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By; Brother Given O. Blakely.

Questions & Answers

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On the second, the belief in reference was of a preliminary sort, not of the New Covenant order. It was much like that of Nicodemus, I gather, who also was persuaded of the superiority of Jesus by the miracles which He did (John 3:2). In John 6:14 a similar thing took place: "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Also, John 7:31: "And many of the people believed on him . . ." because of the miracles they saw. There is a remarkable

similarity in the above texts. In John 2:23, the people believed on Jesus when they saw His miracles. Yet Christ's response indicates this is not the sort of believing through which righteousness is reckoned--"But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." In John 3:2, Jesus counteracted Nicodemus' conclusion by saying unless a person was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). In John 6:14, Jesus withdrew from the very people that believed when He "perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king." In John 7:31, the people did not even conclude He was "the Christ" -- "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"

From these references, I conclude they believed genuine miracles had been wrought, and generally that God was with Him. But their faith was not like that mentioned in John that resulted in "life through His name." Their believing was similar to that of the "chief rulers" who "believed on Him," yet did not confess Him openly because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God (John 12:42-43). It is the sort of believing Thomas did when He saw for Himself the risen Christ. In his case, the blessing was not pronounced him, but upon those who "saw not," yet believed (John 20:29). Beside all of this, the faith that saves is the "evidence of things not seen," not the evidence of things that are seen.

Why should we preach or try and live godly? What difference does it make if God has already determined the outcome based on his choosing.

There are two things that are maintained in salvation: (1) The nature of God and (2) The nature of man, who is in the image of God. God will not violate His own nature to save man, nor

will he violate the nature of His offspring. He must remain both the "Just and the Justifier" of the person believing in Jesus--there provision is made for both Himself and man (Rom 3:26). There have been times when God has overridden man's will -- but it has never been for a blessing. Examples are Nebuchaddezzar being driven from the throne, Herod being struck dead, etc.

The point of the text is NOT that God simply chose people, but that they are chosen "IN CHRIST." His "foreknowledge" knew the people that would be inclined to Him--the ones that would recognize their need of a Savior, who sensed they could not save themselves. He also knew that, of themselves, they were completely incapable of changing their natures or even coming to Him, making themselves acceptable. He therefore made them acceptable "in Christ," Who is the real CHOSEN ONE, and the ONLY begotten Son. His determination was WHAT they would be, NOT who they would be: i.e., "that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love . . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself . . . "

Romans 9:29-30 also states the case, tracing God's motivation to His foreknowledge. Again, that foreknowledge was a recognition of who was tender of heart and humble of spirit, and what He would do in them. Romans 8 states He predestinated they would become like His Son. He facilitates that predetermination by CALLING, not by coercion. His calling is nothing less than an appeal to man's volitional capacity--to make a choice. It will eventually be heard by souls that sense their need of Him. Once that call is embraced, God justifies, and will eventually glorify--or make them fully in the image of His Son. The grand work of every believer is to "abide" in Christ, keep the faith, and maintain their identity with the Son. Everything God has determined is "in Christ," and no part of salvation will be accomplished apart from intimate involvement with Him.

As to our involvement in the process, in Christ we become "workers together with God" (1 Cor 3:9), joining Him in the great work of salvation. We are "ambassadors of Christ, as though God did beseech" people through us (2 Cor 5:18-20). We are also laborers in His harvest--laborers He Himself has raised up.

One must remember that God always uses MEANS to facilitate His appointments. They are not accomplished arbitrarily. He even created the world THROUGH His word, and by His Son. His predestination is accomplished through His Son, through preaching, through calling, through believing . . . etc.

What makes you think that your unproven beliefs are more valid than anybody else's unproven beliefs?

The accounts in Scripture are even more verifiable than those of the history of our nation. They are attested by eye witnesses, history, archeology--and most of all, the consciences of those who have embraced them. They are not "unproven beliefs" by any acceptable criterion for examining historical or philosophical validity.

Any body of reality is ascertained by putting it to the test. In the case of religion, we have something different than the existence of matter, energy, or other realms of nature. True religion is a moral matter--something that impacts upon the decision-making capacity and basic constitution of humanity. The test of its reality, therefore, is found in whether or not it can produce the change in the individual that it proclaims. The essence of the Christian religion is that humanity has been infected with a sort of moral virus. Not only does death eventually overtake us all, but there is a natural tendency downward. Giving the improper environment, there is a

remarkable capacity for wickedness and evil, depression and moroseness, deception and misconception within the "best" of people.

