burden with us.

If we attempt to live outside the yoke, it is impossible to receive anything at all from Him. Only by stooping down to take His yoke upon the shoulders of our souls can we ever learn what His nature is or how much He loves us. We meet Him in the yoke of life, in hardships and in trials.

We pull *together*.

The burden *is* light, for Christ pulls with us and always *for* us.

It is the work of Christ *within* us that works *out* our salvation.

Paul was confident “that He who has begun this good work in us is faithful and will complete it.”⁴⁷⁵

If Christ has begun His work in us, sharing the yoke of life with us, He will finish what He started. He will not leave us to struggle with our burdens all alone, nor should we try to struggle alone.

Our “work” is to surrender to His will, to let go of our pride and foolishness, to acknowledge that He alone is Lord, to give Him all the honor and glory for what He is accomplishing in us as we share the yoke with Him.

⁴⁷⁵ Phil 1:6

When Soul Sees Self

We let go of our righteousness.

We cast it aside!

Life's burdens are too heavy to carry alone.

Yoked with Christ our burden is light. We let go of our old toil and trouble trying to do the work of salvation on our own.

As Jim Elliot wisely says, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."⁴⁷⁶

We abandon our impossible burdens, the ones we used to think we had to carry all alone.

We take up Christ' yoke, and He carries our burdens *with* us.

The apostle Paul urges us, "Lay aside the weight that holds you back and run your race with patience, looking to Christ as both the author and the finisher of your faith."⁴⁷⁷

God designed us to run this race.

He is the author of it, and He will finish the race for us if we remain patient, looking to Him alone for our needs.

We work *out* our salvation, releasing His love to the world.

We work with fear and trembling however, knowing the weight that holds us down is self-righteousness, the lie that we can save ourselves by being good, the effort to overcome sin through our own power, the sacrifice of good works to make God our debtor.

We struggle to make others love us, doing things we hope will earn their affection, and some think they can do the same with God, sacrificing their time, giving their money, or performing such mighty works that He *must* love us for our effort.

It just doesn't work that way.

God will *not* be our debtor.

We cannot work *for* salvation.

We can only work it *out* by releasing Christ into the lives of others through our daily confession that it *is* His goodness they see.

We work *out* our salvation by allowing God's love within us to flow to others with no expectation, no demand for any earthly or heavenly reward, no tit for tat, no *quid pro quo*.

⁴⁷⁶ In The Shadow of the Almighty, Harper and Row, 1958.

⁴⁷⁷ Hebrews 12:1-2

We freely give what we freely receive.⁴⁷⁸

It is God's plan.

It is the power of His Gospel.

It is the life of His True Church.

It is the "glue" of genuine Christian fellowship.

We are united by it.

We are one in it.

It is Christ in us and in each other.

It is love.

The error of working for salvation is like the error of working for love. Both are gifts. They *can't* be bought. They aren't for sale.

Trying to earn either by an effort of our will is foolish vanity.

To live as if there's anything we could do or give to buy the love of someone else is idle nonsense. Nor is there any work or sacrifice we can do that could ever make us worthy of a single drop of Jesus' precious blood or just one of His tears (or the blood or tears of *anyone*).

It is self who thinks such things.

Self struts proudly down the broad path that leads to the wide gate of destruction.

"Follow the narrow path," Jesus urges, "and enter the straight gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there be which go that way. Only a few find the straight and narrow way that leads to life."⁴⁷⁹

Taking Christ's yoke upon us and learning of Him, becoming meek and lowly by His work in our hearts, giving up our doings and resting in His being—*this* is the straight path that leads to the narrow gate.

Confess our faults to others.⁴⁸⁰

Seek God's kingdom.⁴⁸¹

Trust in Him *alone*.

Acknowledge Him.

⁴⁷⁸ Matthew 10:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12

⁴⁷⁹ Matthew 7:13-14

⁴⁸⁰ James 5:16

⁴⁸¹ Matthew 6:33

When Soul Sees Self

Let go our own understanding, so He can direct our path.⁴⁸²

This is the easy yoke.

This is the light burden.

This is the agreeable effort by which we work *out* our salvation.

This is how we demonstrate God's grace to others.

This is Christ's Glory in us.

This is the mark of His True Church.

We rest in the work He is finishing in us now.⁴⁸³

By His Spirit at work *within* us, the world sees Christ and seeks to know more of Him and His mercy.

The world sees we are different not because we go to church, dress modestly, or say eloquent prayers in public ... but because we confess the goodness they see in us is Christ, not us.

We confess that any mercy, sacrifice, wisdom, strength, or any true value they see in us grows from our love for Him who is saving us from our selfs.

He is our righteousness.

He dwells in us, the incarnate love of God alive in our hearts.

Once God's grace opens our eyes and ears to see and hear the call of Him who holds the keys to life eternal, and once that same grace leads us to plead for Him to live within us, His Spirit begins to comfort us with the knowledge that He *will* accomplish what He has begun, that He will never leave us or forsake us.

With that comfort, however, come changes as His Spirit makes our soul see self: self-behavior, self-speak, self-ishness, self-pride.

Paul, was a man who had to learn the hard way what a terrible creature his self had become in its zeal for God. He persecuted the early Christians (consenting even to their deaths).

After Christ made Paul's soul see his self, he was converted by godly sorrow and began to boldly share the Gospel (suffering terrible calamities).

He saw the early church people falling back in the old deception of attempting to please God by keeping the Jewish law by works,

⁴⁸² Proverbs 3:5-6

⁴⁸³ John 19:30

so he taught them to see that Christ's work *within* us replaces the old traditional religious observances.

Paul knew it was wrong to honor men instead of God.

He saw miracles misused and the truth of God ignored.

He opposed church leaders who lusted to be priests like Jewish Levites, placing legal burdens on saints, conditions on salvation, as if *they* held the keys to God's Kingdom.

Paul asked his flock at Galatia, "Who has bewitched you?"⁴⁸⁴

He told them their souls were rescued from the darkness not by works but by the faith of Christ *within* them, i.e., Christ's faith!

Though he did mighty deeds and spread the Gospel throughout the civilized world, though he spoke in the language of angels and demonstrated God's power by surviving snakebites, shipwrecks, imprisonments, and being beaten three times nearly to death, he encouraged the church not to labor for God's love.

Though perhaps mightier in the work of God than any man who ever lived, Paul confessed it is the love of Christ that liberates our souls when we see the foolish fruitlessness of self-work and hear the ego emptiness of self-speak.

He said, "Prophecies will fail. Tongues will cease. Knowledge will vanish. Yet, *love* never fails."⁴⁸⁵

Nothing takes the place of love.

Yet love cannot be manufactured or enforced.

Love is a *gift* ... as is eternal salvation through Christ, free for the asking, never earned.

One cannot work for love or salvation. One cannot buy them. One can do nothing but ask of God in prayer.

Christ does the rest.

He asks only that we:

- (1) acknowledge that the work is His, not ours,
- (2) release our right to claim any reward for our labor,
- (3) give thanks for the undeserved favor of His love, and
- (4) tell others how we're being changed.

⁴⁸⁴ Gal 3:1

⁴⁸⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:8

When Soul Sees Self

As we do these things we discover it's *not* our work saving us from the darkness. It is the faith God gives us by His grace, the out-working of our salvation.

Christ knocks at the doors of our hearts.

Our salvation begins when we open the door and invite Him *in*.

His indwelling power of love begins to turn our hearts of stone into softened hearts of flesh.⁴⁸⁶ We start to change. We start to be healed. We are being made new.

We gladly acknowledge the good others see in us is His work.

It's no longer a sacrifice to give thanks and praise.

We give thanks for His mercy.

We give praise for the favor of love we're receiving.

Our worship is intuitive, flowing naturally, never forced.

We become sensitive to love's nature and aware of its cost.

The nails pierce our own hands and feet. We feel the blows of the whip tearing through the flesh of His innocent back! The thrust of that spear in His side pierces *our* hearts. The thorns of His crown pierce *our* brow. His sorrow, anguish, and tears are ours, and by them we are broken, melted, molded, and filled in a new way.

We begin to know love for what love truly is.

Our soul is seasoned with pity, patience, mercy, forgiveness.

Our meekness is sincere, not a show we perform for others.

Our generosity is genuine, expecting no reward.

His Spirit clothes our soul, revealing self then replacing it.

The fruits of His Love begin to grow, springing from the soil of humbled hearts, sifted and softened by our awareness of sin and its costly consequences. It's not fruit we bear by our own effort, nor can we till the stony soil of our hearts by an exercise of will. Christ is the vine, and His fruit appears in its season, the precious product of His love at work *within* us!

First, our stony hearts *must* be broken.

There is no other way, regardless what popular denominations may teach to entice followers to join their self-willed way.

⁴⁸⁶ Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26

Our hearts must be broken by awareness of our sin, *then* we can be purified by Christ's redeeming love. This is the path that leads to the eternal life of love with God our Heavenly Father.

"Blessed are those with pure hearts," Jesus said, "for they shall see God."⁴⁸⁷

Before we can be purified, we must recognize we are defiled.

Soul must see self!

This we resist.

Self hides from God.

Self insists it is righteous enough already.

Yet, each of us misses the mark of His high calling, every one of us, because we are mortal, frail, and afraid to see the truth of our self and its self-ish desires.⁴⁸⁸

By His grace, however, some are drawn to confess, drawn from their self-ishness by the sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary, the sacrifice of blood that nourishes the life-giving seed of godly sorrow in our hearts, the seed that produces genuine repentance.

Without godly sorrow, there is no repentance.

Without repentance, there is no salvation.

Paul writes to the church at Rome, "God's love is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit of truth who is given to us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Jesus died for the ungodly. Scarcely for a righteous man will one die, though perhaps for a good man some might dare to die, yet God showed his love toward us that while we were yet sinners Jesus died for us. Much more, being justified by his sacrifice, we shall be saved from wrath by Him. For when we were enemies of God we were reconciled to Him by the death of his Son, much more than being reconciled we shall be saved by His life."⁴⁸⁹

We are given a choice. Life with Christ or death without Him.

God made both light *and* darkness, good *and* evil.⁴⁹⁰

The choice is ours.

⁴⁸⁷ Mat 5:8

⁴⁸⁸ Rom 3:23; Rom 5:12-13

⁴⁸⁹ Rom 5:5-15

⁴⁹⁰ Isa 45:7

When Soul Sees Self

Self can surrender to allow Christ to illumine our souls by His Light or we are lost forever in darkness that can never, ever end.

If we choose Christ, the work of saving our souls from the darkness of self is His work.

When by God's grace we begin to see our self-ishness and start to tremble in the eternal darkness that surrounds us, then His light shines into our souls and sets us free.

When by God's grace we see the horrid consequence of sin our self has dragged us into, our soul is compelled to cry out for His forgiveness and redemption.

Sin and self-ishness are part of God's plan, not that He wants us to sin, for sin is offensive in His sight, but that He allows self to lead our souls into sin so He may rescue us by sending Christ to replace our self and clothe our souls with His righteousness.

Out of darkness He draws our souls into His light.

In the midst of storms, He rebukes the wind and waves.⁴⁹¹

We learn slowly!

But, by His grace, we may see the truth, and the struggles of our lives will lead us to His rest.

If we refuse His grace, we continue in self's darkness for eternity, souls separated from Him who *is* truth by our self-pride and self-fear. This dread darkness is the destination we are led to by our self's disobedience. This is the loneliness that finds us when we don't yet see our need. This is the loss that follows every gain self makes at the expense of others.

Self-ishness has its consequence.⁴⁹²

Soul makes the choice.

Life from death comes only by surrender.

There is no other way.

When by God's grace we begin to see death is swallowed up by Jesus' victory of perfect love,⁴⁹³ the self we once served no longer has power over our soul.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ Mat 8:26

⁴⁹² Rom 5:12; Rom 6:23; James 1:15

⁴⁹³ Isa 25:8-9

⁴⁹⁴ Rom 6:14; Rom 6:9

When by God's grace His law shows our souls the sins of self,⁴⁹⁵ we can no longer stand self-justified.

Our soul cries out for Him who *is* mercy.

And then by God's grace He saves our soul from the penalty of eternal darkness by entering to become our life, our love, our truth.

We happily abandon our struggle for self-righteousness and embrace His righteousness.

We release our struggle to be good and give glory to the One *within* us who *is* good, merciful, and kind.

We forsake our old self-life and celebrate His life.

This *is* the Gospel of Christ!

Our salvation ceases to be a private matter. We want to pass it on. We tell others of His work in our lives because we know it's *real*, that it is changing us for the better. We want them to enjoy that same new life we are beginning to know.

His love wells up in us like a fountain of living water.

We *cannot help* but share it!

God changes us. We celebrate His work and show it to others, knowing it is Him showing Himself to them through us, His work, His love, His life.

God's love flows as we confess with our mouths that it *is* God's love, not any goodness self manufactured on its own. We are filled with joy as we proclaim we are being changed by a power other than our self. We have a victory we could never win on our own. Christ is Lord by what *He* has done and is doing—not by anything we have done or ever could do.

Many never see this truth.

They struggle with the lie that somehow, given time and God's "help", they can be good. They struggle for righteousness by study, self-denial, meditation, and prayer. They teach this lie to others.

The damage is reproduced generation after generation.⁴⁹⁶

Instead of saying, "God, please live in me and have your way," they ask for God's "help", as if all they need is some assistance! They cannot see the truth one of my Sunday school teachers taught.

⁴⁹⁵ Gal 3:24-25

⁴⁹⁶ Exodus 34:6-7

When Soul Sees Self

“Unless the Lord is Lord of all, he isn’t Lord *at all!*”

God is *not* our co-pilot.

Those who think they can be righteous and live in God’s will if only He will *help* them a bit here and there are “blind leaders of the blind, and both shall fall into the ditch.”⁴⁹⁷

Christ urges, “Let them alone,” the blind leaders.

Only when God reveals Himself can any of us see the truth.

Blind leaders claim to know all about God, yet in their self is a secret desire to be praised for their knowledge and to be lifted up to rule over those who know little. They condemn those who refuse to make them their “spiritual guides”. They speak of love but cannot demonstrate the mercy and humility that is love’s character.

They think it’s possible for one self to *be* more righteous than another self, not discerning we *are* only what God lets us be.

We pray they may soon see that all we are or ever can be is by the grace of God alone, so they stop leading the blind to that never-ending darkness of death!

“There is none righteous, no not one.”⁴⁹⁸

God desires that we have mercy on each other, not judgment.⁴⁹⁹

The self-wise condemn the sins of others, yet fail to see the sin within their own self. They should be pitied and prayed for.

Though they speak with tongues of men and angels, have all spiritual gifts, prophesy, and do all manner of wonderful works, yet have not the incarnation of love and mercy by the life of Christ *within* their hearts, they deceive themselves as well as those who follow them to destruction.⁵⁰⁰

Our work is to deny the lie of self-works.

Our call is to resist the seduction of lying spirits that disguise themselves as God.

Our hope is to confess the price of our salvation is sorrow for the precious blood of Jesus, sorrow for the wounded lamb who gave Himself to win us from the darkness of self-deceit, sorrow for

⁴⁹⁷ Matthew 15:14

⁴⁹⁸ Romans 3:10

⁴⁹⁹ Matthew 9:13, Matthew 12:7

⁵⁰⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:1-10

the cruelty of those nails, sorrow for the pain of that thorny crown, sorrow for the spear that pierced His most innocent Heart, and godly sorrow for the pain our self has caused so many others.

We take this yoke of sorrow upon us and rejoice to share its burden, proclaiming with the prophet, “God is my salvation. I can trust without fear, for the Lord is my strength and my song. He is my salvation.”

“With joy,” the scripture continues, “you shall draw water from the wells of salvation. And, in that day you will say, ‘Praise the Lord. Call upon His name. Declare His doings among the people. Make mention that His name is exalted. Sing unto the Lord, for He has done excellent things.’”⁵⁰¹

Praise the Lord, indeed!

It is He who is excellent.

It is He who works within us “both to will and to do His good pleasure.”⁵⁰²

“We are the sheep of His pasture. It is He who has made us and not we ourselves.”⁵⁰³

“We are His workmanship.”⁵⁰⁴

He is our potter. We are just clay.

We are the work of His Hands.⁵⁰⁵

In *this* our souls have victory over the seductions of self.

In *this* our souls have eternal life and rest.

Struggling to Overcome Sin

Sin still pursues us, of course.

It indwells us, tries to destroy us, divests us of peace, interferes with our rest.

Even when we know Christ is alive within us, we are pestered by self and its sin all our lives, beset by its perpetual presence.

⁵⁰¹ Isaiah 12:2-5

⁵⁰² Isaiah 46:10; Philippians 2:13

⁵⁰³ Psalms 100:3

⁵⁰⁴ Ephesians 2:10

⁵⁰⁵ Isaiah 64:8

When Soul Sees Self

Sin and self are part of life. So long as we live in these human bodies, sin and self are going to tempt us.⁵⁰⁶

We face difficult choices each day, decisions to allow Christ to rule us or allow a little self-darkness in now and then, from time-to-time, as the mood strikes us.

Our life consists of choices.

Yet through the sometimes stony, arid soil of hard choices the fruits of God's Spirit show forth. Through the process of choosing He teaches our souls to see the great gulf between scorn and mercy, between self-ishness and love, between darkness and truth.

The gulf is as wide as eternity, narrow as a single spoken word.

Sin teaches our need.

Sin confirms our weakness.

Sin finds our faults.

And, from the painful consequence of self's sin, we cry to God for mercy and His grace to break self's icy grip on our souls.

In the best of times we are tempted and robbed of peace. Shame sets in. Sorrow follows, and by sorrow's work in our souls we're restored to perfect peace again and freed from temptation.

It is a cycle some call the Wheel of Life.

We have our ups and downs.

None is exempt.

"There is none good," Jesus said, "no, *not one*."⁵⁰⁷

God allows self to wound us because He loves our soul.

That's not saying sin is good; it certainly isn't.

But by the consequence of sin we see the vast abyss of darkness separating us from truth, and we run to Him as a child runs to a loving father for forgiveness.

Sin terrifies us so, we run from it to the waiting arms of Christ.

If it weren't for sin we'd think we were God's *equal*.

If it weren't for sin we'd never seek His Salvation.

We *aren't* God's equal.

⁵⁰⁶ Romans 7:14-8:1

⁵⁰⁷ Mark 10:18

We are lost in the darkness of our empty self, alone without His love and forgiveness.

