

# **Truth On Fire**

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**Don Roberts, M.Div., B.A.**

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## The Gates of Pearl

How many stories or attempts at humor have you heard that make reference to the 'Pearly Gates'? Many preachers, as an evangelistic appeal, employ a question similar to the following: "If you arrive at the Pearly Gates, and God asks why he should let you in, what would you say?" A lyric in one of George Strait's most popular songs ("Love Without End") says: "Last night I dreamed I died and stood outside those Pearly Gates." The song attempts to pay tribute to the Father's love for sinners, which we all appreciate. But its lyrics are a theological disaster. The love of the Father for us sinners was demonstrated when he offered up his Son for our sins 2000 years ago on the cross. No man or woman who has believed on Jesus will ever have to stand outside those gates. No unbeliever who has rejected Jesus in this life will ever have the opportunity to see those gates, much less stand outside them. Moreover, there are twelve of those gates, not just one.

While the phrase "pearly gates" has become common in America's religious parlance, there is almost nothing biblical about it. Neither the phrase "pearly gates" nor the word "pearly" are anywhere found in scripture. The word "pearly" is an adjective. It means 'pearl-like' (resembling a pearl in luster, color). Its primary usage is to describe objects that are not pearls, but have 'pearl-like' qualities, such as 'pearly' white teeth. The proper biblical nomenclature for these gates, which belong to the new Jerusalem, is: "The Gates of Pearl." They are mentioned in Revelation 21:12-13; 21; 25 in a context where time is no more and God ushers in eternity with descent of the new Jerusalem from a new heaven to a new earth.

There are twelve gates of pearl: three on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west (21:12-13). The eastern gates are mentioned first inasmuch as the single entrance to the tabernacle in the wilderness faced east. There is an angel posted at each gate. On each gate is inscribed the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. These truths signify that Jesus, the Lamb of God, whose glorious Person is the city's single light source, is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the King of the Jews, a faithful God, the seed of Abraham, a keeper of his covenant with Abraham and Abraham's seed. Three gates each on the four sides of the city signify the universal appeal of the gospel, the believing of which is the sole credential for access.

The city of new Jerusalem lies foursquare; the length, the breadth and the height being fifteen-hundred miles (21:16). If we assume the gates are equidistant, they are five-hundred miles apart. At first blush, that sounds like quite a trek from one gate to another. But for residents with glorified bodies, the very thought of moving from one gate to another will make it so. The wall that surrounds the city stretches for six thousand miles and is two-hundred sixteen feet high (21:17). I therefore take the gates to be the same height as the wall—216 feet. Each gate is ONE SOLID PEARL (21:21). The engineering aspects of these gates boggle the mind. What is the weight? How thick are the walls and gates? How wide are the gates? What are the structural requirements for the hinges upon which the gates hang? Since there seems to be a suspension of gravitational law, perhaps the gates just stay in place of their own accord. And since the gates never shut (21:25), what would be the need for hinges in the first place?

The volume of the new Jerusalem, a cube measuring 1,500 miles, is 3.375 billion cubic miles, which consists of 216 billion cubic quarter miles. It is estimated that the total number

of people that have ever been born is about 107 billion. If every human who ever lived experienced the saving grace of God, each of them would have an abode in the new Jerusalem equivalent to 2 cubic quarter miles. Would that be enough room for you? The magnificence of the new Jerusalem testifies to the bountiful provision Jesus made for the sinners for whom he died, which was that estimated 107 billion! Oh what grace!

The gates of pearl will never shut by day; for there's no night (21:25). Gates exist for two reasons: one is for ACCESS (open gates). The other is denial of access (shut gates). After Noah and family entered the ark, scripture says: "the LORD shut him in" (Genesis 7:16). The door God shut (1) delivered Noah and family from the Flood waters, and (2) excluded unbelievers and scoffers. The perennially open gates of pearl on the walls of new Jerusalem signify eternal ACCESS for the people of God. This is consistent with the great gospel truth of ACCESS by faith into the grace of Christ (Romans 5:2), ACCESS to the Father by the Spirit through the Son (Ephesians 2:18) and ACCESS with boldness and confidence by faith in Jesus (3:12). The gates of pearl will serve as an eternal monument to the gospel of grace! The church age invitation of "Whosoever will!" will no longer apply as the access to the streets of gold will be reserved for "Whosoever did!"

There are two facts about pearls that are instructive. The first is the iridescent quality of pearls. A pearl can give off various hues of color, much like a rainbow, depending on the angle with which light strikes it. Now imagine these twelve gates of iridescent pearl, 216 feet high, being struck from behind by the Shekinah glory emitted by the Lamb of God in the midst of the city. Can you picture those gates of pearl taking on hues of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, visible for thousands of miles and morphing from one color to the next as your point of view changes? The gates of pearl will be an awe-inspiring sight as they refract the light of the Lamb from behind the gates!

The second fact about pearls is their origin—irritation. When an oyster (mollusk) becomes host to some sort of foreign substance (invasive parasite or grain of sand), it begins producing a substance called 'nacre' as a defense mechanism. Nacre is a mineral the oyster excretes to coat the invader. It normally takes about three years of irritation and excretion for a pearl to reach marketable size. It is my opinion these gates of pearl represent the thousands of years of history in which the RIGHTEOUS have been a source of irritation for the UNRIGHTEOUS. Abel irritated Cain; Lot irritated the residents of Sodom; Samson irritated the Philistines; David irritated Saul; John the Baptist irritated Herod; Jesus irritated the scribes and Pharisees; Steven irritated the unbelieving Jews at Jerusalem; the apostle John was a source of irritation for the Emperor Domitian. The twelve gates of pearl surrounding the new Jerusalem will serve as an eternal monument to the triumph of the righteous over the unrighteous, whom they irritated.

In Matthew 13:45-46, Jesus told this kingdom parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." In my mind, the only interpretation that makes sense is one where the Father is the merchant man, the pearl of great price is the Church and the currency for purchase is the precious blood of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Show me a pearl of great price, and I'll show you one that required a great deal of irritation in the making! In Psalm 8:4, David asked: "What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" The kingdom parable of Jesus answers that question. A lost man is worth ALL the Father had to redeem him from the curse of the Law and the bondage of sin! Would it therefore be accurate to say the new Jerusalem contains thirteen pearls—twelve existing in

its walls and one walking on its streets?

The sheer magnitude and magnificence of the new Jerusalem is mind-boggling. It's just so difficult for a human to wrap his mind around its immensity. Yet the God of all grace has provided us a glimpse into what lies ahead for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Access through these gates of pearl, like every aspect of our salvation, is a gift of grace that no sinner can earn. In this age, one can secure his or her access to those gates by responding in faith to the invitation: "Whosoever will, let him come!" The Father then seats the believer in heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 2:6). When Almighty God ushers in eternity, and the new Jerusalem descends from the new heaven to the new earth, access to the gates of pearl will belong to: "Whosoever did!"

## **The Great Miscalculation**

Human history is littered with examples of great miscalculations. In the recent housing crisis, tens of thousands of home buyers miscalculated their ability to make timely mortgage payments and fell into foreclosure status. Banks that had bundled these mortgages into securities found themselves and their investors holding worthless junk, fomenting an economic crisis. On December 7, 1941, in its attack on Pearl Harbor, Imperial Japan miscalculated the ability and resolve of America to defend itself against an unprovoked surprise attack. The result of that great miscalculation was the nuclear destruction of the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, resulting in Japan's absolute surrender.

In the beginning of human history, Satan the Serpent became the 'god of this world' with his seduction of Eve and subsequent complicity of Adam in disobeying God's one prohibition. While Satan has over and over again demonstrated his subtlety in deceiving and tripping up members of humanity, he has also made his share of miscalculations.

Joseph is a prime example. As Satan observed Joseph enjoying the favor of God, he moved his brothers to sell him into slavery. In Egypt, God continued to give favor. Satan moved Pharaoh's wife to seduce him. He fled the temptation. A false accusation landed him in prison. But God continued to favor his man with the ability to interpret dreams. God's favor finally put Joseph in great authority, second only to Pharaoh himself, and allowed him to provide safety in Egypt for his father Jacob, his brothers and their families. God's favor upon Joseph gave birth to the Hebrew nation in Egypt. The rest is history. Satan appears to make his greatest miscalculations when he seeks to harm those whom God favors.

Did not Satan miscalculate when the Philistines put Samson in chains? It's true Samson self-destructed by compromising his Nazarite vow. But in his disobedience and affliction, he was still God's man. The Spirit of God enabled him to kill more Philistines in his death than he killed during the twenty years he judged Israel. Based on the biblical record, that total would be in the thousands.

Satan miscalculated in his negotiations with the Lord over Job. God gave Satan authority to take from Job everything but his life. Job endured the loss of health, the loss of his children and worldly goods, and the sanctimonious criticism of his so-called friends. Yet in all his trials, Job continued to bless the Lord and give him the glory. The last thing Satan expected from Job, one he pummeled unmercifully, was for that godly man to petition his God for mercy on behalf of his critics. When the Lord restored to Job double what the Evil One had taken from him, Satan was left to sulk over his great miscalculation.

Another classic miscalculation was when Satan paraded out the Philistine giant Goliath to challenge the armies of Israel. The proposal was for Israel to send out their champion for a mano a mano fight to the death. The nation of the loser would serve the nation of the winner. It looked like a slam dunk for Satan in his attempt to humiliate and subjugate God's people. What Satan failed to account for was an Israelite that would see Goliath through God's eyes—eyes of faith—instead of being intimidated by him. David was that man of faith. God raised up a champion that day, sending Satan back to his drawing board.

No miscalculation of Satan has been greater than Jesus of Nazareth. The events surrounding his birth in Bethlehem must have triggered a desire to destroy the Christ child. So Satan moved Herod at one point to kill every child in Bethlehem age two and under. He failed. He

brought out his best devices to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, but failed. During Jesus' ministry, Satan often moved the religious elites to kill him, but they failed. At the close his ministry, when his 'time' had come, Satan led Judas to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. The arrest of Jesus set in motion the most unjust trial in human history. Satan used his pawns to bring bogus accusations and inspired the crowds to cry: "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Satan thought he had achieved his goal when Pilate finally delivered Jesus to the Roman soldiers to be crucified. He must have longed for the moment when Jesus would draw his last breath.

Jesus finally cried with a loud voice: "It is finished!" Those were the words of a champion, not those of a victim. Moments later Jesus commended his spirit to the Father, and slumped in death. Before Satan could breathe a long-awaited sigh of relief, the earth quaked violently, the Father rent the temple veil in two and resurrected many, telegraphing what would transpire in a few days. Nevertheless, the disciples of Jesus laid his lifeless body in a borrowed tomb. The Romans secured it with guards.

The cross of Jesus Christ was Satan's great miscalculation. While he was relishing what he thought was a resounding victory in crucifying Jesus, the Father was laying the groundwork for redemption through his precious blood. While Satan thought he made a laughing stock of Jesus, the Father was making him to be sin for us, that believers might be made the righteousness of God in him. While Satan was in the process of destroying the life of Christ, God the Father was in the process of reconciling the world unto himself. While Satan was making Jesus the victim of Pilate's judgment, the Father was qualifying his Son to be Judge of all. The Jesus that Satan cast into the fiery trial of the Cross is the same Jesus that one day will cast Satan into the Lake of Fire. The outcome Satan thought he achieved was the complete reverse. Satan and his human cohorts all miscalculated what the Father accomplished in Christ's death. They acted in abject ignorance. Scripture says that if they had been aware of God's wisdom in offering up his Son, they "would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8).