The Bible declares this condition cannot be reversed by human ingenuity or discipline. While regimentation can change the outward conduct, it cannot alter the basic person. God, because of His concern for humanity, and because He created them in His own image (that is, with a capacity to choose, purpose, create, etc.), undertook to correct the condition Himself.

This He did through Jesus Christ, Who is His only begotten Son--i.e., Deity in a human form. In Christ, Deity accommodated Himself to the human condition in order to overcome the source of trouble, and bring a redeeming God within the reach of humanity. This message is declared in what is called "The Gospel of Christ." That message can be confirmed only by believing it--i.e., being persuaded it is the truth. This persuasion is not accomplished by the human intellect alone, but God enters into the process, enabling the individual to get hold of what He has said--convincing the heart it is the truth.

When what God has provided for humanity in Jesus Christ is willingly embraced by the heart and mind--emotion, will, and intellect--a moral change takes place within. A new set of values is appropriated. Things are seen differently. Motives are revolutionized, and a new life begins. THE PRESENCE OF THAT NEW LIFE IS THE PROOF OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL. Until that takes place, men and women only philosophize about the matter. I have found, by experience, that the Gospel of Christ is true. In it I find a proper interpretation of God Himself, the world, humanity, and the human condition. However, this confirmation has no bearing

whatsoever upon the reality of the Gospel. it has merely brought its benefits to me. God, Christ, and the Gospel, are all realities that exist independently of humanity or investigation.

That is a bird's eye view of the matter (and a small bird at that). You tell me whether we should talk more or not. I am not here to argue, and I am sure you understand that. You must also know that the burden of proof does not rest upon the believer, but upon the one that refuses to believe.

Once you have come to Christ, isn't it impossible to fall away, or to stop believing?

I wanted to bring it back to what God has said, not what men think He meant by what He said. It is never wise to use human terms and concepts to judge the validity of someone's faith or teaching. Adam and Eve were really in the Garden from which God expelled them. All of Israel was really delivered from Egypt, but not all of them got into Canaan. The angels that fell were actually in the presence of the Lord. Judas was really an Apostle. All of these cases are adduced in Scripture to teach people it is not enough to think they stand. We are to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5). We are Christ's house if we keep the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb 3:6). Paul told Timothy to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). That does not mean he did not have eternal life, it did mean He did not have it all.

God has never said, nor has He ever intimated that a believer can never quit believing. Hebrews 6:4-6 and 2 Pet 2:20-22 would be meaningless if that were the case. We are to fight the good fight of faith, and resist the devil steadfast in the faith. Faith is not automatic. Those that believe will win, because

faith is the victory that overcomes the world. The Lord tells us about people departing from the faith, and making shipwreck of the faith.

My point is that these sayings should be taken seriously. It requires effort to continue believing, and, praise God, God will underwrite the effort. But when a person says there is no danger, he has simply gone further than God has. The five foolish virgins were invited to the wedding feast. They all had oil. Their lamps were all burning. But they went out because they had no reserve of oil. They were not pretending to be virgins, they were. They were not pretending to have lamps, they did. They were not simulating burning lamps, they were burning. They were not the only ones that slept, the five wise virgins did too.

The Lord Jesus Himself spoke of those who "for a while believed," but "fell away" (Luke 8:13-14). I want no part of any theology that neutralizes those words. Nor, indeed, do I want any part of teaching that tells me I am in and out of a salvation that depends upon my works. I feel the same about poor abused believers as you do.

Both of us are at liberty to take Christ's words and embrace them. I will tell you that your faith is never taken for granted in Scripture. It is something God has given us, and we do well to fight to keep it. All who do this have no fear of being lost--none whatsoever. But those who choose to ignore their faith have no guarantee from God that it will stay with them. Such are warned, and that solemnly.

I am not a person that majors on telling people "You can fall away." That is no Gospel, and I know it. But neither am I one to tell people, "You are locked in, no need to fight," for that does them a great disservice. Saul was a king chosen by God, with the anointing of God, and he lost it. Samson was a Judge,

chosen by God with the power of God, and the Spirit left him. Lot's wife really did get out of Sodom, but she did not get into the city of safety. It does not appear to me to be on the part of wisdom to teach people as though these inspired records were not there.