God allows sin to show our helplessness. None can overcome it by human strength, good intentions, or well-practiced habits.

All are tested by sin, and by it we discover how much we need the longsuffering mercy of Christ to save our soul from self's grip.

All are touched by darkness now and then, crippled by fear, and draw by lust from what is good to what is bad. We fall, then we doubt our salvation, as if salvation ever resulted from self's doing in the first place.

Sin tells the taunting lie, "You're no good. You're going to hell when you die. You *cannot* be saved and still sin!"

The big lie contains some truth!

We *do* sin.

But, even so Christ is our advocate, faithful to forgive all that we will confess.⁵⁰⁸

But, we *must* confess!

The joy in all this is that *because* we confess, we *know* we are saved. Those who are hopelessly lost will not admit their sin. They cannot confess what they don't believe exists!

We confess, and by this we know we are being saved. By this we know we are being transformed.

Our soul sees self convicted in its sin, and our souls are humbled by a healthy shame your Bible calls godly sorrow, the sorrow that works true repentance, the sorrow that cries out, "I never want to do that again!"

God gives us this special grace to be humbled by Him.⁵⁰⁹

Self cannot humble self.

Paul writes to the church at Rome, "It is no more I that do the things I do not want to do. It is sin that dwells in me. I know in me (i.e., in my flesh) dwells no good thing. I want to do good, but I don't do it. I don't want to do evil, but I do it anyway. So, if I do

⁵⁰⁸ 1 John 1:9

⁵⁰⁹ James 4:6

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what I don't want to do, it isn't I who does it. It is sin that dwells in me."⁵¹⁰

This makes no sense to self walking in darkness, yet it's God's wisdom, wonder of wonders. We are *being* transformed. We are not yet perfected. Yet, we are walking in God's will if He is giving our souls the grace to see the sin of self and be ashamed.

Without godly sorrow there can be no *genuine* repentance.

We are *being* transformed by the renewing of our minds!

Our souls are not completely transformed the moment we first confess our sinful nature and ask God to save us from the fires of hell. There is a process we must undergo to be transformed into the image of our Christ by the power of God's indwelling Holy Spirit. The change may take years. Indeed, for most it takes a lifetime.

Self lets go slowly.

God changes us bit by bit, line upon line, precept upon precept, and someday His work of transforming us will be complete!⁵¹¹

Paul writes, "I am a wretched man! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Christ our Lord that with my mind I serve the law of God, though with my flesh the law of sin. There is therefore no condemnation to them which are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ has made me free from the law of sin and death. What the law could not do, working only through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the flesh for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."⁵¹²

We are free from the law of sin *if* we confess it ... not before!

Jesus nailed law to the Cross.

It is there that He purchased for us the godly sorrow by which we can be saved. He bought our souls with blood that washes self-blindness from the eye of our soul.

Sin still haunts us but no longer has dominion over us.⁵¹³

"Shall we continue in sin so grace may abound?" Paul asks.

⁵¹⁰ Romans 7:17-20

⁵¹¹ 1 Corinthians 13:12

⁵¹² Romans 7:24-8:4

⁵¹³ Romans 6:14

“God forbid!”⁵¹⁴

As His work in us continues, we learn to hate sin *sincerely*.

Over time, we are delivered from it entirely—not all at once, but certainly and completely.

The longer we live the more we hate sin.

Paul says, “You were once servants of sin, but then you obeyed from the heart that doctrine of grace delivered to you by Christ’s love and were made free from sin’s power.”⁵¹⁵

Sin has no victory over souls clothed in Christ’s Righteousness.

Sin is present, but we’re no longer its slave.⁵¹⁶

We still do things we ought not to do, but we are not *bound* to do them as we were before. Sin is no longer our master. We do not *serve* sin. Sin does not please us. We learn to hate its horrid results. We come to despise the brutal damage it causes our souls and the souls of others.

Our souls are being transformed. We are being set free from self who is the cause of sin, set free from sin itself. We’ve not yet been perfected, but we are on our way, leaving our old nature behind, learning the truth that sets us free from sin’s bondage and hateful consequence.⁵¹⁷

Still the sin struggle continues, for God seeks our *all*. He wants every nook and cranny of our souls. He’s not satisfied when a soul just gives up alcohol, cigarettes, spitting in public, or cursing. God wants to sweep the floor of our hearts perfectly clean.

Your Bible speaks of his winnowing fan with which he blows the chaff from our hearts, till nothing is left within us but Him and His love.⁵¹⁸

The useless chaff must go, and it goes by the force of His fan.

He frees us from self’s spite, malice, pride, vanity, and all other ridiculous forms of self-centeredness that pollute our souls. He seeks fellowship with humble souls broken for Him, souls being

⁵¹⁴ Romans 6:1

⁵¹⁵ Romans 6:17-18

⁵¹⁶ Rom 6:12

⁵¹⁷ John 8:32

⁵¹⁸ Matthew 3:12

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purified from *every* vice that separates us from Him, souls who long to dine with Him and sit with Him in His Throne as children.

Self is not welcome there.

Christ becomes our center, replacing our self-centeredness.

Sins of self must be confessed, then self must die.

We start with cursing, cheating, lying, and other easy sins. Then later by his grace we confess hidden sins of jealousy, fear, greed, and spite. Over time he replaces self with Himself, cleansing us from *all* unrighteousness.

We release self-pity and embrace the moment, now.

By His mercy we confess, and by His mercy He forgives.

Without His mercy we are powerless to confess our sin!

Without His grace our souls remain blind to self and its sin!

Yet with his mercy and grace, we do confess, are forgiven, and receive power to serve others with His love flowing through us.

The new us.

The born again us!

Before little shepherd David was chosen king of Israel, prophet Samuel examined all his brothers. The first was Eliab, one of the elder brothers. “When Samuel saw Eliab, he declared, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed is here.’

Yet the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, because I have refused him. The Lord does not see as men see, looking on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks into the heart.’”⁵¹⁹

Later, of course, God chose little David, a boy who watched the flocks, and a young shepherd became king because God saw his soul was ready to see self. David made many mistakes, allowing his self to lead him into many errors, but David saw the errors of his self, suffered terrible sorrows, and repented of self’s sin.

Our victory over sin is not a triumph over outward things of life others see. Our victory over sin comes when Christ conquers self who hides in the lies of self-importance, self-righteousness, self-pity, and other self-ishness that resists the truth of God.

The war ends when we give Christ permission to rule our lives.

⁵¹⁹ 1 Sam 16:6-7

The love of Christ *is* our power over sin.

His love *within* us is the victory that brings peace to our souls.

The light of His love overcomes the darkness of our self.

Desiring to be Equal with God

Winston Churchill is said to have remarked when a particularly pompous member of Parliament walked past him and a colleague one day, “There but for the grace of God goes God!”

How silly we must seem to God and others with our pretense of self-importance. We are minuscule creatures walking about on the surface of a mere speck in the starry sea of God’s universe.

Jimmy Buffett, the Key West balladeer, describes life on Earth as “riding a big round ball”.

In comparison to our small bodies, this planet we ride is “a big round ball”. But, compared to the limitless universe around us, our terrestrial home is too tiny to measure! It’s a speck of sand circling a star that itself is immeasurably small in comparison to other objects in the majesty of God’s celestial realm.

As tiny as we are, God sees us promenading on the surface of this rocky sphere, holding minuscule noses high as we pronounce to others the high importance of our puny self, applauding our self achievements, imagining self possessed of the capacity to be like God (if we don’t destroy ourselves and our planet before we have more years to “evolve” beyond our present mortal state).

What arrogance!

Yet each of us allows such arrogance now and then.

Each of us believes we are much more than what we really are.

“We all in time past walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of darkness, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience, among whom we all lived in lust, fulfilling the desires of our flesh and minds, and were by nature children of wrath even as others.”⁵²⁰

We *all* resisted God’s grace.

We *all* defended our self-righteousness and refused to see and acknowledge our self’s sin.

⁵²⁰ Ephesians 2:2-3

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We *all* put self on the throne of our lives.

We *all* denied the Lordship of Christ and Sovereignty of God.

We *all* began as children, *and that's what children do!*

Our greatest sin and most foolish effort is the vain attempt to be God's equal, believing we don't *need* a Savior, that we are good enough to earn salvation by will-power and stiff determination.

It's a lie!

It is sin spelled with an "s" that stands for *self!*

Sin is seductive, empty, entrapping, and ultimately entombing.

It is confusing, unsettling, destroying.

It begins in innocence when we are children.

It grows in fear and guilt as we grow older.

It hides in rebellion and anger (toward God and others).

It matures in the anguish of costly consequences.

And, when sin takes its final toll, it yields eternal darkness.⁵²¹

"But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sin, has given us life with Christ (by grace we are saved) and raised us to sit together with Him in heavenly places—that in ages to come He may demonstrate the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ. For by grace we are saved through faith, and *that* not of ourselves, for even the faith that saves us is God's gift. We are saved by faith, not works, lest any man should boast. We are *His* workmanship, created by God to do the good works He gives us power to do, the works He ordains we *will* do."⁵²²

Lost souls seek a shortcut through life without Christ's Cross or the godly sorrow that works repentance, doomed in the darkness of their own making. Their end is being alone for eternity, souls aware and alive but with no body, all alone in darkness forever!⁵²³

There *is* no way around the Cross.

God rejects souls who cannot weep for Jesus.⁵²⁴

It is His decree by their self-centered choice.

⁵²¹ Romans 6:23

⁵²² Ephesians 2:4-10

⁵²³ Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30

⁵²⁴ Matthew 10:32-33

He hardens their hearts.⁵²⁵

They are consigned to torment by denying the truth of their sin.

God is a lover, not a debtor. It can be no other way.

Our complaining about it will change nothing.

God is God.

Love is love.

Life is life.

Truth is truth.

Sin is sin, and, we *all* sin.

It doesn't matter how loudly we wail in sorrow and fear.

It doesn't matter how we shake our fists at heaven, as some say deaf Beethoven did in his final moments.

It doesn't matter how vociferously we demand equal treatment.

God never grants eternal life as a reward for our merit.

We can give our body to science, support our church with the so-called double tithe, and preach the Gospel from a golden pulpit in a giant crystal cathedral, tickling the well-dressed ears of folks who worship our wisdom and praise our clever oratory.

It means nothing to God.

Unless Christ displaces self and clothes our soul, we are *lost*.

Souls are saved by the renewing of minds.⁵²⁶

It is the work of Christ *within* us by God's grace and mercy.

Remaining Deaf to Our Self

Saved souls listen for the assurance of their salvation, audible evidence that Christ is changing them *within*.

By listening to our words we know if we are standing in self or trusting in Christ's power of love.

"Out of the heart's abundance," Jesus said, "the mouth speaks."

He asks, "How can one who is evil speak good things? A good man of the treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man of the evil in his heart brings evil things."⁵²⁷

⁵²⁵ Romans 9:18

⁵²⁶ Romans 12:2

⁵²⁷ Mat 12:34-35

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By judging the words of our *own* lips, we discern the condition of our heart and discover who is lord thereof.

Christ or self.

We can know the condition of our heart by listening to what we say. Do our words honor Christ or seek honor for self? Do our words confess there is no good thing in our flesh, that all our good works are the work of God who works *within* us? Or, do we allow others to praise us, while we silently soak up their applause and bask in their adulation? Do we punctuate their attention with a charming “Thank you!” and make no mention whatsoever of the Christ who made our achievement possible? Or do we say, “By the grace of God alone I’ve been empowered to do what you see.”

Does anger flash out from our lips when we believe someone injured us unjustly, or do we bear injustice graciously, responding with love, recalling the agony suffered for us by Christ on the Cross, remembering but for His grace we’d be as others are?

Is there malice and conceit in our tone of voice, or is our speech seasoned with kindness and mercy?

Are we *totally* truthful in all we say.

Are we submitted to Him who *cannot* abide the most innocent lie, or do we amend reality to serve our self-ish motives?

Do we love our neighbor as our self by letting him speak without interruption, or do we talk over him or ignore what he says as we plan ahead for what we’ll say when it’s our turn to interject our wiser thoughts?

Do we try to be funny, seek to be the life of the party, the center of attention when we speak?

Do we speak sensibly or babble meaningless nonsense?

Do we take offense when others misinterpret what we say, and carelessly respond, “You should have *known* what I meant!”

Are we *listening* to our words?

Do we *hear* the abundance of our hearts?

God gave us two ears to keep watch on one mouth.

He shows what’s in our hearts as we listen to our speech.

When we hear things that reveal sin still lurking in us, His Holy Spirit calls it to our attention. We then pray for forgiveness and the willingness to be changed.

God honors those prayers.

We grow one day at a time.

There is hope ... *if we listen.*

I ask God to keep me mindful of the printed warning on the big white “X” of railroad crossing signs. Stop. Look. Listen.

“You will be called on the Day of Judgment to give an account of every idle word you speak. By your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned.”⁵²⁸

By our words we know who’s on the throne—self or Christ.

With self on the throne, sin rules, and we’re headed for trouble.

With Christ is on the throne, we’re headed for glory!

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⁵²⁸ Mat 12:36-37

THE WORK

The Testing of Faith

As I began this chapter I was again reminded of the wonderful plan of God, a design no human could possibly invent, a plan so intricate that none of us can comprehend its last detail.⁵²⁹

We peer at life through a foggy window.

We see a few things now, other things later.

A bit here, a bit there, yet the fullness is hidden from us.

Even as the fog begins to clear, we discover there remains more fog obscuring our vision.

We are given tiny pieces of the puzzle as we go along.

We aren't allowed to see the finished work.

He is still perfecting us.

We aren't yet ready.

We are being fashioned in His likeness, a tapestry on His loom, and the shuttle of life's struggle strings the yarns of God's design through us, one strand at a time, back and forth, little by little, weaving the cloth we will be when at last the shuttle is silent.

God sits at the loom, not us.

It is He who selects the yarns and works the wheel.

It is He who designed the pattern He intends us to display.

He isn't finished weaving.

The way God threads the yarns of His truth through the fabric of our circumstance is nothing short of wonderful. He truly works in mysterious ways. He allows disappointment and failure to alter the pattern radically from time to time. Things in which we put our trust, things we valued most, things we cherished above all else, these He lets us lose so we can gain what otherwise we could not have—a closer walk with Him!

Our thread runs out.

Our old familiar pattern is cut off.

We don't get what we hoped for.

⁵²⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:12

We hurt those we love, fall into all sorts of sin, are destroyed by financial reverses, succumb to illness, and grow old and feeble.⁵³⁰

We are broken.

We are cast down.

We are widowed or divorced, condemned, and ridiculed.

Then God begins to weave new cloth!

Wonder of Wonders

The world was filled with darkness two thousand years ago, when God worked His most wonderful wonder!

God sent the angel Gabriel to a virgin named Mary, who lived in the town of Nazareth, espoused to a young man named Joseph.

“Hail, you who are highly favored,” the angel said to her. “The Lord is with you, and you are blessed among women.”

She saw the angel and was troubled, wondering what he meant, but the angel said, “Fear not, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will give birth to a son whom you shall call Jesus. He shall be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord shall give Him the throne of David, and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever. Of His kingdom there shall be no end.”

Mary asked, “How can this be? I have not been with a man.”

The angel explained, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon you, and a Holy Child shall be born of you called the Son of God.”⁵³¹

Shepherds, who were familiar with the evening sky and paths of stars and planets that crossed their fields night after night, saw a strange phenomenon in heaven. Astronomers say it was a rare confluence of planets. Some believe it was a comet. It must have been spectacular, for it convinced the shepherds it was a sign from God. One can only imagine their excitement at seeing such a sight.

“An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were afraid, but the angel said, ‘Fear not, for I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. You shall find the Babe

⁵³⁰ Unless we survive till the rapture, when some Bible scholars say those living in Christ at His Promised Return will be “taken up” to meet him in the air and will not suffer physical death.

⁵³¹ Luke 1:26-35

When Soul Sees Self

wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men.’⁵³²

The heavenly sign and angel proclaimed the birth of Jesus, the Messiah predicted by prophets of old, so the shepherds entered the little town of Bethlehem in search of the newborn King.

Wise men from the east also saw the celestial sign and followed its leading to the tiny town, where they asked, “Where is He that is born King of the Jews? We have seen His star and have come to worship him.”⁵³³ They brought much gold, costly frankincense, and healing myrrh.

The wise men and shepherds found baby Jesus not in a bed at the inn wrapped in silken robes. Instead He lay in a bed of straw in a stable feedbox where animals munched their meals of hay and oats, while men and women of the world enjoyed luxury a few feet away at the inn, ignorant of His Holy presence out in the barn.

Yet what a wonderful barn it was the night He was born. Stars were brightly shining. The night was truly holy. Cattle lowed, the horses snorted (as horses do), donkeys brayed their silly sounds in celebration, and gaunt fuzzy camels craned their long hairy necks to stare with big camel eyes at the Child sleeping in straw.

His mother was aglow with wonder, for there in a manger, come forth from her womb, lay the King of Kings, the Son of her Eternal God, filled with His Spirit ... and she was His mother.

These verses speak to the wonder of that night.

Wonder of Wonders

by Charles B. Wycuff⁵³⁴

The wonder of wonders, as she looked on His face,
That this little boy spoke the worlds in their place.
The stars and the moon, shining brightly on them,
The earth and the sun were created by Him.

⁵³² Luke 2:10-14

⁵³³ Mat 2:2

⁵³⁴ The Wonder of Wonders, ©1983 by Tuckaseegee Publishing Company, a division of Inspirations, Inc., c/o J. Aaron Brown & Assoc., 825 19th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203. Words and Music by Charles B. Wycuff. Lyrics reprinted by permission.

The wonder of wonders as she heard His small cry,
That this voice had thundered on Mount Sinai.
The hand that she held so tenderly
Had made a dry path through the mighty Red Sea.

The wonder of wonders as she looked down and smiled,
That He was her maker as well as her child.
He created the womb that had given Him birth.
He was God incarnate come down to earth.

The wonder of wonders, as the Father looked on,
In eternity past, this was His Son.
He sent him to die on Calvary's tree,
And that is the wonder of wonders to me.

The wonder of wonders, Oh how could it be,
That God became flesh and was given for me?
The Almighty came down and walked among men,
And died on the cross for every man's sin.

As Mary watched, night became day, days turned to weeks and months to years as the baby grew into a man.