Now let's fast forward to Revelation 6:1-17. In this text, we find the unfolding of the Day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation. In total control of the judgments to be meted out upon the earth is the LAMB, the Lord Jesus. He possesses both the AUTHORITY to open the seals of judgment (6:1) as well as the WRATH to carry out the judgments (6:16). The wrath Jesus endured on behalf of sinners qualifies him to administer that same wrath on those who reject his sacrificial suffering for sin.

All four beasts in Revelation 6 issue the same invitation to John: "Come and see" (6:1; 6:3; 6:5; 6:7). It calls to mind John 1:35-39. John the Baptist, in the company of two of his disciples, beheld Jesus and proclaimed: "Behold the LAMB of God!" (1:36). Those two disciples, having heard John, began to follow Jesus. Jesus saw them following, and inquired: "What seek ye?" (1:38). They rejoined: "Rabbi, where dwellest thou?" (1:38). Jesus said: "Come and see!" (1:39). These four beasts issued to John the Revelator the same invitation Jesus issued to the two disciples of John the Baptist. In both invitations, separated by two thousand years, the invitees are bidden to observe the same LAMB in action. In John 1, Jesus is the LAMB, meek and lowly in heart, yet to be offered. In Revelation 6, however, Jesus is the LAMB in full judgment mode, dispensing wrath upon a godless world that rejected his sin offering on their behalf. Satan made a great miscalculation in dealing with the LAMB John the Baptist introduced. For two thousand years, billions of lost men have made the same miscalculation. How could the LAMB of God, so meek and lowly in heart,

wield such fierceness of wrath normally associated with a LION?

History is on a march toward Judgment Day! On the thrones of judgment—the Bema Seat of Christ for believers and the Great White Throne for unbelievers—will sit Jesus, the LAMB of God, in possession of the authority and power of a LION to execute judgment! If you must make a miscalculation in life, please do NOT miscalculate the nature of the LAMB and your unavoidable encounter with him!

## His Hour Was Come

I've said many times that if you banished me to an island and gave me my choice of three Bible books, I would take the Psalms (for a praise guide), Romans (for theological clarity) and the Gospel of John (for a working knowledge of the Christian faith). If I was given the choice of just one book, it would be John's Gospel for the reason stated above.

The apostle John lived longer than any other apostle and was the last of the original twelve to die. He served as a leader in the Jerusalem church from 30-70 AD. He fled to Ephesus in 70 AD as the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. He stayed in Ephesus until 95 AD before being banished to Patmos. He wrote the Gospel of John at Ephesus between 85-90 AD and wrote 1st, 2nd and 3rd John between 90-94 AD. John is exiled to Patmos in 95-96 AD, where he wrote Revelation. He returned to Ephesus in 96 AD, where he lived until his death.

Chapters 13-17 of John's Gospel are jammed packed with spiritual truth that Jesus gave to his disciples within an hour of time on the eve of his death. It took only minutes to deliver, but has served the church for two thousand years in matters of kingdom dynamics and Christian service. While John wrote these words fifty years after Jesus spoke them, he penned them as if they were still fresh in his mind. Here is our text:

*"Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1).*

On two previous occasions, John wrote that Jesus' hour had "not yet come" (John 7:30; 8:20). Now he writes that Jesus (1) knew his hour had come, and (2) represented a departure out of the world unto the Father. John 13:1 represents John's record of the beginning of that hour! In this one verse, John makes us aware of the following concerning Christ:

### I. His Season

Scripture says the season was "before the feast of the Passover." The Passover marked the beginning of the Jewish year. A lamb without blemish spot was set aside on the 10th day of the first month to be sacrificed on the 14th day. It means the Passover lamb spent 3 full days with the family before being killed. Jesus, our Passover Lamb, spent 3 full years in the company of his own, becoming ever so familiar to them, before becoming their sin offering. It was personal! The operative truth of the Passover was stated in these words:

*"And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13).*

Jesus was the Passover Lamb. The blood coursing through his arteries and veins would the next day be shed for sinners. When the efficacy of that blood is applied to the heart of a believer, God washes away his sins, passes him from death unto life and redeems him from the curse of the law.

After the head of a Jewish household killed the lamb and collected its blood for application to the door posts, he did not discard the carcass. The lamb was roasted with fire and consumed by the family with haste as they anticipated immediate departure from Egypt. In like manner, Jesus our Passover Lamb is consumed by the believer for the purpose of

experiencing his life and growing in grace! Beginning with the Passover is feast the feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus is the unleavened bread of life. The presence of Jesus in the believer promotes an unleavened life of holiness unto the Lord.

## II. His Mission

Jesus was ready to "depart out of this world unto the Father." John adds in 13:3 that Jesus knew the Father had delivered all things into his hands, that he came FROM God and went TO God.

This verse reiterates the unique relationship between Father and Jesus regarding his mission—departing from and returning to the Father. This reflects the nature of the Godhead. Jesus is NOT the Father and the Father is NOT Jesus! They are two distinct Persons, who, along with the Spirit of God, comprise the Triune God of scripture. The ONE God of scripture exists eternally as THREE Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. John would later write:

*"For there are THREE that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these THREE are ONE" (1 John 5:7).*

This word about the mission of Jesus is relevant today because no Bible doctrine has come under more fierce attack than the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. If Jesus is God, as scripture affirms, then the LORD of the OT must be Triune in his essence, which the NT reveals and affirms. God the Father is YAHWEH. Jesus of Nazareth is YAHWEH. The Holy Spirit is YAHWEH. The one God of scripture exists eternally in Three Persons!

What was the ultimate mission of Jesus? It was to bring a man into the Godhead! Our salvation would have been impossible without a mediator BETWEEN God and man who was BOTH God and man. The departure of Jesus to the Father was going to require a few intermediate stops—his arrest and trial, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his descent to Abraham's bosom to lead OT captives to the Father, forty days of resurrection appearances and a final ascension to the Father's right hand, where he will sit until his enemies become his footstool. Mission accomplished!

There are several scriptures that validate the success of his mission:

*"For there is one God, and one MEDIATOR between God and men, the MAN Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:5-6).*

*"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the SEED should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one" (Galatians 3:19-20).*

This is one of the most profound passages in the NT. The "seed" of 3:19 is Jesus of Nazareth. The first mediator mentioned is Moses, by whose hand God delivered his Law to Israel. As a rule, the role of mediator requires two or more parties. Moses did exactly that, representing God to Israel and Israel to God. But when the Seed came, who was God in the flesh, GOD and the MEDIATOR between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, became one! YAHWEH became his own Mediator! The solution to the need for mediation between God and man is the God-Man, Jesus of Nazareth! Nothing says "Mission Accomplished" like this one

from Hebrews:

*"But this MAN, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).*

Perhaps there is no greater summation of "Mission Accomplished" and the work of the Godhead in our salvation than this text from Galatians:

*"But when the fulness of the time was come, GOD [the FATHER] sent forth his SON [Jesus of Nazareth], made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the SPIRIT of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, FATHER" (Galatians 4:4-6).*

Opponents of the Trinity and the deity of Christ (you cannot deny one without denying the other) often point to the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD as the place where Trinitarian doctrine was concocted by one named Athanasius and his fellow church bishops. They claim Athanasius, under pressure from Roman emperor Constantine, invented the idea of a Triune god (or three gods) to better meld the Christian faith with the multiplicity of Roman gods, making it more acceptable to the masses.

This is a total misrepresentation of the facts, an exercise in intellectual dishonesty. What Athanasius and the Council did was combat the error of one Arius, who taught Jesus was NOT God, but a created being. His heresy became known as the Arian Controversy, or Arianism. The Council of Nicaea in 325 AD did nothing more than affirm the deity of Christ and apostolic doctrine! If you had been a member of the church at Ephesus circa 60 AD, where Paul spent three years preaching and teaching the gospel he received from Jesus, he would have taught you Trinitarian doctrine. Any attack on the Trinity is an attack on Jesus himself. It is satanic! For if Jesus is not God and the Godhead is not Triune, there is no mediation possible for sinful men. Opponents of the Trinity are their own worst enemies!

In summary, the apostolic doctrine of the Godhead is One God, Three Persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). The Council of Nicaea reaffirmed it. The opponents of Trinitarianism insist on One God, One Person, Three Titles (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). This is the rational approach to the Godhead. But we must remember that Christianity is not RATIONAL, but REVELATIONAL!

These two great truths—the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ and his equality with the Father—are two fundamentals of the Christian faith. They are the reason why Muslims has slaughtered an estimated 360 million Christians since the time of the first Crusade in 1095 AD.

### **III. His Compassion**

Scripture says that Jesus, "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." The word "end" is telos, the terminal point. The question is: The terminal point of what? The obvious answer is the end of his earthly life at the Cross. But if the end in view is his earthly ministry, it would include the forty days of post-resurrection appearances prior to his ascension. And since Jesus loved his own unto the end, we can find glimpses of the that love in the Gospels, both prior to his death and after his resurrection. In the interest of brevity, we'll cite only a handful.

One of the clearest is Peter walking on the water in Matthew 14:28-31. When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they thought they saw a ghost. Peter sought proof, asking: "Lord, if it's really you, bid me come to you." Jesus said: "Come!" It must be noted that Peter, in walking on the water, was actually walking on the WORD! He was doing fine, operating in the realm of the supernatural, until his focus was diverted from Jesus to the wind and waves. As he began to sink, he cried out: "Lord, save me!" Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught Peter.

Herein is the love of Jesus displayed. When a believer dares to step out in faith and walk on the word of Christ, he bids us walk in power. But when a believer is overcome with doubt and finds himself sinking, the same Jesus has a strong, outstretched arm to catch him when he sinks.

The scripture tells us Jesus and Peter made it into the ship. What it does not tell us is how Peter got back to the ship. There are only three options. Option #1: Jesus caught Peter and dragged him through the choppy surf back to the ship. Option #2: Peter walked on water again as Jesus held his hand. Option #3: At some point, Peter looked at Jesus, and said: "Lord, you can let go now! I've got this!" and walked on water back to the ship with Jesus at his side. When I get to heaven, I think I'll ask Peter which of those three options was the case.

Much has been made of Peter and his failure, walking on the water in faith and then sinking in doubt. But for those fellow disciples who never envisioned themselves stepping out of that ship, they might have later kicked themselves, saying: "Why didn't we think of that?!"

The scripture is silent regarding the distance of Jesus from the boat when the disciples first saw him and Peter made his request. That's probably a good thing. If the text had given us the exact or approximate distance, you can bet some church somewhere would have given itself a name that included that distance, such as 'Furlong Baptist Church' or something similar.

The Feeding of the Five Thousand in John 6:5-14 is another example. The Lord Jesus enlisted Philip to assess the situation and devise a solution. Jesus already knew what he was going to do. But he did not want to do it without involving his own, making them participants or co-workers in the miraculous. These men saw the supernatural first-hand, distributing bread and fish to the masses and collecting (conserving) the fragments.