I am discouraged, and ready to quit. What is the use?

Up! Up! Up! You are a son of God, an heir of God, and a joint heir with Christ (1 John 3:1; Rom 8:17; Gal 4:7)! Remember, you have been washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11)! Wrap your mind around the statements of the Spirit concerning you. You are a citizen of heaven--your name is written there (Luke 10:20; Phil 3:20; Heb 12:23) . God is your Father, Jesus is your Savior, Brother, and Intercessor (Rom 1:7; Heb 2:11; 7:25). The Holy Spirit has been sent by God into your heart (Gal 4:6). The holy angels are your ministers (Heb 1:13-14). He that is in you is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). You know these things, but there is strength in hearing them again--because they are the truth of God.

God has shed His Holy Spirit upon you abundantly (Tit 3:5-6), has given you access to Himself through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12). You can come as to Him as often as you want, stay as long as you want, and get as much as you want. The Lord Jesus, Who has the key of David can both open and close doors, and none can reverse His action (Rev 3:7). God Himself is working everything together for your ultimate good (Rom 8:28). Everything belongs to you, including Paul, Cephas, Apollos, the world, life, death, things present, and things to come (1 Cor 3:20-23). God has an inheritance reserved for you in heaven, it is not fading away, and you are

being kept by the power of God through faith (1 Pet 1:3-5). Think of it. This is all the truth. The Scriptures affirm these things to be true. Your faith and hope are in God, not in a movement.

You have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into then kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13). You are among those of whom it is said, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom 4:4-8) You ARE the light of the world, and you ARE the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-14). You have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and have been raised up and made to sit together with Christ in those heavenly places (Eph 1:3; 2:6). The eye of the Lord is upon you, and His ear is open to your cry (Psa 34:15). Think of it, this is your heritage in Christ Jesus the Lord--whether it seems clear right now or not.

The Lord did not call you according to your own works, but according to His open purpose and grace which was given to us before the world began. That is a matter of Divine statement, not human interpretation (2 Tim 1:9). He has placed you in the body (1 Cor 12:18), written His Law upon your heart, and placed it in your mind (Heb 8:10). You are His son, and He is your Father. Listen, God Himself put you in Christ, then made Him to be your righteousness, sanctification and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). That was not, nor can it be, accomplished by a movement or earthly heritage, regardless of how necessary they may appear to some.

Independently of the Movement, you can be filled with all joy and peace in believing (Rom 15:13). God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all you ask or think according to the power that is working in you now (Eph 3:20)! He is even able to make you stand (Rom 14:4). That is the kind of God that has saved you, and Whom you serve.

Maybe men do not honor tender hearts, but your Father does. The humble and contrite heart is the one to which He looks (Isa 66:2). That is what is of great price before Him. Movements be hanged! God will not bring them into heaven-- He is, through Christ, bringing many sons to glory! Hallelujah! And you are among them!

I have been in the work of the Lord for nearly 50 years. I have known personally and intimately a number of what they call "legalists." They are talking about EXACTLY the same things they were 40-45 years ago. They have not grown one millimeter -- same views, same talk, same arguments, same issues. They may suppose this is being faithful, I call it being stagnant. The things they discuss are not yielding Kingdom fruit. They strive about words to no profit--an action strictly forbidden by our Lord. Still, I know that they do this because they simply have never been challenged to do anything else. They have limited their fellowship to the circle that is characterized by relatively fruitless discussions. I do not think they are not God's people, but that they need to come higher.

Join me in this quest to obtain the fulness of eternal life. We have a pledge from our Savior, "All who seek, find . . . " Remember, God is looking for a man--someone whose heart is perfect, whose cause he can undergird (2 Chron 16:9). There is no reason--no reason at all--why that cannot be us!

I've heard that we need to have a positive attitude at all times, because what comes out of your mouth can cause things to happen (it invites Satan to do things or whatever). You need to focus on Scripture, etc. instead.

That is one of the doctrines that sounds good (from a very limited point of view), but is not at all a reflection of the truth.

There is such a thing as saying "peace, peace, when there is not peace" (Jer 6:14; 8:11). When a person is genuinely in distress, it is the truth to acknowledge it, and is so represented in Scripture. Focusing on the Scripture includes appropriating statements of truth that deal with the sort of situation we are in, whether it blessing or trial, happiness or sadness, uplifting or being cast down.