I believe she knew before He was born, the terrible price He'd pay on the Cross to purchase our sorrow, buy our repentance, and prepare the way of redemption for us all.

It is amazing grace that God should draw sinners to Himself by such pitiful mercy.

It is beyond imagination.

He endured agony at Calvary to rescue us from eternal darkness we cannot escape without Him.

Jesus bore the pain of death so we could learn the truth of love.
He died so we could live.

It is the great mystery of life that love must know pain to yield the fruits of righteousness and peace.

Love matures in adversity.

Distress deepens devotion.

Those who demand a bed of roses never find the abundance that comes after deprivation.

The path to victory is through the heat of battle.

When Soul Sees Self

Bitter sorrow brings beautiful joy.

None of this makes any sense to those who are lost.

God allows us to suffer. We are torn by circumstance, crushed by defeat, and tormented by truths that cannot be changed.

Life is punctuated by pain.

The ebb and flow of our losses and gains are as much a part of living as the pulse beat of our hearts.

Nothing stays the same.

Things we cling to fade away.

We toss on our beds, unable to sleep as the fear of death strikes our hearts like an icy knife. We clutch at the air like drowning souls about to sink from sight forever, aware we cannot save ourselves.

Yet, love born in that Bethlehem manger endures.

God forever faithful keeps His promises, though we break ours.

He brings us through the storm and rescues all who cry to Him for help in time of need.

In every trial life puts us through, our Savior encourages us and lifts our souls in His embrace.

At the end of every night, He is our morning star.

The Fruit of Patience

Our Bible tells us to rejoice when faith is tested, for only by the testing of faith can we learn patience.

Patience is wisdom in action.

We wait for what we know is ours already.

James says, "Count it joy, brothers, when you fall into different temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith works patience. Let patience do its work that you may be perfect, complete, lacking nothing."⁵³⁵

Patience is its own reward.

Paul explains, "Being justified by faith, we have peace through Christ, by whom we have access into the grace wherein we stand. Not only do we rejoice in hope of the glory of God, but we rejoice in our trouble, knowing tribulation works patience, patience yields experience, experience brings hope, and hope puts an end to shame

⁵³⁵ James 1:2-4

and its fear, all because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit of Christ, who is within us.”⁵³⁶

Patience is born in the testing of faith. One *cannot* be patient by purposing to be patient.

Try it and see for yourself. It just doesn’t work.

Patience is born in trouble.

Purpose to be patient and see how far it gets you. Exercise restraint. Count to ten. Use all your willpower.

Is your self-effort making you patient? No?

Genuine patience is forged in the fires of terrible trials and bitter setbacks. Willpower has nothing to do with it.

Only troubles produce forbearance, as we *forbear* them.

When real problems come, as real problems do, our “just make up my mind to endure” form of paper-thin patience vanishes, like the make-believe it always is.

Nor can we learn patience by attending seminars on patience, reading books, or offering prayer while fasting for weeks on end!

The path to patience is upset, distress, and trouble that tests it.

Nothing else will do it.

We’ve all heard someone say, “So-and-so tries my patience!” Such statements are incorrect, for it isn’t our patience that’s tried. It’s faith that is tried ... tested to prove its strength.

Patience is the *result* of testing faith. Each time faith is tested by the many reverses in life, we learn God is true to His promises, and our patience grows stronger as faith is made secure.

The stronger patience becomes, the less faith is tested!

Once faith is secure in Christ (once we see it is His faith *within* us by grace) the testing (of *His* faith in us) *always* brings the good result God intends—patience.

Faith in God does not fail when tried, because it’s His faith.

Patience grows greater as we grow in this truth.

James and Paul entreat us to let patience have its good result so we may be “perfect and entire, lacking nothing.”⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ Rom 5:1-5

⁵³⁷ James 1:4

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We can rejoice in reverses, knowing the fruits of God's Spirit flow from patient hearts trusting His love within us.

We cannot squeeze the fruit of patience out of "self" any more than an apple tree can squeeze out oranges.

The truth is in the seed.

Fruits grow from seeds.

As a new plant pushes its first shoots into the sun, it leaves its husk behind, sends its roots deeper into the soil, and sends its stems high in the open air. Flowers appear, mature, and yield new fruits, within which *more* seeds are found.

Such is the way Christ's Gospel is repeated.

The seed of Himself is sown in *us*, and He grows, bearing fruits of "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-restraint"⁵³⁸ flowing from us into all the world as our patience is strengthened by the testing of faith, teaching us to trust in His presence within.

It is the continuing work of God in our lives.

Let none deceive you. This *is* the Christian life.

Our faith *will* be tried, and slowly we *will* learn patience from the tests and be perfected by our love of Christ, according to His plan.

Out of the garden of adversity grow the fruits of God's mercy.

Fruit is evidence of His presence within us.

The fruit does not prove *our* value.

The fruit demonstrates His power *within* us, the Gospel.

The mystery is revealed to us over time.

The fruits others see are not badges.

They are bandages.

Jesus warns us to beware of the doctrine of self-willed priests who "come in sheep's clothing but are inwardly hungry wolves." He says, "You will know them by their fruits."⁵³⁹ Their fruits are *not* of God, not "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, faith, meekness, or self-restraint."⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁸ Gal 5:22-23

⁵³⁹ Mat 7:15-16

⁵⁴⁰ Gal 5:22

God's wisdom is "pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits."⁵⁴¹

The fruits of Christ's Spirit within us flow as faith grows by testing, and patience finds us trusting Him who *is* our faith.

"Love bears all things, endures all things, and never fails."⁵⁴²

Love is patient.

There can be no *joy* in chomping at the bit.

Joy results from accepting what *is*.

Impatience is never content until it gets what it does not have.

There is no rest for impatient souls.

Impatience is an irritant, the itch that scratching cannot soothe.

Impatience prevents faith.

Patience endures disappointment, standing fast when assaulted by the urge to act without Christ's counsel. Patience is not anxious for immediate results. Patience waits for the rescue that comes by His work *within* us.

Similarly, *gentleness* cannot exist without patience.

Impatience taps its foot and barks angrily, "Can't you hurry up?" It strives for what it does not have, demanding immediate compliance of others or sulking in seclusion and rage.

Gentleness is patient.

Faith cannot be had without patience, for patience arises from faith. Patience abides in faith as faith abides in patience. Patience is the product of faith that's tested, strained to a breaking point and found sufficient. Patience *always* accompanies faith, for faith is the substance of things hoped for.⁵⁴³

Faith waits patiently.

Likewise, *meekness* and patience are always companions, for meekness is strength in control, the presence of power arising from knowing our God "shall supply all our need according to His riches in Glory by Christ."⁵⁴⁴ Meekness is patient.

⁵⁴¹ James 3:17

⁵⁴² 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁵⁴³ Hebrews 11:1

⁵⁴⁴ Philippians 4:19

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Without patience there can be no *self-control*, for lack of control is the opposite of patience, inability to refrain from what we know is bad for us, like a drunk who knows alcohol is poison and Adam who knew the apple Eve offered was death.

Impatient self-control is a contradiction of terms.

Christ-control is the power to be patient.

One could write a book on each of these fruits of the Spirit, how they flow from the test of faith, how God sifts the soil of patience to allow His fruits to mature in us so we may be useful to others in need of what we're being given.

Without patience (the virtue of trusting in God's love and divine providence) *none* of the fruits of God's Spirit can come forth.

We are tested to *ask* for patience.

We are tested to learn we *need* patience.

We are tested so patience may bring fruit.

Grapevines work *out* their fruit through branches. Fruit appears when the glory of flowers fades to make room for life that appears where the flowers once were. Each new fruit is complete with its own seeds of promise.

But, fruit doesn't struggle to grow.

Fruit is worked *out* by the power of life *within* the fruit-bearer.

Like branches in the vast vine of God's kingdom, we work *out* His salvation, allowing His love to flow through us, causing fruit to emerge from our lives as faith is strengthened in patience.

The Gift of Endurance

The *exercise* of patience yields endurance.

Paul urges, "Let us run with patience the race set before us."⁵⁴⁵

Our race is not for a corruptible prize that perishes, but for the prize of life eternal, and Paul urges us to run with patience so we can endure to the finish, like a long-distance triathlete who paces himself instead of sprinting full-speed for the prize. Running a race by resting seems odd, until we think it through.

No race is won by those who cannot endure to the finish.

Racing and resting seem inconsistent with each other.

⁵⁴⁵ Hebrews 12:1

We were taught as children how the tortoise beat the hare in a race, precisely because the rabbit ran until he could run no farther, while the turtle plodded on in a restful pace by which he endured to the finish!

To see why patience wins the race of life, we look to the writer of Hebrews who says, “I press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ.”⁵⁴⁶ This seems a struggle, perhaps a pitting of *all* one’s energies! However, another passage urges us to “Run in such manner that you may obtain, knowing that all must run who enter a race, but only one receives the prize.”⁵⁴⁷

We must run in “such manner” that we do not “run in vain”.⁵⁴⁸

So, we run with patience.⁵⁴⁹

“Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”⁵⁵⁰

Here is the meaning of the race metaphor.

Competitors we contend against in the race of life are not other people but our self and its spirits of error, conceit, self-confidence in human strength, doubt, fear, lust, and every darkness that leads us from the narrow path, thoughts that exalt themselves against God, ignorance that confuses indolence with patience.

Against these we must race with endurance to our finish line by trusting God along the way to provide our needs by Christ *within*.

Self opposes us, for self can *never* gain the prize. Self faces an eternal defeat because it is at war with reality. Self cannot win so self obscures our path with stumbling blocks, diversions, detours to delay our progress.

We are no longer ignorant of self’s devices.⁵⁵¹

Christ *is* the endurance by which we reach His victory.

By Christ *within* we prevail.

The race is not yet over.

⁵⁴⁶ Philippians 3:14

⁵⁴⁷ 1 Corinthians 9:24

⁵⁴⁸ Philippians 2:16

⁵⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 9:27

⁵⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 10:12

⁵⁵¹ 2 Corinthians 2:11

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None of us has yet reached the finish, and none of us yet knows what He will make of us when His work within us is complete.

We press on by the endurance of Him who is our victory.

“The God of grace,” Peter writes, “who calls us to His Glory by Christ, will make you perfect after you suffer awhile. He will exalt you in due time. He will establish you, strengthen and settle you. To Him alone be glory and dominion forever.”⁵⁵²

The Gospel is no contradiction.

We are called to salvation, yet first there is an endurance race.

We *can* give up, let self win, go back to how we used to live, and take credit for the goodness others praise us for. We *can* deny our need for salvation. We *can* refuse to confess our sin. We *can* let go of hope and die alone.

That choice is always ours.

Jesus warns, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be wise as serpents, yet harmless as doves. Beware of men who will deliver you up to the councils and scourge you in the synagogues. You shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, to witness of me against them and against heathen who refuse to believe in my Father who loves them. But, when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak, for it shall be given you in that hour what you shall say, for *it is not you that speaks but the Spirit of your Father who speaks through you*. Brothers shall deliver brothers to death, and fathers their children. Sons and daughters shall rise against parents and cause them to be put to death. And you shall be hated by all men for my Name’s sake. He that endures to the end, however, shall be saved.”⁵⁵³

Our endurance is His work.

Our faith is His faith.

Our love is His love.

We press on for the hope of the promise set before us, confident He who has begun this work in us will finish it, certain His work has already begun, for we have the evidence of those fruits of His Spirit already beginning to appear.

⁵⁵² 1 Pet 5:6-11

⁵⁵³ Mat 10:16-22

His love is within, and we *know* it.

The Down Payment

Paul speaks of this knowledge, the hope residing deep within, the peace that's ours at this moment, the rest abiding in our hearts as we witness His work in us *now*, changing us, molding us, filling us, bringing forth fruit. This knowledge is like a down payment for our souls, a promise of more to come, the comfort of His Presence and the assurance that comfort brings.

Paul cheers us with these words, "God has sealed us, depositing the *earnest* of His Spirit in our hearts."⁵⁵⁴

Hallelujah.

As any lawyer or real estate dealer familiar with transfers of property knows, contracts often refer to down payments as earnest money, an amount paid up front to seal or secure a deal, to confirm that the buyer is "in earnest", that he intends to go through with his bargain to complete the purchase.

So it is with Christ's down payment in us.

His fruit is our evidence that Christ is in us and will complete the transaction, replacing our "self" with Himself!

His fruit is our evidence that He will complete the purchase of our souls.

It is our blessed assurance.

He confirms the bargain that's been struck between us. We have a covenant from Him, and we can trust Him with our eternal souls, because He is giving us evidence by the fruit we see today, the fruit we know is not of our making!

This is the new testament of God by which we can be confident that God will perform His part of the bargain purchased for us by Jesus' blood on that cross.

We have the earnest of His Spirit clothing our souls in love!

Paul continues in his second letter to the church at Corinth, "For we that are in the tent of this body do groan, being burdened by

⁵⁵⁴ 2 Corinthians 1:22

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life, yet He who has made us just for this itself is God, who also has given us the earnest of His Spirit.”⁵⁵⁵

The down payment of Christ is real, and we know it.

It is the evidence of things hoped for, the substance of things not yet seen, His Spirit at work in us, transforming our souls.

We know Him by His presence within.

Paul also writes in a letter to the Ephesian church, “After you heard and believed the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation, you trusted in Christ and were sealed with God’s Spirit of promise, the earnest of our inheritance.”⁵⁵⁶

The down payment is made.

The contract is *sealed*.

The earnest of my inheritance, the down payment of grace, the internal evidence of adoption into God’s family and His work in my life, is the most precious thing any of us can possess.

It is a gift from God, evidence of His promise of eternal life.

And, it is *ours*.

We did not *earn* it, and the fact we did not earn it is the part that gives us assurance that doubt cannot shake loose.

We *know* we have it.

It is ours *now!*

The earnest of our salvation *is* His life within us.

He is the down payment.

His assurance is more valuable than gold or silver. It is wonder beyond compare. It is the life of Christ in our soul, given for us, redeeming us, transforming us into someone we could never be without His touch. He is giving us His wisdom. He is giving us His strength. He is giving us His beauty. We have the evidence of His Spirit within us, the down payment by which He tells us every day our soul is His, secure, paid for, redeemed.

His down payment in us makes us want to improve, to love our family more, to overcome bad habits, to be a better person. If we want these things because we Love Him (and not for some reward

⁵⁵⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:4-5

⁵⁵⁶ Ephesians 1:13-14

we hope for) we may be confident our desire is proof of His down payment for our soul, the seal on our eternal contract with God.

We smile more, not because someone shamed us for frowning. We smile because the joy of *knowing* that Christ lives in our hearts just bubbles out of us. We smile *real* smiles rising from a happy place within us deeper than we ever knew before. These new smiles are further evidence of the earnest of our adoption, our eternal inheritance.

Many years ago, I lived on the fringe of society, a child of the rebellious sixties, at war with truth, tormented by the way children cringed at the sight of my angry face, hiding behind their mothers' skirts, peeking in terror at my frown. I was tormented by the pain of my losses in life, living apart from God whom I blamed for the past I had shattered by my own blindness. I sometimes saw myself in a mirror as children saw me, and I *too* was frightened by the horror of that visage, scarred so deeply by my own foul designs.

Nothing I could do would soften the intemperate countenance I wore. I tried to smile, as others said I should, but my efforts were mere pretenses, short-lived, and unconvincing. I prayed for mercy and avoided children to spare us both the shock.

Today, though far from that perfection, Christ is working in me. There's a difference in how I appear to others. I see it in the mirror. I hear it in my voice. Yet, best of all I know it by children's smiles.

Occasionally a child who doesn't even know me will walk right up to me, grab me by my hand, and drag me off to show me something interesting that he or she discovered as if I were a trusted family member.

Children no longer fear this old man! They see the Spirit of another Man, the One who died for me, the Christ of God who lives within me by amazing grace.

The joy I have in the knowledge of His presence, the evidence of Christ both to myself and others, is beyond price.

There is *nothing* I would not give to keep the peace I know by the evidence of His down payment in my heart.

To retain the rest I find each day by the earnest of His Spirit within me, I'd give everything that once enticed me ... *everything*.

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His love is the pearl beyond price.⁵⁵⁷

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⁵⁵⁷ Mat 13:46

THE PATH

The Sorrows

Each religion offers its adherents a path to perfection.

The novice follower of every faith embarks on a journey which has for its goal awareness of self through the knowledge of God.

The journey may be study, the fastidious poring over old books written by sages and seers to explain the mysteries of life and their mastery. Or, the journey may be an austere life of poverty, silence, or some other self-abasing form of ascetic divorce from pleasures to attain the longed-for oneness with the infinite. The journey may be meditation by mantras, beads, or solitude. The journey may be a system of ritual practice, seasonal observance, or other forms of labor and self-sacrifice—but always there's some self-made effort by which *followers* hope to reach the knowledge of deity and self.

For a growing number of modern seekers, God is found only by minds meditating on timeless nothingness.

Individuals adhering to these religious ideas believe their mind can by self-discipline comprehend that which can't be known. The method most commonly employed is to empty their minds so they can discern the great transcendent truths by knowing nothing!

In most religions, however, God is an eternal mind beyond our comprehension, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-seeing, controlling all that is, eternal and without equal. The nature of deity in nearly all religions is identical in these respects, the oneness by which all we know came to be, is sustained, and will one day be destroyed. Even polytheistic religions recognize one primal god who rules all others.

Though most Christians argue our God is not the god of other faiths, one cannot dispute that the God of Jews and Christians is the God of Abraham and Moses. And, moreover, anyone familiar with the Koran knows the Allah of Islam is *also* God of Abraham.

Though Christians, Jews, and the people of Islam may never agree in a political arena, the fact is they all worship the God who made Adam and Abraham. They may not agree about the character

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or will of God in any particular, but on that one point, at least, they are bound to agree, because the Bible and Koran agree: One God.

That different faiths have different names for the same eternal being, differing views of that being's nature, different methods to obtain that being's blessings and approval, those differences do not change the fact that virtually *all* people search for the same God *outside themselves!*

And, they search to obtain the same things from God, principal of which are peace, eternal security, and rest.

It is the *search* that differs or, more correctly, the path along which the search is maintained. Though the paths are widely different, all seek the same goal. Buddhism, Sikhism, Taoism, Judaism, Islam, *and* Christianity all seek peace in this world and life beyond death, a resting place from troubles common to us all.