The love of Jesus for his own is manifested every time he makes his disciples participants in the miraculous distribution of bread! The bread of life is the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Word of God. When a believer distributes the bread of the gospel in evangelism, and the sinner receives that bread and is born again, Jesus and the evangelist become co-participants in the miraculous!

In Luke 23:34, as he hung on the Cross, Jesus cried: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" He clearly offered this petition on behalf of the Jews who cried out for his death as well as the Romans who nailed him to the cross. There's no doubt in my mind that it included those ten disciples who abandoned him and were nowhere to be found. Only John was present.

In Revelation 3:19, Jesus told the Laodicean church that he rebukes and chastens those whom he loves. In Mark 16:14, after the resurrection, Jesus "upbraided" his disciples for their unbelief and hardness of heart. They had rejected the testimony of other eyewitnesses

in spite of the fact he told them beforehand what would happen. Scripture says he appeared in their midst while they were "sitting at meat."

I wonder how the conversation was going? I can hear one of them saying: "Well, guys, we had a good run! But it's over now!" Another chimed in: "Yeah, you got that right!" In essence he was saying: "Don't you guys realize what just happened? I've atoned for the sins of the whole world, including yours! I bruised the head of the Serpent just as I promised Eve! I've conquered death, your worst enemy! I just laid the foundation for MY kingdom, for which I've spent the last three years training YOU guys! Stop wallowing in self-pity and start believing!"

In John 20:24-28, we have his appearance to Thomas after the resurrection. When he first heard Jesus was alive, he said: "Unless I place my fingers in his wounds, I will not believe!" (20:25). Eight days later, Jesus appeared to the disciples with Thomas present in order to deal with his doubts. It's as if Jesus was saying: "Here are my wounds, son. I'm giving you exactly what you said you needed. Are these scars going to be enough to resolve your doubts?" Turns out sight without touch was enough for Thomas, as he affirmed: "My Lord and my God!" (20:28). God has NEVER cut DEALS with men. He's not in the deal-cutting business. But God has and does honor VOWS (e.g., Gideon). In the case of Thomas, he made a VOW, and Jesus gave Thomas the opportunity to make good on that vow!

Our last example is in John 21. Jesus met with Peter and six other disciples on the sea of Galilee after Peter had denied Jesus and said: "I go a fishing!" We know the story of how they fished all night and caught nothing. Our Lord's instruction to cast their nets on "the other side" of the ship netted 153 fish. Jesus was teaching (or rather re-teaching) a critical spiritual truth: There are NO GUARANTEES in life for a believer OUTSIDE the WILL OF GOD! The love of Jesus for his own will ALWAYS give the wayward saint the opportunity to reaffirm and reciprocate his love for Christ without regard for how far he's drifted off the beaten path! Our Lord's handling of Peter is confirmation the love of Jesus will NEVER let us go!

When Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were cast into that fiery furnace, and in desperate need of deliverance, Jesus became the FOURTH man IN the fire. When Peter and six other disciples headed out on a fishing expedition, and in need of restoration, Jesus became the EIGHTH man AT the fire. It is so encouraging to know that whatever a believer needs, whether liberation in the midst of persecution or restoration in the midst of dereliction, the love of Jesus for his own is sufficient for both!

Yes, the love of Jesus for his own is most obvious right up until he ascended to the Father's right hand. But according to Romans 8:38-39, that love for his own will NEVER end:

*"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).*

## Much More (Part 1)

The book of Romans is perhaps the apostle Paul's most extensive theological treatise. It covers a wide range of doctrinal themes. If it was the only Bible book in your possession, you'd have at your disposal all the truth required to ground yourself in the gospel of grace. In this message, "Much More (Part 1)", we'll examine three doctrinal themes integral to the gospel. In "Much More (Part 2)" we will focus our attention on two additional truths that represent "much more" good news to the believer in Christ Jesus.

Our text is Romans 5:6-12:

*"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."*

Human history began when God formed Adam from the dust of the ground and Eve from one of his ribs. In the pristine confines of Eden, God and the first couple enjoyed, for a season, sweet, unfettered fellowship. Scripture does not tell us how long this fellowship lasted, but we know Satan, who fell from heaven at some point after creation, was eager to destroy it. It's not within our scope here to review the temptation of the woman by the Serpent, but to call attention to the resultant carnage of her yielding to it and drawing Adam into the transgression.

As Romans 5:12 reveals, the entrance of sin (missing the mark) through ONE man passed through the ENTIRE human race like a drop of cyanide in a cup of water. In God's reckoning, every one of Adam's descendants sinned with him! For that reason, every man and woman born into this world since Adam is born spiritually dead, making the new birth (restoration to spiritual life) an absolute essential.

When the LORD God came walking in the Garden in the cool of the day as before, Adam and Eve had hidden themselves from his presence. To what shall we liken God approaching the fallen first couple? Imagine you have a son and daughter who are out driving around. The phone rings. On the other end is a state trooper informing you your children have been involved in a fatal crash within a half mile of the house. You jump in the car, race to the scene. There you find the lifeless, mangled bodies of your two children tangled in the wreckage. What type of emotion, as a father or mother, would you experience upon arriving at the crash site? In every way imaginable, the Garden of Eden became a spiritual crash site! In my mind, the Lord was similarly broken-hearted by the devastation sin had wrought.

Before expelling the first couple from the Garden, the LORD God set in motion a plan of salvation. He did this with (1) a Promise—that the Seed of the woman would bruise the head of the Serpent, and (2) a Provision—coats of skins to cover their nakedness, prefiguring the righteousness with which he would clothe those who believe.

The grand theme of scripture is the redemption of Adam's seed by grace through faith through the Seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ. There are several Bible doctrines that speak to various aspects of our redemption, such as substitution, justification, and reconciliation. These doctrinal themes define the manner in which God delivers descendants of Adam from the wreckage of sin and death.

Our text identifies the spiritual condition of the "us" in 5:8. We were: (1) "without strength" – spiritually infirm, (2) "ungodly" – irreverent, no fear of God, (3) "sinners" – missing the mark of divine perfection, and (4) "enemies" – harboring hostility toward God. It goes without saying we needed saving! Now let's examine the three doctrinal themes in our text:

## I. The Doctrine of Substitution

The preposition **ὑπέρ** (huper) is used four times in our text. It precedes the ungodly (5:6), the righteous and good man (5:7), and us (5:8). It is translated "for" in the majority of instances. But it is translated "above" on twelve occasions where the context warrants. It's primary meaning is "in behalf of", "in the stead of" or "in the place of." This is the correct sense of "for" in Romans 5:8. But included in "for" is the sense of "above."

The picture of Romans 5:8 where Christ died "for us" is one where Christ placed himself ABOVE us in his death, bearing the full blunt force trauma of God's judgment against us and our sins. It is the picture of a first responder, entering a burning building looking for survivors before the structure collapses. As he walks through the smoke-filled interior, he spots a young child lying on the floor. As he approaches, a massive overhead beam gives way and begins to fall. In that moment, he realizes the only way to save the child is to place himself above the child so the beam falls on him instead. In like manner, Christ on the Cross placed himself between sinners and the wrath of God, suffering on their behalf and satisfying the justice a holy God demanded for our sins.

The analogy of FIRST responder, however, fails to capture the whole truth of substitution. Jesus Christ was not only the first responder; he was the ONLY responder! The rescue of the FIRST Adam and his descendants was possible only through the LAST Adam, the Lord Jesus, whom God the Father made a quickening spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45). In order to rescue sinners, God could send no other than his ONLY begotten Son.

The nature of substitution represents a stark contrast between God and fallen man. A righteous man is one who plays by the rules, seeks to live his life in moral rectitude. He's generally a good citizen. For another man to die for a righteous man is a rare (scarce) event. A good (benevolent) man is one who does all the right things and has a reputation for extending goodness to his fellow man. It's more likely that someone might dare to die for that kind of man. This is the human reality. But divine reality has Christ dying in the place of sinners—his weak and irreverent enemies—bearing the brunt of God's wrath on behalf of those who themselves deserved that wrath!

## II. The Doctrine of Justification

Our text says "justified by his blood." The word "justified" is **δικαιόω**. It means "to render or declare righteous." Depending on its context, it can signify either a declaration, a vindication or a validation. For example, Jesus said: "Wisdom is justified (vindicated, validated) of all her children" (Luke 7:29). We find a similar sense in James 2, which tells us Abraham was

justified (vindicated, validated) by his works (2:21-24). We know this is the sense since Romans 4:2 tells us: "For if Abraham were justified (declared righteous) by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." In a man's relationship with God, faith alone in Jesus is the ground upon which God declares him righteous. But in his relationships with other men, works provide a validation of the genuineness of his faith, a vindication of his profession.

In our text, the verb "justified" constitutes a declaration. The form is predicate nominative (functions as noun). The literal translation: "ones having been justified by his blood." Justification is a declaration of righteousness by God toward the believer. Moreover, it washes the believer from his sins by the blood of Jesus, enabling God to clothe him in his own righteousness, fulfilling the prophetic figure of the skins with which God clothed Adam and Eve.

The verb is passive voice, signifying the sinner is the recipient of God's declaration. Justification is the work of God, which he performs on the believer's behalf. The sinner can neither wash himself from his sins nor make himself righteous. He is totally dependent upon God to do for him what he cannot do for himself! God the Father makes the believer the **RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD** in the Lord Jesus Christ his Son (2 Corinthians 5:21). Our justification cannot be undone! The believer **IS** the righteousness of God!

The reference to "blood" signifies the loss of life, a bloodletting resulting in death. The blood of Jesus was literally the blood of God whereby he purchased his Church (Acts 20:28). The connection between justification and blood is critical in that God cannot **JUSTIFY** the sinner without metting out **JUSTICE** concerning the sinner and his sin. In other words, God's **RIGHTEOUSNESS** in dealing with us and our sins enables him bestow the **RIGHTEOUSNESS** of Christ his Son upon us, as Romans 3:26 declares:

*"To declare, I say, at this time his RIGHTEOUSNESS: that he might be JUST, and the JUSTIFIER of him which believeth in Jesus."*

The scripture reiterates this great gospel truth in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

*"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

It was the gospel of justification by faith that captivated Martin Luther and sparked the Reformation. It is that same foundational truth that has marked all true gospel preaching since Pentecost and continues unto the current day!

### **III. The Doctrine of Reconciliation**

The word "reconciliation" is **καταλλάσσω** (katalasso). It means "to bring back into agreement those who were at variance." It signifies a mutual exchange to which both parties agree. In salvation terms, it means that God and the sinner, who once were at enmity, are now brought into harmony through the merits of the death of Christ. The verbs "reconciled" and "being reconciled" (5:10) are both passive voice, meaning God does all the reconciling. "Being reconciled" is a predicate nominative. The literal translation: "ones having been reconciled by the death of his Son."

Reconciliation is a two-way street, as expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:19-20:

*"And all things are of God, who hath RECONCILED US to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, BE YE RECONCILED to God."*

God reconciled the world to himself by the death of Christ on their behalf. Men reconcile themselves to God by believing the word of the gospel—the good news that God provided a remedy for our sins and raised his Son from the dead to validate the value of his death. The MINISTRY (work) of reconciliation is the WORD (telling the story) of reconciliation.