The following are expressions of godly men--men that did not know of the doctrine which is espoused by some. David -- "My soul is in anguish. How long, O LORD, how long? Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love" (Psa 6:3,4).

David and Jesus -- "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels" (Psa 22:12-14). David - "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psa 63:1).

Paul -- "Indeed he (Epaphroditus) was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow" (Phil 2:27). Paul - "At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me" (2 Tim 4:16). Paul - "Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger" (2 Cor 6:4).

Jesus - "But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50). When Paul had a thorn in the flesh, he did not pretend it was not there. Instead,

he asked the Lord to remove it -- and the Lord did not (2 Cor 12:7-12). He did receive grace, but only because he acknowledged his condition.

How could a person confess their sin to God if this doctrine was true (1 John 1:9)--particularly someone in Christ, which is who this text addresses. The publican let the truth come out of his mouth when he said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner" (Luke 18:13).

Repeatedly, the people of God are pictured as crying out to God in the day of trouble (Psa 18:6; 22:5). Bartimaeus cried out because he was blind (Mark 10:46-50). The woman with an issue of blood acknowledged her infirmity (Matt 9:20-22).

When we are in trouble, we are to acknowledge it--with our mouth. After all, it may be the chastening of the Lord, that is not pleasant for the moment (Heb 12:11). Paul spoke of both sides of human experience--not only the good. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Cor 4:7-12).

Enough said. There is a thread of this through Scripture in virtually every book. It is foolishness to claim the promise without acknowledging our need of it; to seek a blessing without admitting we stand in need of one.

What about women teachers? Aren't they forbidden in the Word of God?

I suggest that a purely academic approach to the First Timothy text (1 Tim 2:12) will not yield the Spirit's intended meaning. Paul's words are sufficiently clear. His proscription is clear, and the reasons for it are equally marked by clarity. In my understanding, this is the standard, or norm, for our sister's involvement in the assembly of the righteous. That by no means indicates there cannot be Divinely approved exceptions, or ladies that excel before the Lord.

David was not qualified by the Law to engage in military conflict. The rule was "from twenty years and upward" (Num 1:3). Yet he was used of God to spearhead one of the greatest of all conquests in the slaying of Goliath. David was exceptional in the eyes of the Lord. It is good thing for Israel someone was not there to enforce the standard.

In the giving of the Law, God provided for men to be judges among His people (Ex 18:21-22; Deut 1:13). Throughout the book of Judges, this standard was followed, with but one exception, Deborah, a prophetess (Judges 4). She also was exceptional in the eyes of the Lord. Again, it is fortunate a blind guide was not there to enforce the standard.

There were some exceptional women in Scripture who were prophetesses. Among them: Miriam (Ex 15:20), Deborah (Judges 4:4), Huldah (who instructed men, 2 Kgs 22:14-20), Isaiah's wife (Isa 8:3), Anna (who testified to all that were waiting for redemption in Jerusalem (Luke 2:36-38), and the four daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). All of these women were exceptional, and were so regarded by the Lord. They did not represent the norm of the Kingdom, nor did they set a precedent.

Paul allows for some women to prophesy in the assembly, as long as they evidenced due submission to God's order, i.e., the Head of the woman is the man, the Head of the man is Christ,

and the Head of Christ is God (1 Cor 11:3, 5-6). He does not say that the woman prophesying without her head covered has broken the Divine Law, but that she has dishonored her head. A woman can speak in an assembly, therefore, without dishonoring her duly appointed head, or breaking the Law of God. But even then, she should be an exceptional woman. Her participation is not to be disruptive, or in the area of interrogation. It must yield edifying results, or it is out of order, no matter what she says. Of course, neither are men to speak without edifying the assembly.

Our rules must allow for the rise of exceptional people. It was not normal for a twelve year old boy to sit in the midst of the teachers of the Law (Luke 2:49). Even though Paul was "born out of due time," Jesus still qualified him to be an Apostle (1 Cor 15:8). If God raises up an insightful woman in the midst of ignorant and powerless men, it would not seem on the part of wisdom for them to measure her by the First Timothy passage. God used women to testify to the Apostles of the risen Christ (Luke 24:10-11). When appearing to the Apostles, Jesus later upbraided them for not believing the women (Mark 16:14). That certainly was not a normal occurrence. However, the nature of God allowed for this exception.