In every religion apart from Christianity, devotees *work* for that rest, labor for God's approval, struggle for peace (a contradiction) submit to discipline, and exert effort to effect changes in themselves by which they hope to enter the rest we all desire.

In every religion that denies our Christ, people strive to earn perfection and its blessings through the exercise of will. In every religion that separates itself from Christ (or proclaims He's just a teacher or a mystic healer) the promise of fulfillment and serenity can only be purchased by persistence, introspection, and devout dedication to established practices and traditions promoted by human leaders.

It is not so with Christianity.

Christianity is *not* just another religion.

Christianity is truth.

Our faith in Christ is the faith *of* Christ, a gift received, not a prize won or a reward earned.

The benefits of God for the Christian are conferred according to His mercy, not received as payment for some dutiful service or self-sacrifice.

“The race is not to the swift,” the preacher writes, “nor the battle to the strong, neither bread to the wise, nor riches to men of

understanding, nor favor to men of skill,⁵⁵⁸ for the grace and mercy of God determines all these things according to His will.

Only by the Gospel of grace can we ever fellowship with God.

We find God through love, not labor, for love is a gift. Love can never be anything *but* a gift. Love can never be obligation or duty, never attained by sacrifice or diligence. Love is freely given and received, or it is not love at all.

God *is* love.⁵⁵⁹

We only come to know God in a meaningful way (all religions to the contrary notwithstanding) by finding Him through the love we discover by the work of His wonder-ful Gospel of grace within our souls, the love that can't be earned, can't be demanded, can't be obtained by any effort or sacrifice.

The path to God is navigated with this knowledge as our guide.

All is by God's grace!

Our Creator declares, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and compassion on whom I will have compassion."⁵⁶⁰

There is no other way. His love must be a gift, and only those who accept this truth and learn to live it can ever know Him as He *is* or have communion with His Spirit within.

The Gospel is like no religion on earth. Those who seek God in any other way are walking in darkness, thinking they can attain by effort what can only be received freely through prayer, patience, and God's merciful grace!

Unlike the emptied self that is the valued Nirvana of Buddhism, the Christian receives a *filled* self and a new life that is nothing less than God in Christ living *in* us by His grace.

We don't command Christ into our lives, we *invite* Him.

We don't demand that His Spirit indwell and transform us.

We don't insist He admit us to His kingdom.

We pray fervently by humble supplications for this to occur so we may love others as Christ loves us. We don't require any duty

⁵⁵⁸ Ecclesiastes 9:11

⁵⁵⁹ 1 John 4:8-16

⁵⁶⁰ Exodus 33:19, Romans 9:15-18

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whatsoever from our God. We merely receive what He decides to give. All we have is a free gift, and in this we are thankful.

God owes us *nothing*.

If His blessings were a debt, they'd be no longer grace.⁵⁶¹

The grace of God cannot be gained by work, else it isn't grace.

The wisdom of God cannot be gained from study, for study brings knowledge, not wisdom.

The peace of God refuses to be understood, nor can it be gained by those who struggle for it, because it must be stood-under.

The blessings of God fall on rich and poor alike as He ordains.

“God is no respecter of persons.”⁵⁶²

One needn't be special to receive the blessings of Christ. One merely confesses his need, acknowledges Christ's sufficiency, and prays for God's great mercy to be poured into our “great empty”.

None of us is good enough to merit the blessings we receive.

“No, not one.”⁵⁶³

“This is the way,” God's Spirit tells us, when we stray right or left of the perfect path, “Walk you in it.”⁵⁶⁴

“In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your path.”⁵⁶⁵

“He leads me in the path of righteousness.”⁵⁶⁶

It is *all* God's work!

At the end of our days we are not yet fully aware of its truth. We hold on to things we want to be ours, accomplishments for which we hope to be praised, rights in which we want to be secure, demands we want others to fulfill.

Yet, this is *not* the path to God.

We don't want to resign our self-importance.

We resist being merely “what we are”.

We aren't satisfied with what we're given.

⁵⁶¹ Romans 11:6

⁵⁶² Acts 10:34

⁵⁶³ Matthew 19:17

⁵⁶⁴ Isaiah 30:21

⁵⁶⁵ Proverbs 3:6

⁵⁶⁶ Psalms 23:3

We want more.

We may refuse the love God offers us through others and go off in search of something better that we never find.

We are children playing make believe with our lives, imagining a better tomorrow, dissatisfied with today, ashamed of yesterday, unable to admit we've been wrong.

When we begin by His grace to see through our blindness, we meet our Savior as He is, the sacrificial lamb offering salvation to all who confess their need and His sufficiency. We begin a journey that isn't completed until we see Him "face to face"⁵⁶⁷ at the end of life. Yet, we begin to grow. We start to know. We are born again as if we were commencing once more from the womb. There is no turning back. Christ enters us, and we're no longer alone.

We are bought with a price,⁵⁶⁸ purchased with His blood, and by the sorrow planted in our hearts by His sorrow and suffering, our souls are made alive.

Christ redeems us from self who once ruled our lives.

He shines His light in our darkness and heals wounds we inflict on ourselves and others.

He sets us on the path to life eternal.

Our journey has begun.

The Fire

Almost at once, when we give our hearts to Christ, recognizing for the first time our absolute need for His grace—troubles set in.

Peter writes, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you."

He says it will be "as though some strange thing happened to you," then adds, "but rejoice because you are partakers of Christ's suffering so that when His glory is revealed you may be glad with exceeding joy."⁵⁶⁹

New trials test new Christians.

⁵⁶⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:12

⁵⁶⁸ 1 Corinthians 7:23

⁵⁶⁹ 1 Peter 4:12-13

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Some call this growing season “passing through fire”. I think it’s His fire passing through *us*! We are purged, cleansed, and begin to be changed in a new way.

Salvation is a process.

For the first time, we begin to see us as God sees us.

It is not a pretty picture.

God has a lot of work to do! We need a lot of cleaning up. Self is still at work in us, and self must die so Christ may clothe our souls completely with His Spirit.

The process seems painful, until we begin to see its good effect and rejoice, just as Peter promises.

We begin to grow up and face the truth of who we’ve been.

Or, to say it better, Christ begins to grow in us, and the man or woman He intends for us to be begins to emerge from our shell of fear, unforgiveness, and doubt!

Self is wounded.

Hallelujah!

Self is seen.

Hallelujah!

Self is overcome.

Hallelujah!

Self is displaced.

Christ ascends.

People we once considered “friends” abandon us, because we are no longer as they are, clamorous self-deceivers whose lives are controlled by the world’s “political correctness”, whose language is punctuated with expletives to identify them in their fellowship of unbelievers, whose habits are a demonstration of their unbelief, whose idea of “friend” is one who goes along with their crowd.

We make new friends.

Plans for the future we worked all our life to achieve fall apart, as we find ourselves unable to proceed in the direction we once headed. Now that self is being displaced, so also are the plans self made. God turns us from the path we were on.

We make new plans.

Habits we harbored are seen as destructive. Though they once seemed delicious and delightful to us, they must be set aside.

We make new habits.

The old falls away to make room for the new.

God's holy fire purges those things from our souls.

Though God will not allow the flame to kindle on us or consume us, His fire *will* burn all things that have no place in His kingdom.

“Every man's work shall be seen, revealed by fire that will test every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, though he himself shall be saved—yet so as by fire.”⁵⁷⁰

I know about the fire. Much of my work was burned when His work began in me. Things I counted on (when I should have trusted Him) are gone, burned up by God's refining fire. I suffered loss, yet I myself am being saved ... by His fire. I learned things I could never learn another way. I was given a chance to leave my old life behind and receive my new life in which I dare not trust the things I once held dear, life that finds me resting in Christ and His love.

For all that's been taken away, I now have more than I imagined possible, and in place of tears and torment I have joy and peace.

His spirit of truth teaches me all things and cannot lie.⁵⁷¹

His teaching works *within* my soul.

It is God's baptism by fire.

His daily provision for our lives is indeed something for which we can “be glad with exceeding joy”—knowing in all sincerity that what we lost was only something we could not retain, that what we are gaining is something we can never lose.

The prophet Zechariah speaks of God's fire by which one-third of humanity will be “refined as silver, tried as gold is tried.” God tells the prophet, “They shall call my Name, and I will hear them. I will say, ‘You are my people,’ and they will say, ‘The Lord is our God.’”⁵⁷²

By way of explanation, just three verses before the words cited in the preceding paragraph, the prophet says, “One shall ask, ‘What

⁵⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

⁵⁷¹ 1 John 2:27

⁵⁷² Zechariah 13:9

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are these wounds in your hands?’, and He shall answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends.’⁵⁷³

We know who is speaking through Zechariah.

We know who will refine us as silver and try us as gold.

It is the Christ of God who filled Jesus of Nazareth, the lamb of Calvary, the altogether lovely One.

Because we know it is He, we rest—even in the midst of fire.

The prophet Malachi also speaks of the refining fire of God’s grace, saying, “Who may abide the day of His coming? Who shall stand when He appears? He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He shall purify and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.”⁵⁷⁴

Praise the Lord that He is the merciful God of Calvary, for we know we can trust Him to be gentle with our errors. He suffered for us an unspeakable death, so we may be raised to incorruptible life.

He *loves* us.

We are His New Israel, the redeemed of the lamb.

He calls us by name. We are His Seed.⁵⁷⁵

Therefore, when we pass through waters He is with us.

When we pass through rivers they will not overflow us.

And, when we walk through fire we shall not be burned, neither shall the flame kindle upon us to destroy us.⁵⁷⁶

John the Baptist said of the One who was to come, the Messiah King [the Christ for whom John leaped joyfully while in his mother Elizabeth’s womb⁵⁷⁷], “I baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who comes after me is mightier than I. He shall baptize you with the God’s Holy Spirit and with fire. His fan [a winnowing fan used to blow light chaff from heavier seeds on the threshing floor of a mill before grinding begins] is in His hand. He will thoroughly

⁵⁷³ Zechariah 13:6

⁵⁷⁴ Malachi 3:2-3

⁵⁷⁵ Isaiah 53:10

⁵⁷⁶ Isaiah 43:1-2

⁵⁷⁷ Luke 1:41-55

purge His floor [fan away the chaff] and gather His wheat into the garner. But the chaff He will burn up with fire.”⁵⁷⁸

This passage used to scare me, for preachers taught me it was I who would be burned if I refused to “be good”. Now I know it’s the useless chaff of self He burns off my soul so He can clothe me with Himself. I knew there was chaff in my life, things not as they ought to be, treasures I held back from Christ, things I wasn’t ready to trust to Him. So, this passage troubled me, for I thought His fire would judge between me and others who appeared to be good wheat for His harvest, that they would be saved while I was burned up with unquenchable fire. That’s what preachers taught.

I now see His fiery baptism is to cleanse our souls, transforming us by truth. The wheat and chaff are spiritual good and evil. The judgment is not between me and others. It is judgment of my old self spirit that rebels at God’s Lordship. Salvation separates the chaff of self from the wheat of His new creation.⁵⁷⁹

God is planting wheat in my soul,⁵⁸⁰ mercy that grows in His forgiveness of my sin, gentleness that grows in His promise of rest, and peace that grows in the knowledge of His constant presence.

This wheat is *mine*, planted within me by nail-pierced hands and yielding fruit fit for His kingdom.

These things and more I learn each day, good things I did not know ... the wheat of God’s love for me.

The chaff (self-pity, ambition, lust, etc.) are being burned away. They are worthless in His kingdom. They are bad for me, dragging me down, pulling me back, robbing my peace, interrupting my rest.

Self-pity demands attention from others with problems enough of their own. It seeks love in an improper way, attempting to force burdens on those from whom we want to receive love in response to our sorrow. Whatever we gain from self-pity cannot last but a season, and that which it gets from others can *never* be love for, if it comes at all, it comes from a sense of obligation or duty, while true love is always a gift.

⁵⁷⁸ Matthew 3:11-12, Luke 3:16-17

⁵⁷⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17, Galatians 6:15

⁵⁸⁰ Matthew 15:13, Romans 6:5

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Self-pity is chaff. It is worthless to God *and* to me. I willingly submit it to the winnowing fan of Him who loves me, praying He will blow it away and burn it up in His Fire.

Nor is ambition worth keeping. It constantly taunts us, reminds us we've not yet arrived, that there's more to press on for, that the mark is still ahead, that we can make it if we only try harder. The chaff of ambition on the floor of my heart seeks to achieve some great thing on my own, to be someone special, to be loved for what I do. Ambition stands on the seat of the throne of my heart, beats its chest and proclaims, "I have value apart from God's grace!"

It is vanity.

I know, by the grace of Him who saves me, that only His work can last and accomplish the goal I seek—to rest in Him. So, like self-pity, I gladly surrender ambition to the winnowing fan and fire, praying even for the pain it will cost me to lose it forever.

Lust is chaff in us all, tormenting us with desire for things we cannot have, enticing us with the lie that what it wants will give us peace, dogging us day and night, always present, a moment away, a lingering glance, a need we do not need. Its consequence is death. It is never fulfilled, never satisfied, for its ravenous hunger grows stronger the more we feed it. It is chaff Christ is fanning away and burning in His merciful fire.

As our lives are poured out on God's threshing floor each day to be winnowed by truth, the chaff of our old sin-full self is blown away and burned so all that remains is the wholesome wheat of His presence and power within us to the praise of His Glory.⁵⁸¹

God's chastising spirit does not merely burn *within* us. It also burns *between* us to destroy *all* the chaff of our lives, not only the chaff of rebellion and pride in individual hearts, but also the chaff of dissension and bitterness in families, personal relationships, and even religious organizations. It forces us to decide whom we will serve, whom we will worship, whom we will obey.

"I have come to send fire on the earth," Jesus explains.⁵⁸²

"The first shall be last, and the last shall be first,"⁵⁸³ he says.

⁵⁸¹ Ephesians 1:3-14

⁵⁸² Luke 12:49-53

⁵⁸³ Mark 10:29-31

The writer of Hebrews tells us more of the purging fire by which we are saved. “We have received a kingdom that cannot be taken from us! So, let us be filled with grace, whereby we may serve God with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire.”⁵⁸⁴

Peter also speaks of the fire. “Blessed be God who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled. It is hope that doesn’t fade away. It is hope reserved in heaven for us who are kept by the power of God, salvation to be revealed at the end of time. In this hope we greatly rejoice, though the temptations of this moment weigh us down, for we know the fiery trial of our faith (that is more precious than gold that perishes) will bring only praise, honor, and glory when Christ is revealed. For He is the Christ whom, having not seen, we love. In Him, though we see him not now, we believe. In Him we rejoice with unspeakable joy, full of glory. And, in Him we receive the end of our faith, the salvation of our souls.”⁵⁸⁵

To be tried by the fire of God brings peace, yet for a time there is great pain and seeming loss.

We endure because His nail-pierced hands protect our soul from the flame that burns away the chaff of self.

We are kept by His love to be a demonstration of His power.

We are preserved from the flame and also by it..

The fire purifies our souls, and when the testing is complete, we know our souls will be clothed entirely in His Spirit, prepared to dwell in His kingdom forever.

In the testimony of his Revelation, John describes our Savior in this manner, “His head and His hair were white like wool as white as snow. His eyes were as a flame of fire. His feet were like fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace. His voice was as the sound of many waters. In His right hand He held seven stars. Out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword. His countenance was as strong sunshine. And, when I saw him I fell at His feet as though I

⁵⁸⁴ Hebrews 12:28-29

⁵⁸⁵ 1 Pet 1:3-9

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were dead. Then He laid His right hand on me and said, ‘Fear not.’⁵⁸⁶

His eyes are as a flame of fire.

He sees *everything*, including the chaff self tries vainly to hide.

The fire of His spirit of truth consumes our unworthiness and illumines our darkness, it purifies the good He places in us by His grace and prepares us for the inheritance He purchased for us by His blood.

Rest in a fire?

Absolutely!

Christ assures us, “Fear not.”⁵⁸⁷

The Burden

Not only is there fire that burns our profitless works as we walk on this pathway of life in Christ, there is also a burden to bear.

The burden is light,⁵⁸⁸ yet it is a burden nonetheless, and we *must* carry the burden. It is not an option.

We aren’t invited to stroll, gazing at the scenery of life as we walk along. We are called to carry a cargo, to convey an obligation, to assume a duty.

Christ says, “Whoever will not bear his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”⁵⁸⁹

We either bear the burden of His cross, or we walk alone.

What *is* the burden of His cross?

As we seek the answer to this question, we come upon a hazard we must carefully avoid. There is presented to us by our enemy a temptation to stand in Jesus’ sandals, to crucify ourselves, to be volunteer martyrs, to suffer for our salvation.

The enticement to martyrdom is a trick of self, seeking praise even by self-sacrifice and self-destruction. It is insanity.

It is also a lie.

⁵⁸⁶ Rev 1:14-17

⁵⁸⁷ Luke 5:10, Luke 8:50, Luke 12:7, Luke 12:32, Acts 27:24

⁵⁸⁸ Mat 11:30

⁵⁸⁹ Luke 14:27

Christ does not call us to endure crucifixion. He did that for us already. It is done. It is finished.⁵⁹⁰

The cross He calls us to bear is not the Cross of Calvary where He gave His life once for all. We aren't called to suffer so we can gain what Christ has already freely given.

The cross we are called to bear is the burden of surrendering our struggle to be righteous in our own eyes, calling on Him each day to fill us afresh, to show our errors and correct them, to reveal our sicknesses and heal them, to blow our chaff away and burn it.

The burden of our cross is to die to self.

We must allow Him to be more than Savior.

We must allow Him to be Lord indeed!

But each of us begins imprisoned by our ego, the self that drives us to ruin, the I that demands what it can never keep, our rights, our importance, our secret desire to be equal with God.

We must let go ... but we're afraid.

We fear what we might be if we let go of "self".

You've spent your life being *you*.

I've spent my life being *me*.

We have a "self identity", an idea who we are, the "I am" that stands apart from others and apart from God who *is* "I am".

So, we hold on to being "self", the only "self" we've ever been, unable to receive the life Christ longs to give us by the power of His resurrection in our hearts.

What will we be if we stop being *us*?

How can we lose our identities and still be us?

How *can* we surrender our temporal lives to inherit life eternal?

These are certainly questions that human understanding alone cannot answer.

To our human mind these questions make no sense at all!⁵⁹¹

In Christ, however, all makes perfect sense!