In my mind, the best illustration of reconciliation is the balancing of checkbooks before online banking became the norm. Remember when that monthly statement would come from the bank? You would sit down with bank statement in one hand, your check register in the other. The bank statement told you what the bank said you ACTUALLY had while the check register told you what you THOUGHT you had. Can you remember the number of times there was agreement between the two? More times than not, I found my check register to be OUT OF BALANCE with the bank statement. If my register was off in even dollar amounts, those were mistakes most easy to find. But if the register was in error by a combination of dollars and cents, those mistakes were far more difficult to find. In fact, trying to find those tiny mistakes in addition/subtraction sometimes became so frustrating that you simply accepted the bank statement total, drew a line in the register, entered the bank statement amount and adjusted the totals. It was just easier to reset everything to the bank statement.

Reconciliation works in similar fashion with a different wrinkle. The Bible, in a manner of speaking, is God's statement of what we SHOULD have in terms of righteousness. Our lives are the check register, which tells us what we ACTUALLY have. The Bible spells that out, too. God says we SHOULD have perfect righteousness, but we are ACTUALLY weak and hostile sinners. The doctrine of reconciliation answers the questions: "How do I get the righteousness on GOD'S side of the ledger onto MY side of the ledger? How do I go about balancing my spiritual checkbook, so that I can ACTUALLY have what God says I SHOULD and MUST have?"

If you ask God those questions, he'll respond by saying: "I'll impute the perfect righteousness of my Son to your account, and pass you from death unto life, if you'll accept it as a free gift! All I ask is for you to trust my Son (believe he died for your sins and rose again) and eternal life and his own righteousness will be yours as a free gift. You'll never have to balance your spiritual checkbook again! You will be reconciled to me even as I reconciled myself to you!"

Paul makes a profound theological statement: "Not imputing their trespasses unto them." God imputed the sins of the world unto Christ, which means he will NEVER impute them again unto the world. This is important to understand for this reason: Those who reject the death of Christ for their sins will NOT end up in the Lake of Fire to suffer for their sins. Christ suffered ONCE for sins—ALL of the sins of the WHOLE world!

God will cast the lost into the Lake of Fire for one sin and one sin only—UNBELIEF! It's why Jesus told his disciples:

*"And when he [the Spirit] is come, he will reprove [convict] the world of SIN, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of SIN, because they BELIEVE NOT on me" (John 16:8-9).*

The sin of unbelief will be the unbeliever's undoing. Whereas faith in Christ would have brought a declaration of righteousness based on the merits of Christ, fitting him to enjoy the glorious presence of God for all eternity, failure to trust Christ leaves the sinner spiritually naked and destitute, unfit to enter God's presence! God prepared the Lake of Fire for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). But it has also become the default habitation for all eternity for sinners who fail to believe on the One who reconciled himself to them.

One of the chief arguments for Calvinism (Limited Atonement) maintains that a just God could NEVER allow for sins to be paid for twice—once by his Son and again by the sinner who rejects his Son. But 2 Corinthians 5:19 destroys that theory. The Lake of Fire will certainly entail torment. But that torment will not constitute suffering for sin. The suffering of Christ was a propitiation (satisfaction) for the sins of the whole world. The sinner is incapable by his own suffering to provide the first iota of satisfaction Godward. The Lake of Fire is eternal. Jesus accomplished for sinners on the Cross what an eternity of suffering in the Lake of Fire by a lost sinner could NEVER accomplish! The Lake of Fire has no propitiatory value whatsoever! The scripture teaches that God will judge all men, whether saved or lost, according to their works. The suffering (or judgment) for our sins, whether saved or lost, was accomplished one time for all time in the Person of Jesus Christ on the Cross!

In closing, we must note the verbs for justification (ones having been justified) and reconciliation (ones having been reconciled) are PASSIVE voice. The verbs shall be saved from wrath and shall be saved by his life are also PASSIVE. It signifies that God does ALL the saving: past, present and future. A sinner can neither justify nor reconcile himself nor live the Christian life apart from Christ's life. That is God's work on our behalf. But in 5:11, Paul uses the ACTIVE voice: "we have now received the atonement."

The verb "received" is **λαμβάνω** (lambano), meaning "to take hold of, to obtain, to claim, to procure." The word "atonement" is καταλλαγή. It means "reconciliation" and shares the same root with the verb "reconciled." Of the 81 times the word "atonement" is found in scripture, Romans 5:11 is the only NT usage. In salvation, the sinner literally RECEIVES the RECONCILIATION. It means he reaches out and procures (appropriates) what God has proffered (provided). It is ALL of grace! It cannot be earned. It is received as a free gift. But we as sinners MUST take hold of it by faith! O what grace!

One of the most common reasons for a divorce filing is irreconcilable differences. In other words, the two parties have grown apart over differences they feel they just cannot resolve. In the spiritual realm where the gospel is concerned, the possibility of irreconcilable differences does not exist. Of the two parties—holy God and sinful man—God has already done everything within his power to resolve the differences. He reconciled the sinner to himself, removing every obstacle. Christ perfectly fulfilled ALL the Law in his life and suffered for ALL the sinner's trespasses in his death. There is nothing more on God's part that needs to be done or can be done to accomplish justification and reconciliation. If and when God and the sinner part ways for eternity at the Great White Throne, it will be for one reason—the sinner refused to be reconciled to God, failed to receive the reconciliation that God provided and proffered!

## Much More (Part 2)

In Part 1 of this message, we examined the great gospel doctrines of substitution, justification by faith and reconciliation. We talked about how Jesus, as the first and only responder to our perilous condition, placed himself above us, and on his Cross endured on our behalf the blunt force trauma of God's wrath toward sin. We talked about how God declares a believer righteous solely on the basis of his faith in the Lord Jesus. We examined the truth of reconciliation and how, on the basis of faith alone, God brings us into full agreement with himself in terms of life and righteousness. The most sanctified human mind is incapable of fully comprehending such marvelous grace, such unmerited favor on God's part toward us sinners.

As much as those three foundational doctrines thrill the souls of the saved, there is still much more for which to be thankful and rejoice. Let's once again consider our text in Romans 5:6-12:

*"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. MUCH MORE then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, MUCH MORE, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."*

As we can see, there is MUCH MORE to our salvation than justification and reconciliation. As great as these truths are, they are but the foundation for salvation in our future. Jesus said: "I am come that they [sheep] might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). It is never enough for a believer in Jesus to experience justification, reconciliation and eternal life. It is the desire of Jesus that his sheep go on to experience fulness of salvation. Our text teaches us this salvation includes being (1) saved from wrath through him, and (2) saved by his life. Each of these truths represents so MUCH MORE for the child of God.

### I. Saved from Wrath

The scripture says "we shall be saved from wrath through him" (5:9). Wrath is divine indignation. In the scriptures, the wrath of God has three expressions: (1) the wrath that abides on all unbelievers, (2) the day of God's wrath in the Tribulation period, and (3) the Lake of Fire.

First, there is divine indignation that rests upon unbelievers. In John 3:18, Jesus said: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is CONDEMNED ALREADY, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." In 3:36, John adds: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the WRATH OF GOD abideth on him." An unbeliever lives 24/7/365 with the wrath of Almighty God resting upon him. This is why Paul could describe them as

"the children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). Few if any of the lost have any idea they live under the wrath of God on a daily basis.

Secondly, there is divine indignation that will express itself toward a sinful and rebellious world during the Great Tribulation period, also know as Daniel's Seventieth Week, which is yet to come. In the book of Revelation, we find these two phrases: "the WRATH of the Lamb" (6:16) and "the great day of his WRATH" (6:17). There are eleven more mentions in Revelation of God's WRATH being poured out upon the earth in full measure.

Thirdly, the final manifestation of God's wrath is the Lake of Fire, where unbelievers who lived their entire lives under the WRATH of God will experience that WRATH first hand for all eternity with all their senses engaged. Jesus described it as a "furnace of fire" where there will be "wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42,50). Isn't this reason enough to evangelize the lost?

If you have been justified by the blood of Christ and reconciled to God by his death, there is NO wrath of ANY kind in your future! In First Thessalonians, Paul taught that Jesus had "delivered us from the WRATH to come" (1:10) and "God hath not appointed us to WRATH, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:9). Our salvation in Christ includes total deliverance from divine indignation of any kind in our future. We are truly saved from wrath through him!

In the Greek, "wrath" is preceded by the definite article. It is literally "THE wrath." The Greek text reads: τῆς ὀργῆς. There are two interpretive possibilities. First, it could be a reference to the Lake of Fire, THE wrath that is the most severe of the aforementioned three types of wrath. Secondly, it could be a reference to Divine wrath in contradistinction to every other form of wrath on a human level. The second meaning makes the most sense to me—saved from Divine wrath of ANY kind.

## **II. Saved by His Life**

The believer in Jesus Christ, having been justified and reconciled to God, shall be "saved by his life." These four words encapsulate the entire Christian experience. Christianity is not acknowledgment of historical facts. It is not having the proverbial 'get out jail free' card in your wallet. Christianity is Christ IN you, living IN you by his indwelling Spirit. It is the gift of the Spirit, the earnest of our inheritance, that enables the believer to experience Christ. Christianity is Christ living in his people!

I wish somebody had explained this fundamental truth to me in my youth. But it was years after God called to preach that I began to understand and experience the daily salvation that the life of Christ within me provides. The sad fact is there are preachers with seminary degrees filling pulpits across the nation that do not understand this basic truth of the Christian life.

The NT scriptures define the nature of the Christian life. The Christian life is the life of Christ. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal LIFE, and this LIFE is in his SON. He that hath the SON hath LIFE; and he that hath NOT the SON of God hath NOT LIFE. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the SON of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal LIFE, and that ye may believe [keep on believing] on the name of the SON of God" (1 John 5:11-13). The apostle Paul described his own Christian experience: "Christ LIVETH in me" (Galatians 2:20). And for every believer, he

affirmed: "CHRIST, who is OUR LIFE" (Colossians 3:4).

It is worth noting the things that do NOT constitute the life of Christ, things from which no life can be derived, things that have no power whatsoever to save.

(1) Material things – Jesus said a man's life does NOT consist in the THINGS that a man has in his possession (Luke 12:15). In other words, prosperity does NOT constitute life and cannot be the measure of the degree to which a believer experiences the life of Christ.

On four occasions in the Psalms, David said the LORD God was his "portion" (inheritance or allotment) in the land of the living (Psalm 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5). David believed his God was his prime possession, the very essence of his life. As the eighth son of Jesse tending sheep on the hills, God was enough! As king of Israel, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men alive, God was enough! David never measured his spiritual wealth by his material wealth. His son Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes to expose the "vanity" of such a pursuit.

(2) The Mosaic Law – No degree of compliance to the Ten Commandments or Mosaic Law (feasts and ordinances) can produce the life of Christ. The Law has NEVER been a source of spiritual life. One CANNOT experience the LIFE of Christ by compliance to Mosaic LAW. Scripture tells us there is NO LAW that can give LIFE or righteousness to the compliant (Galatians 3:21). This is a bedrock fundamental of grace! There's nothing wrong with the Law. But its role is one of schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, the TRUE source of spiritual LIFE! The schoolmaster is incapable of life, righteousness or salvation. It's biblical purpose is to bring sinners to Christ, who then becomes the believer's life.