Another unusual admonition, concerning a specific woman teacher, is provided by the Lord Jesus Himself. He addressed the church at Thyatira concerning a false prophetess they were tolerating (Rev 2:18-23). Jesus did not rebuke them because they allowed her to teach, but because they allowed her to teach His servants to commit fornication, and eat things offered to idols (v 20). What is more, He even gave this false prophetess "space to repent" -- not for teaching, but "of her fornication" (v 21). Would this not have been an ideal time to rebuke her for teaching at all -- yet Jesus did not. It is obvious

He does not embrace the human interpretation of 2 Timothy 2:12ff.

Teach the standards, but preach a Gospel that will allow for people to excel above their peers. The Lord knows we are living in a time when the blight of mediocrity is suffocating the professed church. God has used technically unqualified people in the past because of their spiritual excellence. There is no indication that this practice has ceased.

If miracles did not produce faith, as you say, what about these two texts. What do you think of them? "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Likewise in John 2: 23, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did."

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Do you believe that Jesus taught that we are all 'Sons of God' and, therefore we are to grow into, and through, our own Christhood to save the world by igniting this Christlight within everyone?

The purpose of salvation is to join us to the Lord, making us "one spirit" with Him (1 Cor 6:17). In that capacity, we become "workers together with God" (1 Cor 3:9) in the fulfillment of His "eternal purpose" (Eph 3:11). Learning how

to live in this world is only introductory--sort of a bootcamp to the world to come. We are being oriented for glory, where we will reign with Christ and inherit all things (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 21:7).

By nature, we are NOT the "sons of God" but "the children of wrath" (Eph 2:1-2). The Divine image within man was marred when sin entered the world, although it was not totally effaced. In Christ Jesus, that image is renewed (Col 3:10), because Christ, through the Spirit, dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17).

I would be cautious about saying we grow into our own "Christhood." While we are being conformed to His image (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18), there is only one Christ--"THE Christ" (Matt 16:16-18). Jesus is called "the Lord's Christ" (Luke 2:26; Acts 4:26; Rev 11:15; 12:10), a title never afforded by God to any other person.

We are now "the sons of God," praise the Lord (1 John 3:1-3), and it does not yet appear what we shall be--that is, we have not yet reached the appointed goal. As sons, you well state, we grow up into Him (Eph 4:15). We are being changed from one stage of glory to another by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). That, however, is not something everyone experiences, but only those in Christ Jesus. This is why a new birth is required. What is found in Adam, the natural man, cannot be reformed or changed (Rom 8:6-10). But when we become a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), we also become capable of growing into the fulness of what God has purposed in His Son.

I would add one further thing. The words of Jesus are the center of all sound teaching. We must remember that He sent His Holy Spirit to His Apostles to recall and expound those words to humanity (John 14:26). Jesus said we believe on Him through their (the Apostles') words (John 17:20). The early

church continued "stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine" (Acts 2:42). They opened up the things Jesus declared when among us. It is incumbent, therefore, that we expose our minds to their words.

My father abandoned me. Tell me, your from his generation ...what good can come from this, 31 years later I still would like to know my Dad but I don't...

Good does not come from transgression. God can, however, work everything together for your personal benefit or good (Rom 8:28). You have an example in Joseph. His brothers hated him--that was not good. They threw him in a pit--that was not good. They sold him to a group of Ishmaelites--that was not good. Potipher's wife lied about him in Egypt--that was not good. He was sent to prison--that was not good. Two of his cell-mates forgot about him when they were released--that was not good. But God took all of those things, and brought some good out of it. Joseph's comments on this are found in Genesis 50:20).

I do not know your father, but what he did was wrong. However, his action does not have to spill over on you. You can be pleasing to the Lord and productive in His kingdom. He will have to account for his own sin . If he has not done so already, he can even repent and begin afresh. But that is his responsibility. Your work is to make some progress toward heaven, knowing that God is able to do more within you than you dare to imagine (Eph 3:20). Hang in there, my friend. It is not over yet!

My question is, at what point does mediocrity become so serious as to merit using technically unqualified people to teach because of their spiritual excellence?