It is the *wisdom* of God.

We decrease. Christ increases.

⁵⁹⁰ John 19:30

⁵⁹¹ 1 Corinthians 1:27

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Our lives are hid with Him.⁵⁹²

We are no longer our own.⁵⁹³

The life we live is no longer the life we once lived in the flesh.

The life we now live we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us.⁵⁹⁴

Our old life is crucified with Christ.

Our new life begins to appear.⁵⁹⁵

Our cross is the crucifixion of self, His work *within* us, not ours.

We stop being who we once were and willingly become new creatures being transformed by the work of His truth in our hearts.

So, we take up our cross each day, deny ourselves, and walk in newness of life.⁵⁹⁶

The alternative is to stay in our old self where *we* are lord, where self is on the throne, where the righteousness we seek is in our own strength, where death brings darkness unending.

Paul warns us not to seek righteousness measured by obedience to law, but to acknowledge the righteousness that is ours through the faith that dwells in the hearts of all who believe the Gospel of Christ's life within. Paul says this is how we know Him and how we know the power of His resurrection, not as though we had already attained or were already made perfect, but that we forget what is behind and reach for what's ahead, pressing "toward the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ."⁵⁹⁷

We cannot do these things in our own strength, but God can *and does* do them through us by the power of His Spirit in our hearts, if we ask for His work in us to continue each day.

We die to *live!*

We lose our "self" identity and discover our souls.

We are new creatures.

⁵⁹² Colossians 3:3

⁵⁹³ 1 Corinthians 6:19

⁵⁹⁴ Galatians 2:20

⁵⁹⁵ Colossians 3:4

⁵⁹⁶ Romans 6:4, Romans 7:6

⁵⁹⁷ Philippians 3:9

“I live,” Paul tells his friends at Galatia, “yet nevertheless not I but Christ lives *within* me, and my new life I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”⁵⁹⁸

Christians live by the faith *of* Christ planted in our hearts, His faith, first a tiny mustard seed that soon becomes a giant tree where birds make nests⁵⁹⁹ and precious fruit grows and flows freely

Spiritual growth is daily surrender, the cross of acknowledging Him and Him alone as the Glory of God within you.

The seed lets go of being a seed then grows by the life *within*.

Do we stop sinning? No.

Do we escape sin’s curse? Absolutely!

The battle with self continues, but He is our victory already.

Eve’s “self” tempted her to eat the apple. Adam’s “self” decided to please the woman instead of his Father God.

Self seeks to steal our joy, though to the lost this makes no sense at all, since the lost are completely living in self and know nothing else, nescience being their way of life.

We are no longer ignorant of self’s devices.⁶⁰⁰

Self is a liar.

You are not a spirit nor a self.

You are a soul.

And, Christ is our good shepherd who says, “My sheep hear my voice.”⁶⁰¹ He is gentle. He is kind. He encourages. He is our hope, leading us in the path of righteousness,⁶⁰² alive *within* us.

Victory is ours, for we have Him who *is* truth within us.

He is our anchor.

As Paul said, “We are more than conquerors through Him who loves us, for I am persuaded neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities or powers, things present nor things to come, height

⁵⁹⁸ Galatians 2:20

⁵⁹⁹ Luke 13:19

⁶⁰⁰ 2 Corinthians 2:11

⁶⁰¹ John 10:1-18

⁶⁰² Psalms 23:3

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nor depth, nor any creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ our Lord.”⁶⁰³

Self is being defeated, and our souls are given life!

We are secured by Him⁶⁰⁴ because we stand not in our own power but in the victory of Christ.

We are safe so long as we rest in His work.

We see by the Light God sent to defeat our darkness⁶⁰⁵.

We rest in His love, resisting every fiery dart sent against us.⁶⁰⁶

We put on His armor.⁶⁰⁷

We are clothed in His truth.⁶⁰⁸

We take His yoke upon us.⁶⁰⁹

We bear our cross gladly, for it is to us the power of God.⁶¹⁰

We become less self-ish each new day!

The Christ of God who lives *in* me is replacing my self and transforming my soul.

When the work He has begun in me is finished, I will sit with Him in His eternal throne that my “self” can never earn.

This is the sacrifice of praise.

This is the cross He calls us to bear.

By *this* our souls are transformed through the mercies of God, and we are strengthened day by day as we bear this burden gladly.

There is no other way.

“God is not mocked, for we reap what we sow.”⁶¹¹ If we sow seeds of truth and love in the hearts of loved ones and others by confessing all goodness in us is Christ, that our wisdom is Christ, that our strength is Christ, we shall reap a glorious harvest of souls one day ... not only in the heaven He’s reserved for His saints to

⁶⁰³ Romans 8:37-39

⁶⁰⁴ John 17:1-26

⁶⁰⁵ John 1:4-10

⁶⁰⁶ Ephesians 6:16

⁶⁰⁷ Ephesians 6:10-20

⁶⁰⁸ Galatians 3:27

⁶⁰⁹ Matthew 11:29-30

⁶¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:18

⁶¹¹ Galatians 6:7-8

enjoy by and by, but here and now in this very world of sorrows and woe.

By sowing these seeds in others, we overcome all who judge us, for we have already seen and judged our self.⁶¹²

We stand not in our own righteousness, but in Christ's mercy and truth. We are more than conquerors as we confess Him.

Jesus said, "My yoke is easy. My burden is light."⁶¹³

The hardest part of Christian living is letting go! We grow only as we surrender, abandoning our old way of seeking satisfaction in things, competing with others, striving to receive approval and praise for imagined righteousness in ourselves apart from Christ (there is none, of course), hoping to be sought after for our wisdom, yearning to be loved for some sacrifice we've made.

As we let go of these things, however, we receive the wonderful blessings of new life filled with Christ' love that takes their place.

His Spirit rules our lives, and Love is His Name.

We begin to receive what we could never have before we let go.

As we learn more of Christ we find it isn't strange at all that the burden *He* calls us to bear, the cross *He* calls us to carry, is the labor of letting go of "self", the toil of praising God, the effort of letting Christ assume our throne, releasing our rights, confessing our sin, forgiving those who offend, showing mercy to those who do us ill, giving to those who rob us, walking a second mile with those who ask only one, doing good to those who do us harm, and loving the unlovely. We do this by His power, not ours.

We learn to live in peace beyond our understanding.

Our resting place.

⁶¹² Romans 3:3-4

⁶¹³ Matthew 11:30

THE LAW

Paul calls us, “ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit. For the letter [of law] kills, but the spirit [of Christ] is life.”⁶¹⁴ “No flesh shall be justified in God’s sight by obeying law.”⁶¹⁵

The law was not given to save us.

The law was given to show us we are wrong, we are weak, we are rebellious, and we need God’s mercy to overcome our self.

The law was given to be our schoolmaster,⁶¹⁶ to show us our blasphemy, murder, adultery, envy, drunkenness, and greed.

“Without the law,” Paul admits, “I’d have no way to recognize my sin. I would not know lust if the law did not say, ‘You shall not covet.’”⁶¹⁷

Paul adds, “All who live by works of the law are cursed by the law, but the just shall live by faith.”⁶¹⁸

Christ’s faith in us overcomes the world,⁶¹⁹ not our obedience to the law. It is impossible to keep God’s law without God’s power.

One of great tragedies is the self-destruction of lives that refuse to acknowledge God’s law (the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule) as guides on life’s path.

The standard of righteous living set for us by His law is too high for us to reach without the supernatural power we receive by His grace that overcomes our human limitations.

“I can do *all* things by Christ who is my strength,”⁶²⁰ Paul tells his flock at Philippi. Without God we can do nothing, but we need the law to show what most needs doing. When we’ve transgressed the law and failed to reach the mark of its high standard, we can

⁶¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 3:6

⁶¹⁵ Romans 3:20, Galatians 2:16

⁶¹⁶ Galatians 3:24-25

⁶¹⁷ Romans 7:7

⁶¹⁸ Galatians 3:10-11

⁶¹⁹ 1 John 5:4

⁶²⁰ Philippians 4:13

fall on our knees to ask for *the strength of Christ* to make it possible for us by His faith to do better.

Those who are a law to themselves⁶²¹ have no guide. They live in darkness, imagining what they wish about right and wrong, sin and righteousness. We all have consciences, a form of law God writes in *every* heart, yet conscience varies between individuals. Those who live without the law of God equivocate and bend reality to suit their lusts. Their darkened imaginations accuse and excuse each other, never coming to know the truth, never *convicted* of sin. They believe their hearts are hidden from the One who one day will most surely judge the secrets of *all* men and women,⁶²² the One who sees *within* our hearts, who looks not on outward things but on the inner man. They do not know Him, so they are free to believe what they wish about good and evil. Their lives are bleak, marred, and disfigured by recurring disappointment and defeat.

God's law guides us in the way that's best for us.

Without it, we wander hit and miss through life.

Those who live without its guide are lost, stumbling in darkness and snared in traps set by their "self" that seeks to live without law.

Those who know God's law may fare no better for, though they know what the law says by reading or hearing it read to them, they may steel their conscience against whatever parts of the law they choose to ignore and be just as lost as those who never heard. They too soon fall into the pit.

The Jews of Christ's time prided themselves on knowing Moses' law. They carried it about with them, printed on slips of paper they kept in fancy little boxes called phylacteries proudly tied to their arms or foreheads for all to see!

They knew the law.

It was central to their culture.

Indeed, they *worshipped* their law more than they honored God.

They used it to measure each other, judging a neighbor's worth by how well he "kept the law", as many religious people do today.

They were disciplined to memorize it from the earliest days of their youth. It was the soul of their national identity. It made them

⁶²¹ Romans 2:12-16

⁶²² Psalms 44:21, Romans 2:16

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who they thought they were, God's chosen people, set apart from all the rest of humanity.

The weak link in their chain, the fly in their ointment, the blind spot they could not see was believing they were able in their human strength to keep the law.

Obedying became the focus of being.

They missed the point.

An example was their practice of tithing (giving a tenth). They gave not only a tenth of their financial income, but also a tenth of the offspring from their flocks, a tenth of the harvest of their fields, and even a tenth of tiny herbs from their kitchen window-gardens.

Keeping the law was an obsession, an addiction by which alone they could assign value to themselves and believe they were as God wished them to be.

And every one fell short of perfection ... as all of us do today!

Jesus told them their error, but they could not hear.

"Woe unto you!" He cried, "For you tithe mint and cumin and all manner of herbs yet miss the love of God."⁶²³

It is good to keep the law, but not if one misses the *purpose* of the law, our schoolmaster unveiling our need for the spirit of law that is love.

Many thought keeping the law would make them righteous. If they could keep the law perfectly, they reasoned, God would have to honor them. They sought to be justified by law, not realizing no man can be justified by the law.⁶²⁴ If a man could be justified by keeping the law, he could make God his debtor and thus be greater than God.

I believe this vain attempt is the unpardonable sin.

Yet it was their way of life ... as it is in many religions today.

They compared themselves by the measure of their law and how well they lived up to it.

Jesus taught something *new*, that the law of God is the *spirit* of grace and truth in love.

⁶²³ Luke 11:42

⁶²⁴ Acts 13:39, Rom 3:20, Gal 2:21-3:11, Gal 5:4

John explains, “The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth come by Christ.”⁶²⁵

The law by itself is dead, Jesus said. The commandments, rules, and other measuring sticks by which people reckoned themselves righteous or by which they condemned their neighbors unfit for God’s blessings were dead. Moses gave Ten Commandments, and to these were added hundreds of ordinances and rules that had no power at all to change the hearts of men.

The Bible teaches that unless we obey the law *from our hearts*, we are under its curse and cannot be justified.

It was easy for *most* to proudly proclaim, as one young man did in Jesus’ presence, “Since the days of my youth until this moment I have kept the law that forbids murder, adultery, stealing, lying, dishonoring father and mother, and I have loved my neighbor as myself.”⁶²⁶

We pat ourselves on the back like this, taking comfort we have not yet murdered anyone nor stolen more than a few paper clips from our employer.

Jesus knew this young man’s boast was true within the *letter* of a dead law, however the last claim the young man made could not possibly be true within the *spirit* of the law, for the young man was very rich.

When the young man demanded to know what else could be required of him, Jesus lovingly replied, “Go sell what you have and give to the poor. *Then* you will have treasure in heaven.”

The young man went away sorrowful, for he was very rich in things his self desired to keep for self.

“Come!” Jesus called to him, “Follow me!”

The young man, who had kept the dead law of commandments all his life, refused to follow, for he loved possessions more than neighbors and preferred to keep things he possessed than follow Jesus and leave his riches behind. He kept the letter of the law but knew nothing of its spirit.

⁶²⁵ John 1:17

⁶²⁶ Mat 19:18-26

The Spirit of Law

Love is the spirit of God's law.

God sees through our hypocrisy. He knows that though we keep the letter of law, we *cannot* abide by its spirit unless empowered by His love to do so. It is *impossible* to keep the spirit of the law unless the spirit of love who *is* the law lives in us.

Paul says, "No flesh shall be justified by obedience to any law, for the law is given to convict us of our sin."⁶²⁷

To believe we can win salvation by obedience to God's laws is to imagine a vain thing. It cannot be done. God does not apply to us the letter of His law. He measures us by the spirit in our hearts. His Spirit. Our life.

If we violate a single precept of law we are guilty of it all. If we keep 99% and violate even one *tiny* part, we are condemned by all. James writes, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, yet offend in one point only, is guilty of all."⁶²⁸ To fall short, we only need to break a solitary commandment, an isolated breach, a one-time omission.

If His law is broken, it is broken.

Only God's mercy can save us.

That's why Paul says no flesh shall be justified by the law!⁶²⁹

Christ alone is our justifier.⁶³⁰

We cannot justify ourselves, and those who try the impossible are soon lost in the dense, dark thicket of failure and defeat.

The futility of seeking to be justified by keeping the law is made clearer by Jesus. "You've heard it taught for years, 'You shall not commit adultery,' but I say whosoever looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery with her."⁶³¹

What man has not done so at one time or another?

⁶²⁷ Rom 3:20

⁶²⁸ James 2:10

⁶²⁹ Rom 3:20, Gal 2:16

⁶³⁰ Romans 3:21-28

⁶³¹ Matthew 5:27-28

With regard to murder Jesus said, “The law says, ‘You shall not kill,’ but I say anyone who is angry with another without cause is in danger of judgment.”⁶³²

Which of us has not been angry with another without cause?

It is empty hope for anyone to imagine he or she is innocent and worthy of God’s blessings just because no murder has been done *in fact* or because the marriage bed has not been shared with others.

Jesus says we are guilty of breaking the law just by *thinking* of breaking it! This is the difference between the letter of the law and its spirit. One need not actually break a law to be spiritually guilty.

To stay within the *doing* is to obey the letter of the law.

To stay within the *being* is to obey the spirit of the law.

“With men this is impossible,” Jesus says, “but with God *all* things are possible.”⁶³³

The New Testament (the new promise of God through Christ) is nothing like the Old Testament (the law of ordinances we cannot keep in our own strength).

Christ blotted out the old, nailing it to the Cross.⁶³⁴

We stand in a *new* relationship with God in Christ.

We are no longer judged by the letter of His law.

We confess He is our Savior and ourselves hopeless sinners.

We are thereby forgiven and confirmed as His adopted children by the witness of His Spirit in our souls.

Though we fail to keep the law of Moses, we are comforted by Christ through the mercies of His Spirit *within* us, who to us is now become God’s law, the law of love *written in our hearts*.⁶³⁵

We are assured of mercy as we experience His mercy flowing through us to others.

We are assured of forgiveness as we experience His forgiveness flowing through us to others.

We are assured of life eternal as we experience His life within us growing stronger day-by-day.

⁶³² Matthew 5:21-22

⁶³³ Matthew 19:26

⁶³⁴ Colossians 2:14

⁶³⁵ Jeremiah 31:33

When Soul Sees Self

Our eternal life has begun, and we share our hope because we experience the earnest of His promise already.

He is our life, and we are dead to the letter of the law.

“Having begun by faith in love’s spirit,” Paul asks, “can you now be made perfect by obeying the law?”⁶³⁶

We cannot!

Only the surrender of self in repentance motivated by godly sorrow can transform our stony hearts into hearts of flesh.

The law cannot keep us out of sin. Only Christ can do that as we plead for His presence in our lives each day.

Many Christians still are taught they can be good enough to earn God’s favor. Many who know they were not good enough to win it in the first place tend to think they can become good enough to keep it once they are saved. Some I’ve known are adamant about this, believing they possess some virtue others do not have, quick to point out how far the rest of us fall short. They say we have to do this and we have to do that, and much of what they say is true. What they omit to say, however, is what they don’t yet understand. The power to accomplish all those “have to” acts they want to bind us with comes not from any human virtue we or they possess. It’s all by grace *or it’s not at all*.

One man’s “have to” is another man’s badge.

Such things ought not to be.

So long as we live by law, we can never escape our “have to” way of thinking nor experience the liberty God wants us to enjoy.

Many make laws they choose to impose on others, laws that suit their own temptations. If they don’t smoke or chew tobacco, they judge those who do as sinners! The same is true of other things, like dancing or women wearing slacks. They make laws they choose to follow, then pride themselves on being in the “right”, judging everyone who isn’t.

A man may proclaim, “I never committed adultery,” imagining himself righteous without remembering the times he hated his wife for failing to be as lovely as his neighbor’s wife, refusing to see the root of both murder *and* adultery in his feelings.

⁶³⁶ Galatians 3:3

We deceive ourselves so easily. “I kept the law. I’ll go to heaven when I die. It’s *you* who should be trying harder!”

Wrong!

The day is coming when, by the power God gives through His indwelling grace, “True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such to worship him.”⁶³⁷

Jesus explains that only service to God in *spirit* is acceptable. Doing things out of duty or in order to receive a future reward is an empty act.

“God is spirit,” Jesus says, “and they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”⁶³⁸

We have not entered this grace by works, nor can we retain God’s favor by preaching, teaching, or reaching out. We stand in God’s grace by the faith He gives through the work of Christ at Calvary 2,000 years ago (the past work) and through the work of His Holy Spirit of love and truth alive within our hearts today (the ongoing present work).

Only as we continue to stand in this faith do we stand at all.