Discipleship is nothing more than growing believers more and more into Christ-likeness. It involves a progressive transformation of the mind. The transformation of a believer's thinking as he reads, studies and meditates on the Word of God coupled with time in prayer is the foundation upon which the Spirit of Christ within him transforms his living. Paul described this life-long quest as knowing and winning Christ (Philippians 3:8-10).

True discipleship CANNOT take place through MONEY or MOSES. It is necessary to make this point because of the many websites and related entities that believe and teach genuine discipleship is rooted in a mixture of Mosaic Covenant and New Covenant in Christ's blood. It is a law-keeping approach to the Christian faith. This is a lie from Satan! Those who believe it are deceived, seduced and bewitched!

First of all, discipleship is the incremental manifestation of Christ's life in the believer. Since Mosaic Law is incapable of generating spiritual life in any way, shape or form, Mosaic Law and compliance thereto CANNOT produce a disciple of Christ. Secondly, the belief that Mosaic Law was integral to our salvation was soundly defeated by the apostles and Holy Ghost at the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 51) as recorded in Acts 15. The conclusion of the Council was stated thusly: "But we believe that through the GRACE of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved, even as they [Gentiles]" (15:11).

The scripture has a warning for anyone (believer or unbeliever) who thinks righteousness or the life of Jesus Christ is attainable through compliance to Mosaic Law: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised [attempt to obtain righteousness by compliance to Mosaic Law], Christ shall PROFIT you NOTHING...Christ is become of NO EFFECT unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from GRACE" (Galatians 5:2,4). If a believer succumbs to the satanic lie that discipleship and growth in Christ is somehow

related to compliance with Mosaic Law, GRACE has ceased to be an operating principle in their life. This does not mean loss of salvation for a believer.

But if an unbeliever buys into the lie of Mosaic compliance to be saved, they will never experience grace. For faith in Jesus ALONE can produce salvation for the lost and spiritual growth for the saved. If you find a website that calls itself "Yahweh Restoration" or "Torah Compliance"—any entity that advocates compliance to Mosaic Law as instrumental in discipleship or experiencing the life of Christ—count them as the enemies of Christ and his cross!

Since scripture teaches we shall be saved by his life, from what then does the life of Christ save us? In a word, the life of Jesus saves (delivers) the believer from EVIL in all of its forms. The Hebrew word for "evil" has a variety of negative meanings, such as "bad, malignant or disagreeable." It essentially refers to anything that a Holy God finds disagreeable to his infinite holiness. The Greek word for "evil" refers to that which is wicked, troubling or hurtful, whether in essence or effect.

A panoramic view of scripture will help make this point. Consider these passages:

"And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only EVIL continually" (Genesis 6:5). Here we learn that the source of all EVIL in the world is the wicked imaginations and thoughts of men.

"And the LORD'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done EVIL in the sight of the LORD, was consumed" (Numbers 32:13). In this case, we know the evil done by Israel was a spirit of unbelief in his promise.

The Psalms are full of references to EVIL and God's abhorrence of it. "For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall EVIL dwell with thee" (Psalm 5:4). "Depart from EVIL, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (34:14). "The face of the LORD is against them that do EVIL, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (34:16). "Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do EVIL" (37:8). "Depart from EVIL, and do good; and dwell for evermore" (37:27). "Ye that love the LORD, hate EVIL: he preserveth the souls of his saints; he delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked" (97:10). "I have refrained my feet from every EVIL way, that I might keep thy word" (119:101). "The LORD shall preserve thee from all EVIL: he shall preserve thy soul" (121:7).

Three more references to evil come from Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount and his dialogue with Nicodemus. As part of the model prayer, Jesus said: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from EVIL" (Matthew 6:13). Later in that same discourse, he said: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the EVIL thereof" (6:34). Jesus taught Nicodemus: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were EVIL" (John 3:19).

Finally, two more admonitions from Romans. "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is EVIL; cleave to that which is good" (12:9). "Be not overcome of EVIL, but overcome evil with good" (12:21). When scripture says the believer shall be "saved by his life," we can say with certitude, based on biblical evidence, that EVIL in all of its forms,

anything that is disagreeable to the holiness of God, is exactly what Paul had in mind. Only the life of Jesus within the believer has the power to deliver us from EVIL, as Jesus said we should pray.

Just how does that deliverance take place? It happens:

Daily – Jesus said that sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. The same life that did combat with Satan in the wilderness is the same life with which God equips his people to combat the world, the flesh and the devil—ONE DAY AT A TIME!

Dynamically – Eternal life is CHRIST'S life! It's not static, but DYNAMIC! The gift of eternal life is brought to the believer by the Holy Spirit. You cannot get one without the other. God's primary gift to believers is his Spirit. Eternal life is NOT a commodity, but the result of having God himself taking up his residence in us.

Dependently – Jesus taught his disciples that he was the VINE and they were the BRANCHES (John 15:1-5). They were totally dependent upon his life for the ability to bear spiritual fruit. He concluded with this: "For without me, ye can do nothing." The dependent believer is a dynamic believer!

Designedly – This means there's a specific effect the life of Jesus in us is designed to produce, and that is conformity to his own image, to become more and more like him as we travel this life. It's the design of predestination (Romans 8:29). The believer who understands God's grand design in saving him will want to cooperate with God in getting that done.

Deliberately – Enjoying the salvation the life of Christ provides us does not happen by accident. It is deliberate. The believer MUST structure his life in a manner that habitually exposes him to the Word and prayer, time wherein he deliberately meets with his Lord. The believer must yield himself on a daily and perhaps hourly basis. Growth in Jesus requires deliberateness of will and purpose of heart.

In closing, we must note the verbs for justified (ones having been justified) and reconciled (ones having been reconciled) are PASSIVE voice. The verbs shall be saved from wrath and shall be saved by his life are also PASSIVE. It signifies that God does ALL the saving: past, present and future. A sinner that believes the gospel is the recipient of God's grace. He can neither justify nor reconcile himself nor live the Christian life apart from Christ's life. It's totally God's work on our behalf. But in 5:11, Paul uses the ACTIVE voice with the past tense: "we have now received the atonement." In addition, there is a sixth verb that is ACTIVE voice, PRESENT tense: "we also joy in God" (5:11). Of the six verbs in our text, five are past tense. Only "joy" is present tense, signifying continuous, ongoing action. In other words, once we are justified and reconciled, one time for all time, we KEEP ON rejoicing over the fact we are SAVED from wrath (no wrath in our future) and SAVED by his life on a daily basis!

There are two basic elements of the gospel: the PROVISION and the APPROPRIATION! God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself and shedding his blood for our sins. That's the provision. But it's up to the sinner, awakened to his need by the Holy Spirit, to appropriate the provision. In this aspect of our salvation, the believer is active! John summed it up in John 1:12-13:

*"But as many as RECEIVED him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God,*

*even to them that BELIEVE on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*

The crucial question the sinner needs to ask himself is: "Have I received (appropriated) the atonement (provision)?" For the saint, he or she should ask themselves: "Am I experiencing the MUCH MORE salvation of Jesus' life that God promised those who put their trust in him?"

## New Creation in Christ Jesus

It is critical for the growth of a new believer to understand what happened to him when he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" to all who believe it (Romans 1:16). But exactly what kind of power is it that saves a believer? Jesus taught that the man or woman who believes in him is passed from death unto life (John 5:24). The kind of power to do that, as we learn from the gospel, is resurrection power! It's the same power that breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils (Genesis 2:7) and the same power that made something out of nothing when God said: "Let there be light!" (1:3). The creative power of Omnipotent God doubles as resurrection power! It is nothing less than the power that brought the heavens and earth into existence and raised Jesus from the dead that passes the believer from spiritual death unto eternal life.

The verb "passed" is the perfect tense of the Greek **metabaino** (**meta**="across" + **baino**="to go"). It means "to pass over from one place to another." The perfect tense signifies a permanent transfer. Once a believer moves from spiritual death to spiritual life, he enjoys eternal life in Christ, never again to see death. The apostle Paul stated it like this: "Who [God the Father] hath delivered [rescued] us from the power [authority] of darkness, and hath translated [transported, transferred] us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). The verbs "passed" and "translated" both speak of a fundamental transfer of existence from death to life, from a kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. God accomplishes this great creative work in response to heart-felt faith in Jesus, not mere mental assent to a set of facts.

It is no surprise to find the new birth in scripture associated with God's creative power. When a man is born again, and passed from death unto life, God's creative power performs it. As the Spirit of God, the agent of regeneration (new birth), applies the effects of Christ's death (dead to the Law, crucified with Christ) and resurrection (Christ liveth in me) to a believer, a NEW MAN is created. The creative power of the gospel changes a believer at his core. The apostle Paul said: "And that ye put on the NEW MAN, which after God is CREATED in righteousness and true holiness" (Ephesians 4:24). The Lord's saving grace clothes the believer with the righteousness and holiness of Christ. Again: "And have put on the NEW MAN, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that CREATED him" (Colossians 3:10). Jesus exercises creative power in regeneration, creating a new man fashioned in his own image inasmuch as he now lives in the believer.

Paul also wrote these familiar words: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new CREATURE: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the context, the fact that Christ died for ALL who were spiritually dead means ALL who are reconciled to God by the death of his Son and made alive by the gospel are new creatures in Christ. Old things are passed away! One of the 'old things' that passes away is the relationship to Mosaic Law. He's no longer under its dominion because he died to the Law and is now married to Christ (Romans 7:1-4). He now lives under Kingdom authority where he is clothed with Christ's righteousness and subject only to Christ. Some protest here, arguing that a man who is no longer 'under Law' can no longer sin since "sin is the transgression of the Law." The problem with this objection is that being 'dead to the Law' does NOT mean that a believer is without law to God. He is "under the law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21). The believer who lives under the Law to Christ is under a higher standard than Mosaic Law. When he violates the righteousness and holiness of Christ, whether by

attitude or act, he sins against his Lord. It is perfectly conceivable that a believer could sin against Christ and still be in compliance with Mosaic Law.

Believers are said to be "in Christ" as well as Christ being "in them." For those who are IN CHRIST, the following is a spiritual principle: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new CREATURE" (Galatians 6:15). The Church of Jesus Christ, the habitation of God through the Spirit, consists of both Jews (circumcision) and Gentiles (uncircumcision), who've been born again. In Christ Jesus, the Jew is not advantaged; nor is the Gentile disadvantaged. The only thing that "avails" (exerts force or power) in Christ is the fact that every one who is in Christ has been made a new creature through the creative power of the risen Christ. It is that level of power that avails for the believer.

God created the heavens and the earth for a purpose. Revelation 4:11 declares: "For thy pleasure they are and were created." The 'pleasure' principle applies to born again believers as well. But we are given additional specifics: "For we are his workmanship, CREATED in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). An obvious observation here is that good works are the goal of God's creative work, not the cause of it. That's grace. But these good works were "before ordained."

Some would cite these good works to be a reference to Mosaic Law. I would agree to the extent the Ten Commandments represent a baseline for spiritual and moral rectitude. But since we're in a context involving the new birth with creation and resurrection power in play, the good works are more likely to be representative of Christ's character and conduct--the behavior of God--as the Spirit forms Christ-likeness in the believer's life. A believer can learn what these good works are by saturating his mind with scripture, learning of Christ from Genesis to Revelation! In like manner as being under the law to Christ is a far higher standard than being under Mosaic Law, so also do the good works that proceed from the Spirit of Christ far exceed those of mere compliance to Mosaic Law.