At what point could people break the rules of the Sabbath day? Could they allow a sheep to perish because it fell in the ditch on the Sabbath day? Were I to argue the case from an academic viewpoint, I would have to either let the sheep die, or ask for a special revelation to save it. In the case of people, a man is much better than a sheep, meaning the attention is given to helping them (Matt 12:11-12). Will God allow people to remain spiritually malnourished because there is not a qualified man to teach them? Is that the spirit of the law? the intent of the commandment? There is a spirit to the text as well as a letter, and God's people do well to make it their business to know what they are. If they cannot tell, they are obliged to ask God to give them wisdom. They can join David in praying for the ability to understand the Scriptures he had. He did not ask for more Scripture -- he asked for God to help him understand what he had (Psa 119:34,73,125,144, 169). Why not join the man of God in praying, "Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Thy law" (Psa 119:18). As for myself, I refuse--and obstinately so--to depend upon the well of human wisdom or self-learning when I have been encouraged to seek it from my Father in heaven.

How will we know when the exceptional person allows for the setting aside of the rule?

First of all, we have to know the thrust of Scripture. There is a Divine objective that has determined every Word of God. It is not a group of random rules, unrelated to His "eternal purpose." Those that have a working grasp of that purpose, and are contributing to the maturity of God's people do not

have restraints placed upon them. Those that are not advancing the people of God, assisting in their orientation for the world to come, are inhibitors to their faith, and do have restraints upon them.

ONE FINAL WORD on this not-so-momentous subject. There is a certain futility that characterizes such discussions. I do not say this to demean anyone, nor am I standing in judgment their motives. Paul did say, "Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers" (2 Tim 2:14). I have heard, and have been extensively involved myself in, this very discussion for over 45 years. I can tell you that you can place in an extremely small container every speck of good that has come from it. That alone has taught me it is not worthy of our emphasis or prolonged discussion. No amount of scholastic bantering can make it right to "wrangle about words." We are solemnly charged not to do it.

What is more, I know of no godly woman who walks in the light that insists on imposing herself upon men. I say, feed and nourish the women, and they will become a spiritual resource to us, without infringing upon the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. If they knew more of what God has provided for them in Christ, there would be far less trouble on this issue. To fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9, I assume they are included), they do not have to violate the Word of God. Nor, indeed, does God have to abandon His purpose because the men have withered and died.

I am wondering what you think of the Laws of God, the Ten Commandments especially the Sabbath?

The Ten Commandments are a reflection of the image of God. They are good, and holy, and just, as Romans 7 declares. But they are not the basis for determining whether a person is righteous or not. That is determined by personal faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:13; Phil 3:9). As for the Sabbath day, Israel, who received the commandment, never really entered into God's rest, or sabbath. There is a greater rest that was typified by the Law's Sabbath day, but never fulfilled by it. That is the rest of faith, and is discussed at length in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. A parallel is made between the fourth commandment Sabbath and the rest of faith. The Sabbath day was bound upon Israel because their hearts were hard. They would have forgotten God altogether if He did not demand they remember Him on that day, dedicating it exclusively to Him. In Christ, however, our nature is changed, so that we actually know and delight in knowing the Lord. Now every day becomes a Sabbath so far as sanctifying the Lord in our memory. This does not mean keeping the Sabbath is wrong. Nor, indeed, does it mean we are to demand that everyone keep it. Colossians 2:16 forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful. That is why Scripture affirms, "We which believe do enter into rest" (Heb 4:3). The word used in that text is sabbaton, or sabbath. It is a higher and more extensive rest which overshadows, but does not obliterate, the former Sabbath.

What about the text that says Jesus bore our infirmities?

The text quoted is taken from Matthew 8:16-17: "When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word,

and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." This was before Christ died. Matthew applies Christ's earthly ministry to the passage quoted from Isaiah 53:4.

Peter quotes the same passage in relation to Christ's death, and applies it to the remission of our sins, which was our largest infirmity. "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls" (1 Pet 2:24-25). The passage, therefore, has a twofold meaning. First, it was fulfilled in the healings of Jesus, whereby He took upon Himself the sicknesses borne by people, thereby relieving them of the oppression. This was a type of the even greater removal of the contamination and power of sin which would be accomplished by His vicarious atonement. In both instances, the malady removed was borne by Jesus. A most remarkable text, and conducive for much productive contemplation.

Are there levels in Heaven?