“Stand fast, therefore,” Paul urges, “in the liberty wherewith Christ has set you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”⁶³⁹

There is always the tendency to fall back on law, on legalism, on points of performance by which we can judge our outer selves (and the outer selves of others). Yet God looks on the heart, not the outward man. God seeks to know who is on the throne of our lives.

God asks, “Who makes you good, my spirit or your self?”

All who say they are good in their own power deny Christ, no matter how loudly they protest to the contrary.

They make the cross of no effect.⁶⁴⁰

Striving to keep the law is struggling with the truth, and those who do so are at war with reality. They are not resting. Indeed, for them there can *be* no rest!

⁶³⁷ John 4:23

⁶³⁸ John 4:23-24

⁶³⁹ Gal 5:1

⁶⁴⁰ 1 Corinthians 1:17, Romans 4:13-17, Galatians 5:4

When Soul Sees Self

They are lost.

We are saved by faith given by God's grace, not by works of keeping the law.

Christ makes us good to the extent we *are* good at all.

It is His work not ours.

We cannot make "self" good.

God has ordained we cannot achieve equality with Him.

He is God.

We're not.

This is truly a resting place, "For not many wise men, not many mighty, not many noble are called, but God has chosen the foolish to confound the wise. God has chosen the weak to overcome the strong. God has chosen the lowly things, hated things, even things that don't even exist to bring to nothing things that are.

He does all this so no flesh can glory in His presence.

For by His grace alone we are in Christ and Christ in us.

Christ is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption so that, as it is written, "He that glories shall glory in the Lord."⁶⁴¹

If we seek to be justified by any law, we fall from grace.

"Christ is nothing to you," Paul warns, "for we who stand in grace through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness *by faith*."⁶⁴²

"I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live, yet it is not I who lives," Paul admits, "but Christ who lives in me by His Spirit. The life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."⁶⁴³

It is *all* by faith, and all faith is by grace.

It *cannot* be earned, manufactured, or purchased.

In *this* we rest together united as brothers and sisters in Christ, where there is no boasting nor judgment, for all are one.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

⁶⁴² Galatians 5:4-5

⁶⁴³ Galatians 2:20

⁶⁴⁴ Galatians 3:28

THE CUP

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed, “Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup from me.”⁶⁴⁵

He prayed to be spared the horrible death of crucifixion.

He knew the Cross waited to take His life and did not want to die that terrible death.

He prayed to be spared.

Yet the cup of death awaits each of us, and we will surely drink (unless we are with those future few who will be raptured from life to meet him in the air⁶⁴⁶). There is no escape, no way around it.

By death (or rapture) we must leave this mortal body behind.

We *will* be changed.

We cannot stay. Our body is frail. We cannot live forever in it. Our cup awaits, as it awaited Him that lonely night.

Jesus was not in rebellion when He prayed, “Take this cup from me.” He wasn’t asking to escape death, but to be spared the agony of the cross. He knew death takes us all. He wanted only to be spared the cruelty of that murderous device contrived by men to cause incredible misery. Yet, even this He accepted for our sakes, for His prayer continues, “Nevertheless, not my will but Yours be done.”

He was ready to be changed.

We can be ready, too.

Some of us will die in our sleep, some on a surgeon’s table, some in the twisted metal of a mangled car, others ravaged by a poison, a mugger’s blade, or a sudden fall. None of us knows how death will come or when. Not even a condemned man on death row knows for certain if his death will be at the hands of others, for his heart may stop while making that long final walk or be spared by a last minute stay from the governor’s office.

Death is the ultimate mystery.

⁶⁴⁵ Mark 14:36

⁶⁴⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:17

When Soul Sees Self

None of us knows anything for sure beyond the night of death.

Shakespeare's Hamlet ponders, "What dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil?"⁶⁴⁷

Who *knows* what dreams may come?

Death is the great equalizer. It comes to rich and poor alike, to the famous as well as those who trudge through their monotonous anonymity. The circus clown, the financier, the migrant worker's wife, the lawyer, orphaned child, priest, drunkard, hungry vagrant.

All are changed.

Only I AM remains forever without change.

Only He can comfort us and give us rest, for only He endures eternally beyond the cup.

The cup symbolizes reality, not only the stark and unavoidable imminence of death but also the simple and profound presence of this fragile life we share as human beings. The cup is symbol of the consequence of existence, the truth we cannot avoid. It isn't merely a container. It is also the easily-spilled fluid within.

We drink or spill.

So are the certainties of life.

When Jesus spoke of the cup, He spoke not only of His death but also of circumstances that led him to that hour and would lead Him to endure the agony of those nails that pierced His innocent hands and feet for our sakes.

The cup is ultimate.

It is both cause and consequence.

It is the path that leads both to and from this present moment.

When apostles James and John asked to sit with Jesus in heaven, He asked, "Are you able to drink of the cup from which I drink?"

They, not understanding, said, "We can."

Then Jesus said, "You shall indeed drink of the cup from which I drink."⁶⁴⁸ He was about to die to atone for their sins (and ours), knowing soon they too would give their lives for the Gospel.

"As they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to His disciples, and said, 'Take, eat. This is my body.'"

⁶⁴⁷ Hamlet, Act III, Scene 1, line 47 et.seq.

⁶⁴⁸ Mark 10:37-40

He also passed a bowl of new wine to them saying, “Drink all this, for it is my blood shed for many for the remission of sins.”⁶⁴⁹

We remember his body and blood when we take communion, celebrate the Eucharist, or sacrifice the Holy Mass.

It renews our memory of how He suffered to win our soul-saving sorrow.

We share that memory when we eat and drink together.

We remember His death as He asked.⁶⁵⁰

It is a sacrament by which we enter love’s greatest mystery.

The bread *is* His body.

The new wine *is* His blood.

His first miracle was when His mother told Him there was no more wine at a party. He turned to her and said, “My hour has not yet come.”⁶⁵¹

The hour was now upon Him, however.

It *was* His time.

The purpose for His birth was about to be revealed.

God’s love would be completed, Christ’s victory made sure.

Yet, Jesus prayed, “Father, let this cup pass from me.”

Jesus was human.

Many miss this truth. They see Jesus as God, one in the Trinity, eternal, powerful, and pure. They see Jesus turn water to wine, feed thousands with a few fish and small loaves of bread, heal lepers, call dead men from their tombs. They see Jesus seated on a great white horse, with eyes like flames, with hair white as wool, with a two-edged sword that divides souls from spirits. They see Jesus as conqueror, avenger, mighty king, fierce in His wrath. They see Jesus as glorious risen Savior, eternal in the heavens, immaculate, beyond compare, lovely, and perfect!

And so He is.

Jesus is perfect ... all the way to His humanity!

God’s Christ *perfectly* in a man.

⁶⁴⁹ Matthew 26:26-28

⁶⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 11:24-25

⁶⁵¹ John 2:4

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Yet, Jesus was a humble man, tempted as we are, not willing to suffer death, certainly not anxious to abandon those things He might have enjoyed if He had not been called to die on that cruel Cross for us.

Jesus was nearly 35 at His crucifixion, a comparatively *young* man by today's point of view. If God's will had been otherwise, I believe He would rather live another 35 years with his friends, out on the boats fishing or continuing His earthly ministry of teaching.

Jesus was "in all points tempted"⁶⁵² as we are, so we may safely conclude He desired to marry, have children of His own, and live a long life away from the hateful, godless priests of Jerusalem. The Bible is silent on this point but, being in all points tempted, it seems reasonable for us to ponder how much He wanted a home of His own, the joy of family life, and other simple pleasures we take for granted, but He denied the joy of a family on earth so we could be His family.

His generation was cut off for our sakes.⁶⁵³

He suffered much more than the cross, denying much more than we take time to consider ... all for you and me.

He took His cup, "Not as *I* will, Father, but as *You* will."

He gave His life to purchase salvation for our souls!⁶⁵⁴

There is also a cup *we* take or reject. Each day it is presented to us afresh. Each day we decide, "Will I take this cup or reject it?" Each day the cup changes, but always the choice is presented.

We can drink today, or we can drink tomorrow.

We can be changed today, or we can be changed another day.

But *all* shall surely drink, and *all* shall surely be changed.

We may plead for the gift of Christ *indwelling* us and begin our walk in His eternal life today, confessing our sin and our need, or we can reject His truth today and run the risk of meeting Him later when it's too late to repent, when the only sorrow we can know is sorrow for self, when we've been trapped by our refusal to allow His life to begin in us *today*.

⁶⁵² Hebrews 4:15

⁶⁵³ Isaiah 53:8-10

⁶⁵⁴ Galatians 1:4, Ephesians 5:25, 1 Timothy 2:6

Drink now of the sweet sorrow for His suffering that alone can work genuine soul-saving repentance in our lives, or drink later of the bitter sorrow of eternal torment in the darkness without end.

The cup may be refused today.

It cannot be avoided.

The Sacrifice

Though we no longer burn animals on altars, there *is* a sacrifice we're called to make.

None escapes its solemn obligation without consequences that flow not from God's wrath but proceed from our own rebellion and stubbornness.

God doesn't ask us to sit in ash piles as Job did, nor wear shirts of hair or beat our breasts to be seen in public mortification.

God takes no pleasure in such "sacrifices".

The sacrifice God finds pleasing is what we freely give: time we spend with our family and children, support we give the needy, repair of a widow's porch, flowers for a worried spouse and, above all, confession of our falling short, trust in His daily provision, surrender of our prideful self-nature, and prayers of a broken heart that reaches to Him for comfort.

These sacrifices become blessings as we grow old, wellsprings of new discoveries each day, acts in fellowship with Christ whose will to do good is becoming our will to do good as His life pours through us.

Samuel asked, "Does the Lord delight more in burnt offerings and sacrifice or in obedience?"

The Lord answered the old prophet, "It is better to obey than to sacrifice, to listen to My voice instead of burning animals."⁶⁵⁵

King Solomon was known for wisdom, but he was not so wise as Samuel. Solomon sacrificed a burnt offering of 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep⁶⁵⁶ to dedicate God's temple at Jerusalem.

The magnitude of flesh burned for the ceremony is incredible!

⁶⁵⁵ 1 Samuel 15:22-23

⁶⁵⁶ 2 Chronicles 7:5

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An average ox weighs 1,500 pounds. An average sheep weighs 250 pounds. Using these conservative estimates, Solomon burned 63 *million* pounds of flesh to please the Lord!

Solomon's offering was *not* what God wanted.

God appeared to Solomon by night after the great celebration, and said, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for a house of sacrifice. Yet, if I shut up heaven so there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence, and my people who are called by my name humble themselves and pray, seeking my face and turning from their wicked ways, *then* will I hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land."⁶⁵⁷

God said *nothing* to Solomon about burning oxen or sheep to gain forgiveness and healing! God said He would heal and forgive when His people humbled themselves and prayed, seeking His face and turning from their wickedness.

The sacrifices God wants are prayer, praise, and humility.

These are the sacrifices that delight Him.

The psalmist writes, "You do not desire sacrifice and offerings. You opened my ears. You wrote your law in my heart. I have not hid the righteousness you placed within me. I have declared your faithfulness and your salvation. I have not concealed your loving kindness or your truth from others. Innumerable evils surround me, and my own iniquity takes hold of me so I cannot look up. My sins are more than the hairs of my head, causing my heart to fail me. O Lord, be pleased to deliver me. Make haste to help me."⁶⁵⁸

Prayer, praise, and humility.

Nor does the psalmist consider himself *able* to give praise as he ought, but instead he begs, "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall show forth your praise." He acknowledges that the power to praise comes from Him to whom He gives praise.

"You do not desire sacrifice, for if you did I would give it." The psalmist continues. "You do not delight in burned offerings. The sacrifices you seek are a broken spirit and a contrite heart. These you will not despise."⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁷ 2 Chronicles 7:12-14

⁶⁵⁸ Psalms 40:6-13

⁶⁵⁹ Psalms 51:15-17

The broken spirit and contrite heart purchased by Jesus' blood cleanse our impure hearts to allow prayer, praise, and humility to be *intuitive*, flowing, spontaneous, joyful, and *free!*

"I freely sacrifice to you and praise your good name, for you delivered me from my troubles."⁶⁶⁰ The psalmist does not imagine he delivered himself. He humbly prays his sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice that delights our God beyond all else we do.

Having spent some time at sea, where on occasion God saved me from terrible storms (including a hurricane 200 miles southeast of Hatteras in 60-foot seas and sustained winds in excess of 120 miles per hour), the following portions of another psalm are special to me. "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, *they* see God's works and wonders in the deep. He commands and raises the stormy winds that lift the waves. They mount up to heaven and go down again in the depth. Their souls are melted by their troubles. They reel to and fro, staggering like drunken men and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and He rescues them from distress. He changes the storm to a calm so the waves are still. They are glad for the rest. He brings them to safe harbor."⁶⁶¹

If you've survived storms (whether gales at sea, catastrophes ashore, or the devastating loss of relationships on which you'd set your hopes), you understand this psalm as I do, and we *both* have much for which to humbly praise and thank our God in prayer!

He *is* our safe harbor.

"The sacrifice of the wicked," however, "is an abomination to the Lord," the writer of Proverbs tells us, "but the prayer of the upright is His delight."⁶⁶²

Who is the upright?

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but God ponders the hearts. To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to God than sacrifice. The high look, proud heart, and works accomplished by wickedness are sin."⁶⁶³

⁶⁶⁰ Psalms 54:6-7

⁶⁶¹ Psalms 107:21-32

⁶⁶² Proverbs 15:8

⁶⁶³ Proverbs 21:2-4

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Why do we *dare* judge others? By the measure we measure our neighbors, we are measured ourselves, and we are surely no better than they in God's sight.⁶⁶⁴

We see our *out*-side.

God sees our *in*-side.

"The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination. How much more abomination it is when he brings his sacrifice to the altar with a wicked mind!"⁶⁶⁵

What can be more wicked than thinking oneself righteous apart from God's grace?

Yet all of us are guilty. None of us is righteous. No, not one!⁶⁶⁶

We praise self in our secret chambers.

We refuse to see the sins we are helpless to wash clean.

If our righteousness is by grace, where is judging? It is entirely excluded. It is the province of our Lord alone, who is worthy!

Judging others is a sign our soul still hides in self's darkness.

When God's voice whispers, "You're judging!", we should fall on our knees and beg Him to replace our self with Christ.

"When you enter the House of God, watch your step! Be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools, for fools do not know they do evil."⁶⁶⁷

Nescience is self's blindness, not knowing what we don't know.

If what seems to be sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving flows not from our soul, it is self's evil babbling and defiles us.

God desires more.

God says to the prophet Jeremiah, "I will cause the captivity of Judah and Israel to return. I will build them as at first, cleansing them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against me. I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have transgressed against me. All the nations of the earth shall fear and tremble for the goodness and prosperity I will obtain for them. Their honor and praise of me before the earth shall be a joy to me. And in this place

⁶⁶⁴ Matthew 7:2, Mark 4:24, Luke 6:38, Ephesians 4:7

⁶⁶⁵ Proverbs 21:27

⁶⁶⁶ Romans 3:10

⁶⁶⁷ Ecclesiastes 5:1

there shall again be heard the voice of joy, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, 'Praise the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good. His mercy endures forever.' And they shall bring the sacrifice of praise into my house."⁶⁶⁸

God delights in our sacrifice of praise, our acknowledgment that He is good and that we stand in absolute and perpetual need of His mercy and rest.

He hews down the stubborn self that rebels, as a woodsman fells trees in a forest. The greater a self thinks it is, the greater the fall.

Hosea writes what God said to him, "I have hewed them by my prophets. I have slain them by the words of my own mouth."⁶⁶⁹

We are without excuse if we refuse to acknowledge our God.

We are hopelessly foolish if we believe God will accept burnt offerings or any other sacrifice so long as we are without mercy, forgiveness, and love ... without Christ in our hearts.

"I desire mercy and not sacrifice," God told Hosea⁶⁷⁰

Yet many trudge on in their hopeless efforts to please God with the self-sacrifice, self-effort, and ignorant self-praising nescience that blinds them to truth.

Poor Jonah (lost overboard and swallowed in a whale before his ears were opened to hear what God was teaching) said, "They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. I, however, will sacrifice unto God with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord."

God *then* spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah up on land.⁶⁷¹

Salvation *is* of the Lord.

If we think we are something, when we are nothing, we deceive ourselves.⁶⁷²

During Jesus' ministry, He often took meals with publicans and sinners, who sat with Him and His disciples. The Pharisees (who sought to be recognized for the righteousness of the law by which

⁶⁶⁸ Jeremiah 33:7-11

⁶⁶⁹ Hosea 6:5

⁶⁷⁰ Hosea 6:6

⁶⁷¹ Jonah 2:8-10

⁶⁷² Gal 6:3

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they judged themselves and others) asked His disciples, “Why does your Master eat with such people?”

Jesus, overhearing their question, responded by saying, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. You need to learn what the prophets meant when they spoke for the Father saying, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’”

He then added, “I have not come to call the righteous. I’ve come to call sinners to repentance.”⁶⁷³

Pharisees were certainly sinners, and surely Jesus came to call them as well as the rest of us. Yet, what *good* does it do to call those to be healed who do not believe they are sick, or to call those to repentance who believe they don’t sin?

Rather than accuse these men who believed themselves free of sin, since they kept the letter of the law, Jesus reminds them of the words of the prophet, words they knew well, “God desires mercy, not sacrifice.”

God desires broken hearts yielded to Him, not hardened hearts that believe themselves worthy already because of the law.

“If you knew what God meant by, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice,’ you’d not have condemned the guiltless,”⁶⁷⁴ Jesus said.

The passage that follows from Paul’s letter to the church at Rome gives us rest in this area of sacrifice. “For, just as you in the past did not believe God, yet now have obtained His mercy, even so these also do not now believe.⁶⁷⁵ Through *your* mercy, however, the Jews may also obtain mercy! God concludes *all* in unbelief, so He can have mercy on all. How deep are the riches of both the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments and His ways past finding out! Who has known the mind of Him or been His counselor? Who has given first to Him, that He should be required to make a return gift? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him are *all* things ... to Whom be Glory forever. Amen.”

Paul continues, “I beseech you by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Don’t be conformed to this

⁶⁷³ Mat 9-10-13

⁶⁷⁴ Matthew 12:7

⁶⁷⁵ Romans 11:30

world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so you may prove what is that good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. For I say to every man that is among you, through the grace that is given to me, that none of us should think of himself more highly than he ought. Rather we should think soberly, according as God has dealt to every one of us the measure of faith.”⁶⁷⁶

Who can have faith if God withholds His wisdom?