The Law demands no gods other than the true God, no sacrilege, keeping of the Sabbath, honoring of parents, no murder, no adultery, no lying, no stealing and no lust. But can the avoidance of evil works be considered the doing of good works? The indwelling Holy Spirit, in contrast to the prohibitions of the Law, enables the believer to love God and his fellow man--the two great commandments upon which the entire Law rests. In addition, the Spirit empowers the believer to offer unadulterated worship, praise and thanksgiving to his Lord, avoid every form of sacrilege, love and honor parents, respect the sanctity of life, maintain sexual purity, speak the truth at all times, respect the property of others and be content with what God gives him. To this basic 'good works' profile we can add the tangibles of Holy Spirit fruit--JOY in the Lord's salvation, being at PEACE with God, himself and his fellow man, LONGSUFFERING (even-temperedness) and GENTLENESS (kindness) in relationships with others, GOODNESS (displays of benevolence), FAITH (life lived in confidence), MEEKNESS (operating under Christ's rule) and TEMPERANCE (self-control in all aspects of life).

This is what it means to be like Jesus, the believer's primary objective in life! We must always remember that the goal of the Holy Spirit in discipleship is Christ Conformance, NOT Torah Compliance. The same creative power that raised Jesus from the dead and passed the believer from death unto life is the same creative power required for true discipleship,

wherein the believer becomes more and more like Jesus in his thought life, his attitudes and his conduct. As Paul wrote the Ephesians: "For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth" (5:9). The practical outworking of righteousness and good works in discipleship is the fruit of the Spirit!

These are the kinds of good works God predestinated a new creature in Christ to produce—a life littered with spiritual fruit that reflects the image of Christ (Romans 8:29). Good works serve as light to lost men so they might glorify the Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 2:12). Paul exhorted rich believers to be rich in good works (1 Timothy 6:18). Paul admonished Timothy, a young preacher, to be thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Timothy 3:17). Paul instructed Titus, another of his young proteges, to show a pattern of good works (Titus 2:7). Jesus redeemed believers to be a peculiar people, zealous of good works (2:14). Those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works (3:8; 3:14). God's people are admonished to consider one another so as to provoke unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24).

The source of godliness in a believer as it manifests itself in good works is Christ living in his people through the enabling power—the creation and resurrection power—of the Spirit. David understood the need for God's creative power as he prayed for restoration of fellowship after the sins of adultery and conspiracy to commit murder. He prayed: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10). The resurrection power of Christ which makes the believer a new creation is the same power required to live a godly life filled with good works. It's a fool's errand to believe that the letter of Mosaic Law has a single iota of power to produce Christ-likeness. It is the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus that avails for a believer as he now lives in his new kingdom realm—dead to the Law and created anew IN CHRIST JESUS!

## The Saviour and the Schoolmaster

In Matthew 19:16-22, a young man with great possessions (19:22) came to Jesus with an inquiry as to how he could have "eternal life" based on some "good thing" (19:16) he might do. This text has given advocates of a Law-Grace gospel mix the fodder they need to allege Jesus taught compliance with the Mosaic Law as requisite to salvation and eternal life. This passage is the subject of many discussion threads on websites called "Yahweh Restoration", "Torah Restoration" or something similar.

It is an admittedly challenging text to interpret, requiring one to compare scripture with scripture in arriving at the proper interpretation. What was Jesus really trying to do with this young man? Was he seeking to evangelize him? Was Jesus involved in pre-evangelism? I believe if we rightly divide the Word of God and treat the scripture with intellectual honesty, we can arrive at the proper understanding of the text. The LAST thing Jesus was teaching was a connection between compliance with Mosaic Law and eternal life. Our text constitutes a story about the Saviour's relationship to the Schoolmaster, the Lawgiver to the Law he gave Moses at Sinai.

We begin by noting the way the young rich man addressed Jesus. He called Jesus "Good Master." The Greek is διδασκαλε αγαθε. The adjective **ἀγαθός** (agathos) signifies what is intrinsically beneficial, good in its very essence. "Master" is **διδάσκαλος** (didaskolos) meaning "teacher, instructor or doctor." He addresses Jesus as "good teacher." It's difficult to find fault with this address. It was polite even if perfunctory. The young man saw in Jesus of Nazareth a genuinely good man, a kind man, a teacher with whom children could feel at ease with his meekness and gentleness.

Jesus took the opportunity of this address to stimulate the young man's thinking regarding WHO it was he was addressing. Jesus replied: "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (19:17). In other words, do you realize that in calling me "good" you have called me "God"? The rich young man was standing in the presence of the Saviour, the Lifegiver himself, and was asking what "good thing" he might do to have eternal life. At the end of their encounter, it is clear he never did grasp the spiritual truth Jesus sought to teach.

The man asked: "What good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life?" His enquiry was flawed in at least three ways according to scripture he should have known. First, it is impossible for a sinner to DO a good thing. Four times in Psalms, scripture says: "there is none that doeth good" (14:1, 3; 53:1, 3). Paul reiterated this truth for a fifth time in Romans 3:12: "There is none that doeth good, no, not one." Secondly, it is NOT possible for a sinner to EARN eternal life. It is a gift of God's grace! Thirdly, keeping the Ten Commandments cannot produce life. There is no Law capable of giving spiritual life to a compliant sinner (Galatians 3:21).

So what was the purpose of Jesus introducing the Mosaic Law to this man as a path to life? Consider these NT truths. First, SIN is the transgression of the LAW (1 John 3:4). Secondly, for by the LAW is the knowledge of SIN (Romans 3:20). Thirdly, SIN by the COMMANDMENT becomes exceeding SINFUL (Romans 7:13). Fourthly, the LAW was added alongside the Abrahamic covenant because of TRANSGRESSIONS (Galatians 3:19). It's clear at this point that Jesus introduced the commandments for the purpose of removing the blinders from his eyes and exposing his sin. And sure enough, it was Commandment #10, a prohibition

against covetousness, that sank his ship, so to speak.

There exists an instructive comparison between this young rich man (Matthew 19) and the woman at Jacob's well in Samaria (John 4). In both instances, the point of evangelism with Jesus was to bring each of them to an awareness of WHO he was and to find salvation in HIM. To the Samaritan woman, Jesus said if she knew WHO it was that had asked her for water, she would have asked HIM for living water. When the woman brought up the subject of MESSIAH, Jesus said: "I that speak unto thee am HE (John 4:26). To the young rich man, Jesus clarified that since he had called him "good" he must therefore be "GOD," the sole source of eternal life.

Jesus then instructed him that in order to be "perfect" (complete, lacking nothing) he should sell all that he had, give it to the poor and trade his earthly wealth for heavenly treasure. Jesus followed up those imperatives with another command: "Come and FOLLOW ME" (Matthew 19:21). These are the key imperatives, often overlooked by interpreters. In both cases, Jesus linked living water (John 4) and eternal life (Matthew 19) to HIMSELF. In the end, the young rich man valued the relationship with his GOODS as more important than a potential relationship with GOD, the giver of eternal life!

This is the bedrock truth in true evangelism. On both occasions, Jesus used the Schoolmaster to bring each of them to HIMSELF (Galatians 3:24). For the woman at the well, it was Commandment #7, the sin of adultery, that accentuated her need. She discovered that WHO she worshipped was of far greater import than WHERE she worshipped. For the young rich man, it was Commandment #10, the sin of covetousness, that exposed his need. He ultimately refused to relinquish his sin in order that he might have life in Christ!

We see the effectiveness of the Schoolmaster in bringing the woman to Christ: "The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, 'Come, see a MAN, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the CHRIST?'" (John 4:28-29). Contrariwise, we see the reaction of the young rich man: "But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions" (Matthew 19:22). The woman went away JOYFUL, but the man SORROWFUL!

Some thirty years later, the apostle Paul clarified what was actually happening in this encounter with the young rich man. Paul likewise had kept all the commandments from his youth up, as he testified in Philippians 3:4-6. He used the word "blameless" to describe his devotion to the Law of Moses. But once he met Christ, the obsession of his life was to "win Christ" and to be "found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (3:8-9). Paul discovered that CHRIST WAS ENOUGH, his ALL IN ALL, a reality that escaped the young rich man.

Paul earlier wrote these words to the church at Rome: "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (8:3-4). There is nothing wrong with the Law. But it cannot produce true righteousness or give life because of the weakness of man's flesh to comply fully with its demands. So God in Christ condemned sin in the flesh with his own perfect obedience, rose from the dead, ascended to the Father's right hand and sends the Spirit of God INTO the heart of every believer for the purpose of fulfilling the

righteousness of the Law IN them! The weakness of the young rich man's flesh rendered the Law impotent to save him or anyone else. Little did that young rich man know that the Christ that bid him "Follow me!" was going to do all this on his behalf.

One last thought. We must remember that this rich young man, although zealous of complying with the commandments "from his youth," was under condemnation. Jesus told Nicodemus: "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:18-19). The young man was NOT a good guy. His covetousness was an EVIL DEED that caused him to reject the Light in whose presence he stood. He loved darkness rather than Light, and walked away sorrowful.

Such is the relationship between the Saviour and the Schoolmaster, which God added alongside the Abrahamic covenant to exacerbate our transgressions and bring us to Christ. For the woman at the well, it found great success in her salvation. But for the young rich man, its purpose was not realized. As the saying goes, the same sun that melts the snow is the same sun that hardens the clay!

## **The Synagogue of Satan**

The historical setting is the reign of Roman emperor Domitian (81-96 A.D.). The apostle John has been banished to the Isle of Patmos. If we estimate the writing of Revelation to be circa 90 A.D., the apostle Paul has been dead for twenty-five years. While the churches Paul planted in Asia Minor are still alive and well, they've been impacted by various heresies, many of which Paul wrote to combat and correct.

In Chapters 2-3, the Lord Jesus delivers individual messages to seven churches. In each message, Jesus informs them he has full knowledge of their spiritual condition (good and bad), what they're enduring, what actions they should take and a promise to the faithful. It's encouraging to see that while NONE of the churches passed muster in terms of a clean bill of spiritual health (Smyrna excepted), all seven are LOVED by the Lord Jesus. There is nothing more precious to Jesus than local churches that assemble in HIS name and proclaim HIS gospel, the gospel of GRACE!

The churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia shared a common malady: the "synagogue of Satan." To the church at Smyrna, he said: "And I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:9). To the church at Philadelphia, he reiterated: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee" (3:9). It is not clear whether members of this satanic group had infiltrated the church or were just a local presence in the city whose influence was felt by the church.

Before we seek to identify who these folks were and whether there is a modern-day equivalent, let us examine the words of Jesus to ascertain what we DO know to be true. The term "synagogue" may sound a little sarcastic but is, in fact, a statement of reality. These folks obviously claimed to have Jewish roots and practices. But Jesus said they were a synagogue with Satan at the helm. Perhaps they had a Jewish pedigree (physical component) but lacked the faith of Abraham (spiritual component). I suppose it's possible they were physical Jews who were never circumcised in heart. But I'm not sure that would rise to the level of blasphemy. They were more likely to have been Gentiles who believed the Church was the new Israel and therefore claimed to be Jews with an obligation to bring elements of Mosaic Law into Church life. Whatever they may have THOUGHT they were, Jesus said they were BLASPHEMERS and LIARS! It is important to remember that the major difference between a synagogue and a church is the difference between Law and Grace. Whether they were physical Jews who were spiritual imposters or Gentiles claiming to be Jews, they were guilty of making Mosaic Law, in addition to Grace, a requisite for righteousness.