Rewards in heaven are proportionate to our stewardship, faithfulness, etc. In the parable of the talents, one steward received ten cities, another five -- not the same. This is the positive side of being rewarding "according to our works" (Matt 16:27; Rev 22:12). There is such a thing as a "prophet's reward" and a "righteous man's reward" -- all rewards are not the same (Matt 10:41). There is also such a thing as a "full reward" (2 John 8), which implies differing measures. The highest position in glory, of course, belongs to our blessed Lord Jesus. Under Him, the Apostles of the Lamb have exalted

positions, being foundations in the glorified church (Rev 21:14). They will not be on the same "level" as those whom they taught.

The church is a reflection of the glorified state. There are levels in it, which are reflective of the differing degrees in glory, "first, second, etc." (1 Cor 12:28). When "every man" receives "praise from God" (1 Cor 4:5), it will be proportionate to their involvement in His Kingdom. Jesus hinted at this when He told James and John places at His right hand and left hand were reserved for certain ones by His Father (Matt 20:23).

If it is true that "God is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith and labor of love" (Heb 6:10), then great faithfulness here will be matched by great reward in heaven. Jesus did speak of "great rewards" -- rewards that excelled (Matt 5:12; Lk 6:35). In every case, a great reward was preceded by unusual effort for Christ.

The Spirit also informs us that laborers in the vineyard can "suffer loss" by their "works" not passing the test of divine judgment (1 Cor 3:10-17). An examination of that text will confirm converts were the "work" of the laborer--people that were brought into association with the "church." Some were good quality and some were bad. The Spirit solemnly warns us in that passage to take care how we build on the foundation.

Those who have invested much for Christ will reap much. The Word of the King is, "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully" (2 Cor 9:6).

There is a day coming when those who are "first" in the world will be "last," and those who are "last" will be "first" (Mark 10:31).

These, and similar, texts confirm the world to come will not yield the same rewards for everyone. I see "rewards" as reflective of what you have called differing levels. Hope these things provide some food for thought.

How do you feel about the stuff that goes in some Pentecostal churches like slain in the spirit and holy laughter? Not to mention the incessant 'speaking in tongues' which so many regard as a mere concoction.

The Word of God makes no mention anywhere of being "slain in the Spirit," nor is there an example of such a thing. This is a term men have created, not God. Everyplace in Scripture (and there are no exceptions) a person was filled with the Spirit, they became more productive than they had ever been before. There also is no example or reference to "holy laughter." Again, that is something men have created, not God. I do not question the sincerity of those involved in such thing, but they are operating in the flesh, not in the Holy Spirit. In all of these cases, people become unconscious about their surroundings, unproductive, inarticulate, and out of a sound mind. This is not a state to be coveted. To me, it is an environment in which Satan can be more productive. As to speaking in tongues, Scripture informs us language that cannot be understood is barbaric and pointless (1 Corinthians 14:7-11). Speaking publicly in a language the people cannot understand is like having a Bible you cannot read. Nowhere in God's Word is such a thing presented. Everyplace people spoke in tongues (which means other languages) in the Bible, people understood what was being said. Men from every nation under heaven understood when Peter and the Apostles preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:4-6). Peter and the men with him understood and his house when they spoke in tongues (Acts 10:46--the word

"heard" hear means "understand"--they knew they were magnifying God). When Paul laid his hands on the believers in Ephesus, there is no evidence they said something unintelligible (Acts 19:6). People have equated "tongues" with unintelligible--but that is not an association made by the Holy Spirit. The thought that God can be glorified and man edified by unintelligible speech is a tradition of man, pure and simple.

How exactly does Christ's death atone for our sins? i.e.: why did Christ have to be killed? (And if your answer is because he was a sacrifice, then) Why do sacrifices have to be killed? What is it about the act or murder that makes it an essential ingredient in the atonement of our sins?