Who can have mercy if God withholds His pity?

Who can have life if God withholds His love?

Who can have forgiveness if God withholds His grace?

All God’s mercies are by grace, especially forgiveness.

The writer of Hebrews examines the problem in this way, “The law was but a shadow of good things we receive by the grace of God through Christ. The sacrifices given year after year can never make those who give them perfect, for if sacrifices could make the givers perfect they would cease to give, because once purged they would have no more need to give. Their conscience would be clear. Instead, the sacrifices were given as remembrances of sin year after year. It is not possible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Therefore, when Jesus came into the world He said, ‘Sacrifice and offering you would not, but a body have you prepared me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have no pleasure. I come to do your will, O God.’ When Jesus said, ‘You have no pleasure in sacrifices offered by the law,’ and when He said, ‘I come to do your will, O God,’ He took away the first so He could establish the second, and we are thereby sanctified through the offering of His body once for all. Yet, every priest stands daily ministering and offering, giving sacrifices which can *never* take away sins. Jesus, however, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, where He waits until His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He forever perfected those He sanctifies, whereof God’s Spirit is also a witness to us. Afterward He said, ‘This is the covenant I will make with them after those days. I will put my laws into their hearts and minds, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.’ Now, where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin. Having boldness to enter

⁶⁷⁶ Romans 11:30-12:3

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into the holiest place by the blood of Christ, by a new and living way which He has consecrated for us through the veil that is His flesh, and having Him as our high priest over the house of God, let us draw near therefore with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering (for He is faithful that promised), and let us be mindful to encourage each other to love and to good works ... not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”⁶⁷⁷

“By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”⁶⁷⁸

The sacrifice of praise acknowledges Him who not only makes us *want* to do His will but also *does* it through us⁶⁷⁹, performing His good works in us who are His workmanship, according to His own pleasure and not for any other reason, even as He ordained before ever the stars were set in space that we would do these things by the power of His love *within* us.

It is by grace we are saved.

“Stand fast!”, Paul exhorts us, “in the liberty wherein Christ has set you free, and do not return to the bondage of law and its works.”

We cannot save ourselves by keeping the law, nor can we rest so long as we continue making that vain attempt.

The Liberty

Liberty is a peculiar thing.

It is *not* the same as freedom.

A study of the two words reveals they’re not at all the same.

They are different words with totally different meanings.

Freedom says, “Do your thing!” Freedom imposes no restraint. Freedom gives as much as we will take. Freedom is the dream of children. It says, “You may do whatever you want.”

⁶⁷⁷ Hebrews 10:1-25

⁶⁷⁸ Hebrews 13:15

⁶⁷⁹ Phil 2:13

Liberty is not at all the same. Liberty gives permission within limits set by law and reason. Liberty gives as much as may be had within boundaries. It is the object of mature ambition. It says, "You may do anything that's not specifically illegal or harmful."

American patriot Nathan Hale did not say, "Give me *freedom* or give me death."

He said, "Give me liberty."

Freedom would permit us to drive our automobiles at 100 mph or just as fast as we may care to go, while liberty permits us to go any speed we like so long as the speed we choose is within the limit.

Unregulated freedom is not a good thing. It's called anarchy.

It's dangerous!

Liberty works within limits, lines around safety zones that tell us when we're near disaster, warning us to exercise restraint and keep from going overboard and getting lost at sea as shipwrecks.

Iron sailing masters once pushed wooden ships to destruction in their haste to speed cargo 'round the Horn from New York to California. The average clipper ship kept a sailmaker and carpenter busy mending shredded sails, replacing sprung boltropes, repairing broken masts, booms, gaffs, and yards. A captain wasn't thought to be a true blue-water sailor if he failed to suffer some degree of damage. His orders were, "Crack on more sail! Drive her faster!"

And so they did. They pushed their ships to the limit and often broke them. Innocent lives were lost at sea. Young boys shipping out on their first voyage, old veterans of Cape Horn passages, and helpless passengers met watery deaths because skippers refused to stay within the boundaries of prudent ship handling.

They pushed too hard.

They knew no law except the lust to exercise their iron will.

They competed to win wagers by arriving at distant ports ahead of rival skippers. Many were last seen leaving port on their *first* voyage. The annals of maritime history are replete with statistics of such sad voyages.

Prudent skippers, on the other hand, made many safe passages around Cape Horn, the southernmost tip of South America, where unrelenting gales whip waves into nightmares. They made trip and

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trip again without mishap, plying a profitable trade for years before steam improved the odds somewhat. They succeeded because they knew the limits of their crews, their ships, and themselves. They lived by the law of limits, exercising liberty with wisdom that does not demand unbridled freedom.

The liberty we have with Christ is within rules and limits.

Our liberty doesn't push the envelope of what's permitted.

We don't try to get away with as much as we can.

We are free from the law of sin and death.⁶⁸⁰

We aren't under law anymore.⁶⁸¹

All things are lawful to us who have Christ in our hearts.⁶⁸²

We are led by His Spirit, so law has no dominion over us.⁶⁸³

But, by His loving guidance we live within the law of liberty.

Though we are *free* from the law of sin, His Spirit leads us away from sin and its inevitable destruction.

We stand fast in His liberty.

His liberty!

We learn the limits of His law being written in our souls.

We no longer *want* to sin.

That's what is meant by being *free* from sin.

The liberty of Christ's abiding love!

"Shall we continue to sin so grace may abound?" Paul asks facetiously then answers, "God forbid!"⁶⁸⁴

Freedom *has* no law but is a law unto itself, a Godless thing.

The liberty of Christ has set us free indeed.⁶⁸⁵

We give, receive, come, go, run, stand, be, do, weep, and rejoice within the law of God's love.

His liberty is all our need.

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⁶⁸⁰ Rom 8:2

⁶⁸¹ Rom 6:14

⁶⁸² 1 Corinthians 6:12

⁶⁸³ Galatians 5:18

⁶⁸⁴ Romans 6:1

⁶⁸⁵ Galatians 5:1

THE REST

Ability

God gives us the ability to rest.

Christ bids us, “Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

This is the rest we need.

It is God’s rest.

It is the rest that is complete, the only *true* rest any of us will ever know, the rest He invites us to receive, His wonderful gift.

“Take my yoke upon you,” He urges, “and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. In this you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”⁶⁸⁶

Christ invites *all* who labor.

He calls *all* who struggle with the burdens of life.

His promise is that we receive His rest as we allow ourselves to be yoked with Him. In that prideless posture we learn meekness, and in meekness we find rest.

Christ knows only the meek, whose self-pride is stripped away, can ever find rest.

He promises that rest is *certain* to those who will submit.

Before we are born again by His indwelling spirit, however, we don’t have the strength to take His yoke upon us. We cannot “be” meek by thinking about it or even purposing with all our might to do so, any more than we can add one foot to our height by taking thought.⁶⁸⁷

We cannot take up His yoke until Christ *is* our strength.

We may try to be meek, but until God breaks our heart in truth to show us Who meekness truly *is*, we’re actors in a play without meaning, children attempting the impossible.

This world is filled with folks trying to walk in His sandals.

God sees their impossible attempts.

⁶⁸⁶ Mat 11:28-30

⁶⁸⁷ Mat 6:27, Luke 12:25

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Thomas à Kempis' devotional The Imitation of Christ,⁶⁸⁸ is a literary treasure of great spiritual insight with a misleading title and a premise that is flawed. Those who imitate the Lord end up being just imitations. It is certainly better to imitate Christ than to crucify Him or ignore all He stands for, but imitations are never real and never last.

The glory of the Gospel is being *more* than imitations!

Christ Himself can *be* our life, if we invite Him to be.

We can know the presence of God *within* us.

We can experience His transforming power as He renews our minds, teaching us truth from within, making us more like Jesus every day.

This is no imitation.

It is Christ in us, the hope of Glory!

“No man can come to me unless it is given by my Father.”⁶⁸⁹

The life that begins when Christ enters us, is conferred by Him who hung the stars and makes the roses bloom.

We may *think* we come to God by our goodness, by our prayers, by our years of studying scripture, or because we finally begin to see the errors of our ways, but Jesus tells us plainly the ability to come to Him, the power by which we're drawn, the light that leads us to the Throne of grace where we cry Abba, Father, and beg for mercy—is God's *gift* to those on whom He chooses to have mercy.

Jesus calls us to come to Him, to take His yoke, to learn of Him, and to receive His rest. Yet, He tells us we cannot do these things unless our Father makes it possible. “No man can come,” He says, “unless it is *given* to him by my Father.”

The Father alone gives us power to respond to Christ' call. We have not that power in ourselves. It is a gift.

The gift of grace.

We must ask, but He must give.

⁶⁸⁸ Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), German monk who became an Augustinian priest in the Netherlands about 1413, generally believed to have authored *The Imitation of Christ*, though some dispute this distinction. The work recites, “Everywhere I have sought rest and not found it, except sitting in a corner by myself with a little book.”

⁶⁸⁹ John 6:65

When we get on our knees, we should recognize that even our will to pray, our choice to do so, and the desire within us to appeal to God, indeed the very faith we have to pray at all is given from above by His indescribable grace.

Many do not receive because they do not ask. Friends and loved ones live lives of desperation, powerless to save themselves, deaf to the call of God, unwilling to pray for themselves because Father has not given the tiny mustard seed of faith they need to believe it would make any difference.

When Moses and the children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land, they were troubled by poisonous snakes for a time. The snakes would bite, and people would die. The people pleaded with Moses to ask God to remove the snakes. Instead of removing them, God told Moses to fashion a serpent of brass and attach it to a pole set high in the middle of the camp. God explained if those who were bitten would only *look* at the brass snake on the pole they would live. Moses did as he was told and, sure enough, “if a serpent bit a man, then when the bitten man beheld the serpent of brass, he did not die.”⁶⁹⁰

Imagine a man bitten by such a lethal desert snake, trembling with fever, moaning in a tent not far from the brass serpent, feeling the chill of death as Moses entered the tent to announce, “Look on the brass snake out there on the pole, and you won’t die!”

“C’mon, Moses!” some must have responded, “What good can it do to look at a brass snake? I’ll be dead in another minute!” A few probably managed a feeble laugh as a final expression of their pathetic life of pride and rebellion. Others just rolled over on their cots with a dismissing grunt and stopped breathing.

How many are dying today because they will not see?

How many are dying today because they have not seen?

So, we tell them of Jesus and urge them to, “Look at Him!”

The mystery of God’s eternal grace.

God plants the “faith” we need to ask after we “believe”.

We in this modern world are so careless with words that many, if not most, see those two are the same. They are not.

Believing comes first. Faith follows.

⁶⁹⁰ Numbers 21:6-9

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Our English “believe” comes from words that mean to love.

Love first. Faith follows.

And, when we first were urged to look at Him, when we were told of His suffering, His innocence, His kindness and mercy, the ones who urged us to look might have asked, “What’s not to love?”

He loved us first, so we would love Him in return, and that love *is* “believing” . . . not in the sense people use the word today but in a sense that pleases Father. He sees us loving His Son, and gives us the gift of faith to pray for our forgiveness.

That’s how the Gospel works.

That’s how the Gospel needs to be taught today.

It is truth.

All else is sinking sand.

If we were urged to look upon an old brass serpent hanging on a pole, we’d likely be like those who rolled over and died. What’s to love in an old brass serpent? What is there to *believe* in?

How many are dying because they have not seen Jesus on that cross, or leading Lazarus from the tomb, or caring for the children, or giving to the poor, healing the blind, loving the unlovely?

How many are dying because they haven’t seen Him.

How many are dying because He isn’t being lifted up?

He said, “If I be lifted up I will draw all men.”

All men aren’t drawn.

He is not yet lifted up as we would lift Him if we only knew the mystery of this Gospel as my book presents it.

If we *really* knew we would pray for them.

If we *really* knew we would tell them.

If we *really* knew we’d do all we could to bring them to Him so they can see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and be converted by their love for Him so His Father’s faith can be planted in them and draw them to the prayer of confession by which all are saved.

Does the world see Jesus on His Cross, dying for them?

Or is He increasingly the brunt of media humor and ridicule?

Many will perish rather than look to Christ.

They do not know Him, so they do not love Him and are not sorrowful for Him, so we must lift Him higher so they can know Him as we know Him.

Some try to convince others with logic or theology, but that never works, because salvation is a mystery of love discovered in our hearts when God shows us our self and Jesus crucified, starting the godly sorrow that works the repentance that saves our souls.

A man still at war with reality may cry out in rebellion, “That’s not fair! God ought to save everyone.”

Sadly, for those who refuse to submit, God is God, not a man.

God is not a spiritual robot we can wind up and make do what we want.

God does what God wants to do, whether we like it or not.

That’s how it is!

God says to every man and woman, old or young, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.”⁶⁹¹

Those at war with this reality lose all.

God allowed Jesus to be nailed on a cruel cross, as Moses lifted the serpent of brass on a pole in the wilderness.⁶⁹² Whether we look and live depends not on whether we are good or bad (for *all* have sinned⁶⁹³).

Whether we receive the grace of God depends entirely on God and whether or not we hear and answer His call, “Come to me all you who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁶⁹⁴

We can pray God will give our friends the grace to look to Christ and live, or we can refuse to pray and be dismayed when they roll over on their bunks with a grunt and die.

God doesn’t have to save *anyone!*

If we refuse to pray for the lost, God can certainly refuse to grant them His salvation.

We have a part to play. We ask for their souls to be saved!

⁶⁹¹ Rom 9:15

⁶⁹² John 3:14

⁶⁹³ Rom 3:23, 5:12

⁶⁹⁴ Mat 11:28

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And, we continue asking God to keep changing *us*, so they see His victory in our lives, so they see His life where once they saw only our self that was dead in its self-ishness and pride.

The last words Jesus said were, “It is finished!”⁶⁹⁵ His work is complete. Nothing more needs be done by Him.

The question that remains (the most important to us) is whether we will look and live.

He invites us to a resting place prepared by Him.

The rest is up to us.

Some choose instead to let self rule their lives, expecting God to reward them for their imagined goodness, and ultimately entering the endless night of death without Him.

We can either accept it is His work that saves us from sin, or we can demand He become our debtor and repay us for the deeds we think are good enough to merit His eternal gift of life.

One way leads to unending paradise with Him.

The other leads to unending darkness all alone.

Rather than continue our battle with truth, we can choose to accept things as they are—admitting our sin and God’s redeeming love offered freely through the blood sacrifice of Jesus at Calvary.

We can hold onto our own idea how God should rule His world and all that’s in it, or we can let God be God!

After all, God will be God, regardless what self decides.

We can be angry because God doesn’t save *everyone*, or we can get on our knees and pray He will save the souls we know and care about.

God says, “You don’t receive because you do not *ask!*”⁶⁹⁶

Whether God is fair to require us to pray for the lost is beside the point. That’s how it is!

If we won’t ask God to save our friends because we think He is unfair to require us to pray for what we think he *ought* to give, we are no wiser than those rebellious old fools who rolled over on their cot in the wilderness and died, rather than flip back the flap of their tents and take a peek at that brass snake.

⁶⁹⁵ John 19:30

⁶⁹⁶ James 4:2

We are judged by what we say and what we leave unsaid.⁶⁹⁷

We are also judged by what we pray and do not pray!

The consequence is eternal.

To all who humble themselves and *ask* according to His will, God is faithful, opening the gates of heaven to pour blessings into our lives that are more wonderful than anything we could imagine before they were given. God promises we will receive if we ask in faith, knowing that the faith we need is *also* His gift of grace.

For those to whom He gives the faith to ask, He changes hearts, lifts sorrows, fills loneliness, and gives the loving companionship of Himself alive within them, displacing self to make room for Christ.

The gifts of God are incorruptible, *forever* ours by His grace.

Consider the promise God gave the prophet Isaiah. “No weapon formed against you shall prosper. Every tongue that judges you shall be condemned. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. Their righteousness is of *me*.”

Do you hear with your heart what God is saying?

Our righteousness is of Him!

“Everyone that is thirsty may come to the water,” He continues. “He that has no money may come and eat. Everyone will buy wine and milk without money. All will be without price. Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? Why do you labor for things that don’t satisfy? Listen carefully to me and eat that which is good. Let your soul delight itself in the fatness. Incline your ear and come unto me. Hear and your soul shall live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you in mercy. The Holy One of Israel has glorified you. Seek me while I may yet be found. Call upon me while I am near. Let the wicked forsake his way. Let the unrighteous man forsake his thoughts. Let them all return to me, and I will have mercy on them. I will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways.”⁶⁹⁸

The most beautiful part of this promise is that our righteousness is of *Him*. He does not wait for us to be righteous on our own. The promise God made to Isaiah is absolute love and eternal mercy. He

⁶⁹⁷ Mat 12:36-37

⁶⁹⁸ Isa 54:17-55:8

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says it is *He* who glorifies us. We need no money, nor need we labor for things. Our God will provide *all* our needs according to the riches of His mercy in Christ, who is our Lord.⁶⁹⁹

Tranquility

One of the angels that appeared to shepherds outside that little town of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born said, “Fear not! I bring you good tidings which shall be to all people.”⁷⁰⁰

God said to Abraham, “Fear not! I am your shield and your great reward.”⁷⁰¹

Jesus assures us with these words, “I leave you peace. It is not the peace this perishing world offers that I give you. It is *my* peace that does not perish. Let not your heart be troubled, therefore. Neither let it be afraid.”⁷⁰²

When His disciples were fishing out on the Sea of Galilee one night, they saw Jesus walking on the water and were terrified. Then Jesus said, “Be of good cheer. It is I. Be not afraid.”⁷⁰³

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” Jesus said to the Jews. “You believe in God. Believe also in me.”⁷⁰⁴

“These things I have spoken unto you,” Jesus said, “that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have troubles, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world.”⁷⁰⁵

This is the source of Christian joy, our source of strength.⁷⁰⁶

The fruits of righteousness are sown in peace.⁷⁰⁷

The Spirit of God is pure and peaceful, and by His peaceful fruit growing out of us, we know He is *within* us, and we rest.