The overriding message here is our Lord's seriousness about his gospel of grace and his divine indignation with those who augment it in any way. The apostle Paul taught that Mosaic Law had no capacity whatsoever to bring spiritual life or righteousness to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins (Galatians 3:21). He also affirmed that Christ becomes the believer's righteousness and life when he calls upon Jesus' name, believing he died for their sins and rose again the third day. This is the message of the gospel! Activity that seeks to alter this message—adding to or taking from—is satanic activity. Mosaic Law can neither save the lost nor sanctify the saved! The synagogue of Satan was no doubt engaged in the

modification of the gospel with Jewish (Mosaic) elements.

The book of Galatians was likely the first epistle Paul wrote following the Jerusalem Council (A.D. 51). The conclusion arrived at by the apostles and the Holy Ghost was: "But we believe that through the GRACE of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved, even as they [Gentiles]" (Acts 15:11). The future tense of "saved" signifies that GRACE, not Mosaic Law, is the sole basis for our salvation FROM faith (justification) TO faith (sanctification) and our ultimate glorification. But not everyone embraced the doctrinal edict of the Council. When Paul began Galatians, he issued this stern warning: " I marvel that ye are so soon removed from HIM that called you into the GRACE of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would PERVERT the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:6-7). This is no coincidence! Any admixture of Law with Grace as a formula for attaining to the righteousness of God is a 'perversion' (corruption, transmutation) of the gospel. The synagogue of Satan is in the business of perverting the gospel by mixing Law with Grace.

An instructive passage in Galatians 2:11-21 records Paul's public rebuke of Peter as he had changed his behavior with Gentile believers at Antioch out of fear for other Jews that came from Jerusalem. Peter, a Jew by nature, was perfectly at ease with Gentile believers who observed no Mosaic rituals. But in an hypocritical reversal, he began "compelling" the Gentiles to live after the manner of Jews upon the arrival of Jews from Jerusalem. This change of behavior was contrary to "the truth of the gospel." That truth is that righteousness comes by faith in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile. Both have equal standing before God on the merits of Christ alone. One absolute truth taught in this passage is that it was and NEVER has been the will of God for Gentile believers to live as Jews! Moreover, when Peter, a natural Jew, abandoned Mosaic customs and lived as did the Gentiles, he walked uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. The synagogue of Satan consists of professing Gentile believers who falsely claim to be Jews, believe righteousness comes from Jesus + Mosaic Law and seek to compel other Gentile believers to live as Jews. Such behavior is contrary to the truth of the gospel and a perversion of it!

One cannot read the book of Acts without seeing that early believers, especially Jews, had a very difficult time with grace, holding on to Mosaic practices after professing faith in Christ. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, preached and taught Christ from the Law and the Prophets but advocated NO Mosaic practices for the churches he planted. Some advocates of 'Restoration' theology cite historical documents that say the early churches acted like Jews. That's understandable given the difficulties for Jews transitioning from Law to Grace. It apparently proved difficult for Gentiles, who would have gained, from Paul's influence, a great respect for Christianity's Jewish roots. But historical documents do NOT constitute doctrine. Paul wrote Galatians and Colossians, two doctrinal foundations for the gospel of grace, to combat the error of incorporating the "weak and beggarly" elements of Mosaic Law into church life. Yet despite Paul's inspired efforts to lay a solid doctrinal foundation for the gospel, there were many "false brethren" (2 Corinthians 11:26; Galatians 2:4) who continued to "trouble" Gentile believers with ANOTHER gospel (Jesus + Mosaic covenant). A generation later, Jesus called out these synagogues of Satan in his messages to Smyrna and Philadelphia.

The charge of blasphemy is a serious one. But how does one commit blasphemy? One blasphemes when he treats sacred things with contempt. Where the gospel is concerned, it all boils down to the doctrine of redemption and the blood of Christ. The shed blood of

Jesus, the Seed of Abraham, is the basis for the new covenant that fulfills the Abrahamic covenant and connects the believer to the promises made to Abraham. The Mosaic covenant, which God added alongside the Abrahamic covenant to exacerbate the knowledge of sin, is the old covenant from which Christ redeems the believer. God has not done away with the old covenant. By virtue of his death with Christ, the believer dies to the old covenant and is made alive by the new covenant in Christ's blood. When men mix the old and new covenants in some sort of gospel hybrid, they show contempt for the blood of Christ, deeming it unable, in and of itself, to secure our eternal redemption. In doing so, they become blasphemers and Jesus calls them exactly that!

In addition to the charge of blasphemy, Jesus accused the synagogue of Satan of lying! A lie is a false statement made with the intent to deceive. It misrepresents the truth. What exactly was the synagogue of Satan lying about? The gospel affirms the death of Christ on the Cross was the total satisfaction for our sins and the demands of the Law. It affirms that the blood of Christ was sufficient to redeem them that were under the Law from the curse of the Law. It affirms the believer of the gospel to be dead to the Law and alive unto the Lawgiver. The lie was likely two-fold in nature. First, Gentiles who claim to be Jews misrepresent the facts. Scripture teaches there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). When a Gentile who claims to believe in Jesus also claims to be a Jew, he or she is a liar! Secondly, the risen Christ considers their claim the Church is Israel and therefore obligated to continue observing Mosaic Law to be a deliberate misrepresentation of gospel truth and the value of his Cross. It misrepresents the doctrine of redemption! Jesus is the final Judge. When he levels charges of blasphemy and lying against any people, there exists no higher court to which they can appeal their conviction!

Satan is in the business of blinding the minds of unbelievers to the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 3:14; 4:4). He uses his subtility to corrupt the minds of believers from the simplicity that is in Christ (11:3). It is expected that his 'synagogue' would be engaged in both of these activities—blinding and corrupting minds. His ultimate objective is to persuade the unsaved and saved alike that the death of Jesus, his precious blood, his resurrection and his righteousness imputed to the believer, the 'Good News' of GRACE, are insufficient, in and of themselves, to secure eternal redemption on behalf of those who believe. The argument a synagogue of Satan propagates usually takes the form of old 'covenant' plus new 'covenant'—a mix of Law and Grace. The NT, however, affirms that unbelievers are 'under Law' and believers 'under Grace' and that no man can be 'under' both at the same time. Those who mix Law and Grace essentially despise the blood of Jesus and incur his displeasure in the form of a two-fold indictment—blasphemers and liars! This indictment of Jesus is applicable to ANY individual or group that teaches righteousness, whether in justification or sanctification, is obtainable by compliance to Mosaic Law. The modern-day 'Restoration' movement is reflective of a satanic synagogue.

These synagogues of Satan were apparently claiming the higher 'gospel' ground. They considered their allegiance to Mosaic Law and their attempt to meld it with Christianity as the superior position. But the Lord said he would ultimately make the synagogue of Satan worship at the feet of the Church and know how much Jesus loves those who champion the gospel of GRACE. The synagogues of Satan were likely akin to the Judaizers against whom Paul warned the Galatians and Colossians. If a man believes and teaches that Mosaic Law can, in any way, contribute to life or righteousness, he is a Judaizer, a member of the synagogue of Satan. He may have a quiver full of bastardized proof texts he claims prove

that Mosaic Law was always intended to be part of Church life. But in the final analysis, salvation hinges upon the efficaciousness of the blood of Christ to secure our eternal redemption, clothe us in Christ's righteousness and provide us a "new and living way" into the holiest (Hebrews 10:20). The offering of the body of Christ—his death and precious blood—perfects forever the believer who is sanctified by faith in him (10:14). Adding so much as one requirement to the blood of Christ as necessary to achieve these ends is blasphemy and lying!

The synagogue of Satan through the ages has taken on different forms. But in the final analysis, it has at its core an alternative to or augmentation of redemption by the blood of Jesus Christ and or sanctification by the Spirit of Christ. Paul testified that he was not ignorant of Satan's devices (2 Corinthians 2:11). If we examine Satan's first temptation (device), we derive basic insight into how he operates where his synagogues are concerned (Genesis 3:1). God said to the first couple: "Ye shall SURELY die" (2:17). Satan countered with: "Yea, hath God said...?" (3:1) and followed with: "Ye shall NOT SURELY die!" (3:4). Satan first introduced an element of DOUBT, then followed up with an outright DENIAL of truth. In the NT, God says believers are: "DEAD to the Law" (Romans 7:4; Galatians 2:19). Satan counters with: "Does dead really mean dead?" At some point, after DOUBT has run its course and eroded confidence in the plain sense of scripture, he follows with: "You are NOT DEAD to the Law!" He will then proceed to explain why that cannot be the case, using bastardized 'proof texts' from the OT that he interprets apart from their context as 'proof' that the Law is still applicable to the Church as a basis of justification and or discipleship; a mix of Law and Grace, old Mosaic covenant with the new covenant in the blood of Christ.

In summary, every synagogue of Satan, regardless of the name under which it operates, will have one or more of the following tenets undergirding its existense:

1. A claim that Israel is now the Church, that Gentile believers in the Church Age have been 'grafted' into one of the tribes of Israel. Both 'Replacement' theology and 'Restoration' theology espouse this error notwithstanding the scriptural truth that there are NO tribes in Christ or his Church (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11).
2. A failure to understand the covenants. Romans 11 makes it clear that God has grafted Gentiles, as a wild olive tree, into Israel, the natural olive tree. But that grafting connects Gentile believers to Abraham, not Moses. Gentile believers are dead to the Old Covenant and grafted into the Abrahamic Covenant. In this regard, they are blessed with faithful Abraham, to whom God made promise to justify by faith all who followed his example of faith. Descendants of Abraham are the natural olive tree. There are no tribes in the Abrahamic covenant even as there are no tribes in the covenant in Christ's blood.
3. A defective view of the death of Christ. Jesus fulfilled the Law in its entirety, He did not destroy it. Yet some allege Jesus satisfied the priesthood requirements of the Law but left other aspects in tact for our observavnce. This kind of thinking misses the point. Jesus left ALL the Law in tact. He satisfied ALL the demands of the Law in his death. He did not destroy the Law, but FULFILLED every aspect of it! If Jesus died for ALL our sins (1 Corinthians 15:3) and had ALL our iniquities laid upon him (Isaiah 53:6), then the atonement of Jesus MUST have included EVERY aspect of Law, a violation of which would constitute a transgression. Jesus did NOT suffer and atone for the traditions of the elders, scribes and Pharisees. The violation of their traditions

did NOT constitute transgressions of the Law as far as God is concerned! Jesus in his death was a TOTAL satisfaction for our sins and iniquities and a fulfillment of the Law that precipitated them!

4. An advocacy for some degree of adherence to OT Law, whether it be for salvation (justification) or discipleship (sanctification) at the expense of NT Grace, which teaches the total sufficiency of Christ, his righteousness, his life and the redeeming power of his blood.
5. A belief that the early Church went astray early on and was 'hijacked' by grace advocates. They see their mission as one to 'restore' elements of Mosaic Law that the Church abandoned. Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council soundly refuted this error! In fact, the synagogues of Satan are akin to the disciples of Moses who tried to corrupt the church at Antioch in Syria, an attempt which precipitated the Jerusalem Council in the first place, where Grace won the day.
6. A bastardization of NT scripture. Synagogue of Satan ministers are guilty of substituting 'Yahweh' for 'Lord', 'Yeshua' for 'Jesus' and 'Elohim' for 'God'. The NT was written in Greek. Any honest translation of scripture will demonstrate faithfulness to the original language. A synagogue of Satan will purposefully mistranslate these Greek words as an eisegetical (reading into) exercise to give a Hebrew flavor to the Greek text. When you hear a Gentile man, who believes he's a Jew, using OT names for God when quoting NT scripture (i.e., reading Hebrew names into Greek text), you're likely listening to a synagogue of Satan representative. It's one of the ways a Gentile, who believes his faith in 'Yeshua' makes him a Jew, seeks to affirm his Jewishness. But it's nothing more than deceitful handling of scripture.
7. A denial of the Trinity. A synagogue of Satan will typically deny the Trinitarian (Three-in-One) nature of the Godhead. There are few Bible doctrines with more attestation than the ONE true God existing eternally in THREE Persons—the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Each member of the Godhead has a unique role in our redemption. The man Christ Jesus is the One Mediator between God and men. Jesus could NOT be a Mediator if he was not BOTH God and man! The synagogue of Satan, because it believes Trinitarian doctrine teaches Three Gods, will advocate an equivalency of the Father and Son (i.e., the Father IS the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ IS the Father). This is a direct assault on the doctrine of God!
8. A misrepresentation of the Holy Spirit. Some 'Restoration' ministries describe the Holy Spirit as "an invisible force." This essentially strips the Spirit of personhood and, in combination with the Father and Son 'equivalency' concept, maintains the idea of One God, One Person. It is therefore not uncommon to hear a synagogue of Satan member use the words 'Father' or 'Almighty Father' when referring to their God and conspicuously omit the names of 'Jesus' and or 'Christ' from their vocabulary.

Two biblical keys apply here. Jesus said: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26). Paul wrote: "And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he [Jesus] might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18). If and when the Spirit God is the impetus behind a ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ will be the first and foremost focus of it! You simply cannot honor the Father without honoring his

Son (John 5:23).

9. A defective view of eschatology. Many synagogues of Satan allege that "the fulness of the Gentiles" has come and gone (Romans 11:25). But as Paul explained, the fulness of the Gentiles is connected to the "mystery" of the church. The day of the Lord will not commence, nor the fulness of the Gentiles be accomplished, until Jesus catches away (gathers) his Church, his largely Gentile bride, unto himself in the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). This is a convenient allegation that really **MUST** accompany the other false belief that the Church is Israel.
10. A disdain for (abandonment of) the local church that preaches the gospel of GRACE as affirmed by the Jerusalem Council in A.D. 51. A synagogue of Satan may see its 'work' as that of influencing GRACE-based local churches to adopt LAW-based practices, such as the observance of Feasts and Sabbaths, as a matter of discipleship. But such 'Torah compliance' doctrine has **NO** ability to make one a disciple of Christ, for it can impart neither life nor righteousness. The Christian life **IS** the life of Christ! It is **NOT** conformity to types, figures and shadows! Any individual who **REJECTS** what Jesus **LOVES** (i.e., Grace-preaching local churches) is telegraphing the satanic source of his or her persuasion.
11. The use of OT phrases like "my ways" and "old paths" as proof the Church is still obligated to conform to those ways, often referred to as "the Father's ways" as expressed in Mosaic Law. In the NT, however, Jesus said he was the embodiment of those "ways" and "paths" inasmuch as he told his disciples: "I am **THE** way" (John 14:6). When Jesus said he was **THE** way, he was essentially saying: "ALL the 'my ways' and 'old paths' of the Old Covenant are now bundled up in **ME**, the Mediator of the New Covenant!"
12. A false accusation of 'lawlessness' against Grace-based churches and individuals. Believers in the gospel of grace are "under the law to Christ" as was the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 9:21). A disciple of Christ who studies the Torah is **NOT** concerned with **COMPLIANCE**, but with **OBEDIENCE**. His goal is to discover the will of God and obey it as he finds it through the power of the Spirit. For example, when he reads Exodus 20:13-16, he learns the will of God for his life is respect for the sanctity of life, sexual purity, respect for the property of others and truthfulness in every area of life. As he relies upon the power of the Spirit to **FORM** these Christ-like qualities **IN** him, he fulfills the righteousness of the Law (Galatians 4:19; Romans 8:2-4).

How does a believer in grace obey an OT feast? Since OT feasts are shadows of Christ, he simply seeks to discover the spiritual intent of the feast and what can be learned about Christ his Lord. For example, the Feast of Unleavened Bread teaches the need to live an unleavened life as a result of Christ becoming his Passover Lamb. The way he obeys the spirit of the feast is to ask God daily to expose the leaven in his life, confess it, forsake it and live godly in Spirit power as a result. What is the benefit of OT feast **COMPLIANCE** by one whose life is rife with **DISOBEDIENCE**?

These messages to the churches at Smyrna and Philadelphia should strike fear in the heart of every soul that seeks to add some aspect of Mosaic Law as necessary to the attainment of life and righteousness. The bottom line: **DO.NOT.MESS.WITH.GRACE!** The blood of Christ

and the Spirit of Christ ALONE have the power to redeem, regenerate, justify, reconcile, cleanse from sin, empower the believer to walk in fellowship with his Lord and transform-conform him into the image of Christ Jesus.

Those who champion any element of Mosaic Law as integral to Grace have departed from the faith, having given heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils (1 Timothy 4:1). They are: (1) the enemies of Christ, (2) the enemies of his Cross, and (3) despisers of his blood. As Paul warned, it is "no great thing" if the ministers of Satan transform themselves into "ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:15). Modern-day examples include ministries like 'Yahweh Restoration', 'Torah Restoration' and 'Torah Compliance'. These and ministries with similar scope, which advocate elements of Mosaic Law as integral to salvation and or discipleship, are synagogues of Satan. At the end of the day, Jesus will expose them for the blasphemers and liars they are! The synagogue of Satan has nothing whatsoever to do with the worship of Satan, but rather the false worship of ANOTHER Jesus with ANOTHER gospel and ANOTHER spirit. That's what makes it so sinister, so deadly, and why Jesus hates it!

## **Why I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

A major component of the gospel of Jesus Christ is his resurrection from the dead. In order for a sinful man to be saved from his sins, he must believe it. For the scripture declares: "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved" (Romans 10:9). Paul reminded the Corinthians of the same gospel he preached to them: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The resurrection was a vindication of Jesus' substitutionary death for sinners inasmuch as death had no claim on him. It was for us and our sins that he died and rose again.

A belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is rooted in reason as well as revelation. In other words, any intellectually honest individual should have no problem believing God can raise the dead. Psalm 19:1 says: "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." A reasonable man, unaided by scripture, can perceive the majesty of God from the universe he observes. The deeper a man delves into the wonders of nature, the more glory he beholds. This is true both macroscopically (vastness of the universe) and microscopically (genius behind the composition of matter on an atomic level). In addition, he perceives that he (man) is at the pinnacle of life forms, being self-aware, having cognitive ability and possessing a conscience. He now has two options available to explain his existence and that of the universe: creation or evolution.

An intellectually honest individual who considers evolution, the humanist alternative to creation, as a viable explanation for his existence, will ultimately abandon that theory thanks to what his fellow man has discovered about physical science. The First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics, which are two fundamentals of the physical universe, destroy the theory of evolution. The First Law is the principle of energy conservation. It states that in a closed mechanical system, which the universe is, there is a fixed amount of energy. Although energy is often converted from one form to another, it's neither created nor destroyed. The Second Law states when energy is converted from one form to another, it always has the tendency to become less available for useful work. It's the principle of energy entropy. The conversions of energy tend toward greater degrees of randomness and lesser degrees of complexity.

The First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics enable us to draw two inescapable conclusions. First, since there is no energy creation taking place in the universe, there **MUST** have been a point at which the energy currently existing within the system was brought into existence by a greater power outside the system. Secondly, since converted energy always becomes less orderly, energy evolution from less complex to more complex forms, an absolute necessity for the evolution of species, is impossible! That leaves the reasonable man to conclude that creation alone can explain his existence.

This is admittedly a rather circuitous route to a belief in the resurrection of Christ. But the need to make the case for God as Creator is mandatory to any defense of the resurrection. Resurrection power is an extension of creative power! If God did not create man in his own image, neither can he resurrect man! The latter necessitates the former! The most egregious attacks upon the Godhead focus upon his role as Creator, the One to whom all

men are accountable! Once a man acknowledges God as his Creator, One who is bigger and wiser than himself, embracing the concepts of Christ's incarnation (virgin conception and birth), substitutionary death and triumphant resurrection becomes a logical progression of thought!

Belief in God as Creator leads one logically to conclude that God is perfectly able to REVEAL his mind and will for man to man, and PRESERVE what he communicates. This belief is entirely reasonable. If God can establish with absolute precision the trillions of heavenly bodies stretched across billions of light years, he is well able to get a message to man and preserve it!

This leads me to believe in the Bible as the source of divine revelation. The sixty-six books of the Bible have a unique history. God led Moses to write its first five books. Over the course of 2,000 or so years, different men with unique gifts and perspectives penned the historical books, the poetic and prophetic books, the four gospels and the NT epistles. All sixty-six books have a common theme: Jesus Christ the Messiah. Despite many attempts by skeptics to find errors within its pages and disparage its integrity, the Bible has withstood every attack. While on this earth, Jesus of Nazareth affirmed the veracity of the scriptures (John 10:35). His resurrection proves what he said about them was true. The Bible says Jesus both arose from the dead (Matthew 28:6-7; Mark 16:6) and appeared to his disciples after he arose. At one point, over five hundred saw him alive at once (1 Corinthians 15:6). There is just no way these men would have laid down their lives as martyrs for a dead leader. Once the eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ were filled with Holy Ghost power and boldness to bear witness of him, the number of disciples grew to several thousand in a matter of days.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ, an integral part of the gospel, is the power of God to transform the life of a believer (Romans 1:16). Jesus was raised for our justification (4:25). The perfect righteousness of God that Jesus embodied in his death is the same righteousness God imputes to every one that believes in his name. The gospel of grace forever settles the issue of righteousness for those who believe. It is so dynamic and transformative that the apostle Paul testified: "Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). The ability of the resurrected Christ to transform a life is undeniable and irrefutable. The resurrection of Christ guarantees that all whom God has resurrected from spiritual death he will one day resurrect from physical death as well, accomplishing the total redemption of spirit, soul and body (Romans 8:11, 23; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; 1 Thessalonians 4:14).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is believable on the basis of both reason and revelation. Those who have experienced God's grace in the new birth, having been resurrected with him, are his children and joint-heirs with Christ. Eye has not seen nor has ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, what God has prepared for them that love him (1 Corinthians 2:9). All of the glories and blessings God has in store for believers are due to the fact that death was unable to contain Jesus in that grave!