Paul told his friends, “We preach not ourselves, but Christ the Lord. We are your servants for Christ’ sake. For God, who

⁶⁹⁹ Philippians 4:19

⁷⁰⁰ Luke 2:10

⁷⁰¹ Genesis 15:1

⁷⁰² John 14:27

⁷⁰³ Matthew 14:26-27

⁷⁰⁴ John 14:1

⁷⁰⁵ John 16:33

⁷⁰⁶ Nehemiah 8:10

⁷⁰⁷ James 3:18

commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give us the light of knowing the glory of God in the face of Christ. Moreover, we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed. We are perplexed, but not in despair. We are persecuted, but not forsaken. We are cast down, but not destroyed. For we are always bearing about in our bodies the death of our Lord Christ, that His life might be made manifest to others through us.”⁷⁰⁸

What a glorious Gospel!

We are troubled, but not distressed.

Perplexed but not in despair.

We live a life others cannot know until they also rest with us.

He *is* our strength, our wisdom, and our righteousness.

“We preach not ourselves,” Paul proclaims, for the life we live is the life of Christ’s spirit of love and tranquil truth within us.

“You who are troubled,” Paul invites, “*rest* with us!”⁷⁰⁹

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds through Christ.⁷¹⁰

Immortality

Once we’re safe in the rest Christ promised, *none* will die!

We *will* be changed.

This body we were born with will not last forever. It is going to die, yet we are not, for the life hid with Christ will be completely changed when God is finished with these mortal shells that are our temporary homes.

Death is not an end.

It is a new beginning, the dawn of a day that will last forever.

The trumpet of the Lord is sure to sound.

It may not be today or tomorrow, but someday it will sound as it heralded the Year of Jubilee long ago.

⁷⁰⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:5-10

⁷⁰⁹ 2 Thessalonians 1:7

⁷¹⁰ Philippians 4:7

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No one knows precisely when, but certainly the day is coming when life as *we* know it is going to cease.

Paul speaks of it this way, “Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, when the final trumpet sounds. For then the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So, when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality, then shall be known the saying, ‘Death is swallowed up in victory.’ O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Christ.”⁷¹¹

Immortality is nothing more than getting beyond this flesh and blood, becoming one with His Spirit, and resting there in peace.

Certainty

What’s *beyond* this life of trials and tribulations?

Is there *really* a heaven where Christ’s souls will rest eternally?

Are there streets of gold and mansions?

Will we see our loved ones there?

What’s it like to pass from this life to the life we’re promised?

What can we *know* about that final rest?

None has gone and returned. Oh, yes, a few have “died” and been restored to life. Hearts have stopped. Breathing has ceased. Individuals have become inert for several minutes, and a few have testimonies of their “after life” experience. Yet each returned to tell the rest of us who haven’t made the journey yet, and it is certain none of those who tell their stories of the great light, the tunnel, the sense of serenity, and the feeling of goodwill stayed dead to find out more and report back to us.

One thing we know for certain is that we cannot return to share another sunset with a friend, not even just one more!

⁷¹¹ 1 Corinthians 15:50-57

We'll not come back to mow the widow's lawn nor nail needed boards on her sagging porch.

We won't return to help the orphan fly a kite or learn to throw a ball.

We won't have one more dance or say again, "I love you," to that special person we once knew.

None of us will walk again within this world of joys and woe.

This life is the only chance we have to love another mortal soul into the Kingdom of our God.

There'll be no second chance.

There is no way to do it all again.

There's only *now*.

Right now!

The lives we touch with Jesus' love, joys we share with friends, thankful prayers we say in tears of adoration, all we've been and what we're yet to be before we die will be forever fixed on that day we cross the sea of death.

Our lives will be beyond this place of change.

Words we said in jest, in anger, and in love will all be written in the Book of Life.

Hugs we gave will finally be numbered, and no license will be granted to return and give one more.

Gifts we gave to those less fortunate than we will all be tallied.

Time we've spent will be just that—time spent, used up, gone.

Our life here and all we could have done will be no more.

We will be fully known, with no further chance to change or to apologize.

What we will be is what we will have been.

Nothing more.

Nothing less.

Uncertainty and doubt will cease.

We'll know ourselves at last on that day, even as we are known.

In this we'll find rest, if we acknowledge Christ as Lord today.

We know He will forgive us, if we ask for mercy.

We will rest secure with Him forevermore.

Security

This present life offers a foretaste of the rest we will enjoy when we enter that eternal rest our Lord prepared for us who, by His grace, both love and trust Him.

Jesus says, “In my Father’s House are many dwelling places. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again to receive you unto myself, so where I am you may be also.”⁷¹²

Of all I know, the thing I most desire above all else is *home*.

Thomas Wolfe⁷¹³ wrote You Can’t Go Home Again, and most of us are aware of the truth of the title of his famous novel.

We *can’t* go home again.

We are adults.

We have our own lives.

We are locked in the present by jobs and other responsibilities we cannot abandon.

Still, we long to go home—*all* of us.

I remember playing cops and robbers in the backyard, climbing trees, diving into piles of autumn leaves, as those who grew up in the city may remember playing stickball in the streets, climbing through labyrinths of abandoned buildings, splashing in the spray let loose from hydrants on hot summer days.

Such joys are memories we treasure, yet if we’re truly honest we’d rather *not* be the children we were, talking back to parents who may now be gone forever, complaining when we were denied some benefit we felt we ought to have, responding sluggishly or not at all to those who asked us to perform some simple chore, thinking we must wear some special clothing or possess a certain brand of roller skates to be accepted by our peers.

We were childish.

We were sometimes cruel.

No, I don’t want to go home to be a child again. I’ve passed the middle of my life and near its end. This old man is hardly interested in climbing trees or playing stickball in the streets.

⁷¹² John 14:2-3

⁷¹³ 1900-1938 ... a short life.

It's not for playtime that I long for home.

I want home to *rest* in peace.

I long to go where I'll be safe at last from the consequence of my rebellious sin, a place where my old self will be forever left behind, where I'll be sheltered from the storms of life, immune to sickness and death, free at last from the doubts that plagued me all my life, shielded from harm's way, able to let down the last of my defenses and drink in the love of God without fear or anxiety.

I long to *rest* at home where joys aren't ruined by suspicion and anger, where "I love you" has no hidden meaning or agenda.

God calls us to rest with Him in such a home. Only the hardest heart denies desiring it.

We all experience a homesickness God ordains, yearning to reach that hoped-for place where striving will end, where our needs will finally be fully met with love that makes no demands.

God put those needs in us.

He made our souls to long for that which only home can fill.

So we work, save money, buy houses, marry, have children, and try to make a home here on earth. We dig pools in backyards and build brick barbecue grills to share with neighbors who live next door in earthbound homes like us.

We go to church, read books, attend seminars, listen to tapes, and pray for hours on end for the wisdom to make our houses homes.

Raking leaves, Christmas Eves, sitting round the table giving thanks for daily food, tucking little ones in bed—all part of making homes to share with others in this life.

We pit all our energies to finish projects, tidy the garage, plant hedges by the front porch, paint the fence, stick little signs near the walkway ("Chipmunk Crossing"), and invite friends for popcorn and singing.

We diligently establish traditions we hope will impart a sense of family unity.

Yet, as surely as evening follows day, children grow and move away to make their own homes, spouses divorce us or die, and we are alone again.

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The roaring fireplace and memories of Christmas Eve now lost forever bring tears of longing that echo in the silent laughter and songs of yesterday. Bushes by the front porch no longer matter very much. The “Chipmunk Crossing” sign faded, corner bumped off by the lawn mower. No friends come for popcorn, and all the traditions we hoped to hold on to are vapor.

It makes no sense to continue the dream.

The home we hoped for in this life is gone.

Truth draws near.

The time for departing is nigh.

Things of this world, however dear they were, are now fading memories, and we are alone, staring hungrily at houses of younger folk where the laughter of love still rings. We wonder what it’s like for them and wish we could share a Christmas once more before we fly away. We long to sit at a crowded table for another meal, to feel the love of family and friends, to be one with them, to share a song, a kiss, a hug. We long to hear a dear one say, “I love you, friend. I always will.”

It’s hard to be brave in the face of reality.

It’s difficult to accept what is true.

It’s painful to know that this life and its joys are just a moment, that the love of another is only for now, that forever is not ours.

And, although we long to go home, we cannot go back!

God offers an eternal home with Him.

At the close of life’s brief drama in a brightly-lit mansion or a simple grass hut by the side of a road, we will all be united in that city Love promises on the far side of this troublesome sea.

There we will rest in a home like we never have known.

His call to come home prepares us to go when the heavens roll back like a scroll.

We sing hallelujahs together—one family united and free.

And there we’ll find rest without end.

Eternity

Our life in Christ begins *right now*, however.

That is the only way, after all, that life can *be* eternal.

It certainly doesn't wait to begin when we die or commence its beginning only after we're dead. That would make no sense at all, and it cannot be true.

Eternal life begins *now*.

Paul said, "I live, yet nevertheless not I, but Christ lives in me."⁷¹⁴

This life of Christ within the believer *is* eternal life. It begins as soon as Christ comes to dwell within our hearts. It doesn't wait until we are perfected. It doesn't wait until we cease from sin.

One either has Christ's eternal life within or one does not.

We're "raised to sit together with Him in heavenly places"⁷¹⁵.

We know from this passage (and many others) that the life we live by the Spirit of Christ has *already* begun in us. We have it *now* and, because we have it now, we have it for eternity! It will not go away. It will not fade. It will not end.

Paul was confident, "that He who has begun this good work in you will certainly complete it."⁷¹⁶

Our works will be judged, and we must not abandon doing good nor cease contending for the faith so long as we live in this body, but our souls have already begun to live eternally with Him.

He will never abandon us.

We *are* saved and shall *be* saved, even if by fire.

Paul writes, "*Now* is the time. *Now* is the day of salvation."⁷¹⁷

Tomorrow is not ours *or* theirs.

Tomorrow well may be too late.

I wrote a simple poem to express this view.

⁷¹⁴ Galatians 2:20

⁷¹⁵ Ephesians 2:6

⁷¹⁶ Philippians 1:6

⁷¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 6:2

Now is the Time

Peaches and raspberries, bottles of wine,
Fairy tales, moonbeams, and things that were mine,
Promises, heartbreaks, what will I find,
When I surrender to Love that's Divine?
Now is the time, is the time, is the time.

I thought tomorrow would always be mine,
I sought the moment and missed your design,
Teach me your Word, let my spirit resign
All that I've held to that should have been thine.
Now is the time, is the time, is the time.

I've left my April's, I see them behind,
Far off December I see time to time,
I know His Love by the Bread and the Wine,
I once had fears, now I leave them behind.
Now is the time, is the time, is the time.

To rest from our labors, to receive comfort for our souls, to find eternal peace from our torment—*this* is the greatest gift our God can give.

To rest with Him *is* heaven.

We begin that rest *right now or never!*

The richest treasure of this world cannot compare with being in His presence, experiencing His love flowing through us to others and back to Him again in worship and thanksgiving.

All the riches in the universe *cannot* buy a gift as lovely as our Christ, and every comfort money can procure is agony compared to resting in His precious love.

The writer of proverbs hints at God's promise of rest when he says, "There is he who makes himself rich, yet has nothing. There is he who makes himself poor, yet has great riches."⁷¹⁸

And again we are told, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father."⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁸ Proverbs 13:7

⁷¹⁹ James 1:17

The things of this world simply cannot satisfy our longing.
They were never meant to do so.

“Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden,” Christ lovingly urges, “and I will give you rest.”⁷²⁰

Self is never satisfied.

Souls find rest at home with Him who dwells within us now.

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⁷²⁰ Matthew 11:28

EPILOGUE

Geese gather. It's what geese do.

They do it to help each other.

The writer of Hebrews urges us to gather, each sharing how God is working in our lives, each encouraging others, telling what we're learning and how we're being transformed by God's grace.⁷²¹

But, some gather to be seen as members of a body that validates self as accepted and approved.

Many gather to get their ears scratched by preachers who'll say what self wants to hear,⁷²² messages that don't interfere with self's chosen lifestyle or in any way disrupt what self wants to believe.

Some gather because it's "the thing to do", what "good" people do, what everyone "ought to do".

Others gather to make someone their "leader", someone to talk about God for them, so they don't have to mention "religion" or the work of Christ at work or at the barber shop or nail salon.

Gathering together is what God calls us to do, but not to sit in an "audience" for an hour or so each week and then head home or down to the restaurant for a hearty meal and leave the preaching to someone being paid to do that job.

There is nothing in the Bible about sitting as an audience being entertained by skits, videos, live music, or pulpit oratory. Not that there's anything "wrong" with skits, videos, live music, or pulpit oratory that reveals the truth for people. But, we're called to gather for a much higher purpose than to be a passive audience.

We are called to gather so we can help each other.

Most Christians, however, gather only as an audience.

Few gather to share as individuals, telling what God is doing in their individual lives, what they're discovering about soul and self, how Christ is changing them from *within*, and how they can work together as His Church to tell the dying world around them.

Only a few gather like geese ... to help each other fly!

⁷²¹ Hebrews 10:25

⁷²² 2 Timothy 4:3

That's right.

Geese gather to help each other fly.

Each individual goose is fully capable of flying on its own but, when they fly together, flapping is much easier, and the distances they can reach without rest is much farther than if they fly alone.

You may think geese have a goose leader, top gun, main goose, the single bird who flies out front of the V-formation we see in the sky now and then. You may think that main goose is leading them, taking responsibility to get them where they're going.

It certainly seems that way when we see them in formation.

When a squadron of military jets streaks across the sky, there's almost always one plane leading the pack, out front, responsible to guide the planes that follow close behind.

But, have you *studied* the flight of geese in V-formation?

Scientists have. What they discovered is amazing and should be a lesson to all who seek the life-changing power of Christ and be led to a better life now and eternal life hereafter.

There *is* a main goose at the point of every V-formation. We've all seen it. Main goose up front. Leader of the band. Preacher on a pulpit. One goose all the rest are following, one they seem to rely upon, one that seems to be their navigational "head" *in charge!*

Remember my prayer at the pond?

Remember how I fed the birds that morning?

Remember how I wondered why they landed at that particular spot each year, instead of somewhere else?

Remember how I asked to be shown how God guides the birds to know where to find rest before flapping their wings again to fly their weary way back to Canada?

"Dear God," I prayed, "please guide me as you guide the geese. My life has reached a dead-end. I've lost my bearings. I don't know which way to turn. I'm lost."

Do all those birds follow one "leader goose" in flight, a single goose that God tells which way to go, what landmarks to look for down below, what to do when the path is blocked by pitch black clouds of stormy weather, how high to fly, or which birds may fly near the leader and which must fly at the rear?

That's the way it seems to a casual observer.

When Soul Sees Self

That's the way it seems in many of today's churches.

There seems to be a single leader all the rest rely upon.

Until one takes a closer look, watching the V-formation as they flap tirelessly toward their divinely directed destination.

At any particular moment, one "leader goose" is at the point.

A few moments later, however, another goose from the back of the flock takes his place, and the one who *was* leading falls back.

Soon another goose takes her turn to lead, and the one who had been "out there" in goose prominence falls back to join the crowd following close behind.

Every goose knows where *all* are going and how to get there.

Each takes his or her turn at the lead.

Science now believes the reason for the odd goose behavior of changing leaders, rotating the flock so everyone has his or her time at the apex (what we silly humans might think is a place of honor such as our self desires in the eyes of others) has nothing to do with guiding the flock and everything to do with the aerodynamic value of the V-formation *and the birds' need to rest!*

That's right.

Each leader falls back to rest, replaced by another from the rear.

The lead bird tires more easily than the flock behind him in his wake. The leader cannot maintain his or her position more than a few moments. He must work harder, pushing through still air to make it easier for the birds behind him to fly in his wake.

Every truck driver knows he can get better fuel mileage by staying behind the truck in front of him, instead of pulling ahead to push through the air all on his own. The truck at the lead pushes through the air, so trucks behind have less resistance as the convoy moves along the highway at the bottom of the gaseous sea we call our atmosphere.

Next time you take a road trip, see for yourself how often the trucks line up in convoy. It's not so they can chat with each other on their CB radios; they can do that when they're miles apart. It's because the lead truck reduces air resistance for the trucks behind.

Follow a convoy a few miles and you'll see the lead truck fall back to be replaced by another who moves to the front.

Just like the geese, each truck in the convoy takes his turn.

Every member of the convoy saves fuel.

So it is with the geese.

God taught me how geese get to where they're going.

They don't follow a leader like foolish Christians.

God puts His truth in each of them, and they all follow Him.

Geese don't *have* to fly in formation to get to their resting place. They fly that way because it's *easier*. Any single goose can make its migration trip reliably, year after year, finding its way alone, with no help from any other goose, but flapping alone is tiring.

We Christians would do well to take our cue from the geese.

John wrote in one of his letters to the early church, "You don't need men to teach you, for you have the Spirit of Truth *within* you, who teaches you *all things!*"⁷²³

Remember what Jesus told Peter about receiving truth direct from God, the revelation that is the rock of His Church?

We receive truth from Him ... if we listen with our soul.

His Spirit of Truth is *within* us/

Some may reject the message of my book where it doesn't agree with what their chosen "spiritual heads" teach from pulpits, what they hear on Christian radio stations, what they see in Christian TV ministries, or what they read in Christian books.

Self wants what self wants when self wants it, and that includes a view of God that sends self running to a "leader goose" who will say what self wants to hear.

Yet, Jesus said, "You will *know* truth, and it will set you free!"⁷²⁴

Self can't find truth.⁷²⁵

Truth is Christ *within* us!

We need to flock together as His Church, helping others, each receiving truth from Him who lives *within* us.

He is our way, our truth, our life.

Together, with His inner guidance, we'll find our resting place.

God is answering my prayers.

⁷²³ 1 John 2:27

⁷²⁴ John 8:32, 1 Timothy 4:1-3

⁷²⁵ Matthew 6:27

When Soul Sees Self

I now have the longed-for home with peace and love I'd always hoped for. Christmas dinners, friends who care, a puppy who sits on my lap while I work, and a beautiful wife who loves me in spite of my many shortcomings and shares our celebration of Christ in the mystery of marriage that grows more wonderful each day.

My self dies slowly, but Christ is faithful, filling my soul with unfeigned love, genuine joy, jubilant hope, and thanksgiving that cannot be expressed in mere words alone.

My life was changed forever as those Canadian geese gobbled bread by my feet more than twenty years ago and I, lost, alone and afraid, prayed for God to be *more than my co-pilot*.

“Guide me as you guide your geese.”

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