Christ's death allowed God to punish sin. Scripture tells us our sins were carried by Christ "in His body on the tree (cross)" (1 Pet 2:24). God placed the iniquities of the world upon His Son (Isaiah 53:6). By doing this, Jesus "became sin for us" in order that God might judge sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). God then "cursed" Jesus, a staggering thought--yet that is what God's Word says (Galatians 3:10-13). The "murder," as you put it, of Jesus is not what atoned for our sin, but the fact that Jesus volunteered to do this. He became a container, as it were, for the sins of the world, in order that God might condemn sin once and for all (Hebrews 10:4-10; Romans 8:3). God chose this way because Jesus could come back from the dead--come back from the curse of God--and we could not. Also, this allowed God to remain righteous, and at the same time justify, or completely free from sin, those that were guilty (Romans 3:24-26). By doing this, Jesus "put sin away" (Hebrew 9:26) from the face of God. That means sin has no power over the person that is in Christ Jesus. That is why a Christian can confess their sins and be forgiven (1 John 1:9), because God

has already punished sin in the Person of His Son. This truth is the heart and core of the Bible. In the sacrifices commanded under the Law, God was introducing people to the idea of an innocent victim being held responsible for the sins of people. The bulls and goats that were sacrificed did not actually take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). They did introduce the idea of atonement to humanity, which is a Divine concept, not a human one. When Jesus came, He became the innocent One that took sin upon Himself, and allowed God to curse it once and for all. This is only an introductory answer to your question. When you read the Scriptures with this in mind, God will help you understand it more fully. It is something we grow in all of our life.

A statement from one of our readers: << God does not judge .. God loves .. unconditionally

Concerning God judging, how do you account for these representations God has given of Himself. "The LORD judges the peoples" (Psa 7:8). "The Lord shall judge His people" (Heb 10:30). "The Lord, the righteous judge" (2 Tim 4:8). Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face" (Psa 89:14). Jesus has been appointed by God as Judge of the living and the dead" (Acts 10:42). In salvation, Scripture reminds us that we have come "to God the Judge of all" (Heb 12:23). These could be multiplied many times. Concerning God loving unconditionally, Scripture declares. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him" (John 14:21,23). Here,

Jesus declares the Father's love is conditional. God's love is unconditional in the matter of providing salvation for every person--God so loved the world. But that love is only experienced by those who are in Christ Jesus--that is a condition. Jesus said to His disciples, "the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father" (John 16:27). That is a condition. The Spirit also says, "God loves a cheerful giver (1 Cor 9:7)--another condition. To say "God does not judge .. God loves .. unconditionally" may sound good, but it simply is not true. That is not what God has said--it is something man has said. God's primary purpose is not to judge, but to save. God does not desire to despise anyone, but to love them. If that is what you meant, that is true. But God does, and will, judge all people. His love will not be experienced by anyone rejecting His Son, or choosing to live in sin.

Isn't baptism separate from salvation?

I offer the following corrections to some technical points in your letter. "Believeth" comes from pisteusaj, which is the verb form of pisteuo. It is an aorist participle, but is in the active voice. In modern English it would read, "is believing." Believing at some point in the past is represented by the word evpisteusaj, as used in Matthew 8:13. Active faith is required to be saved, not historical faith. You are correct about the word baptisqei.j representing a past action. That, of course, is devastating to your view of baptism, for it has Jesus saying, "He who is believing and has been baptized shall be saved."

It is interesting to observe that nothing derogatory is every said about baptism in Scripture. There was never any question concerning its necessity, appropriateness, or position in human response. The only people on record who objected to it were

the Pharisees and Lawyers, who did not submit to John's baptism (which was for the remission of sins, Mark 1:4). Of their refusal to submit to it, the Spirit said, "But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:30). If John's baptism was related to "the counsel of God," how do the words of Jesus relate to God's counsel? You frequently mention baptism is a testimony to others, and indeed it is. In this case, it was also a testimony to God. I suggest that looking at it from this view will radically change the way we think about it.

Think of the things with which the Holy Spirit has associated baptism. (1. Believing and being saved (Mark 16:16). (2. Repentance, remission of sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). (3. Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41). (4. Believing the preaching of God's Kingdom (Acts 8:12). (5. A command in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:48). (6. Washing away sins (Acts 22:16). (7. Being brought into Christ's death (Rom 6:3). (8. Being put into Christ (Gal 3:27). (9. Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27b). (10. Being buried with Christ and raised by faith in the operation of God (Col 2:12). (11. Being saved and obtaining a good conscience (1 Pet 3:21). (12. Participating in the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-12). It is inconceivable that such language would be employed concerning an optional action. It is also inappropriate to make such an action the subject of disagreement. It seems to me that a clearer association with salvation would be most difficult to make.

Jesus Himself was baptized "to fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:16-17). He refused to allow John to dissuade Him from being baptized. If we had nothing more in the Bible than this, there should be no question about this matter. If the King submitted to it as One without sin, who is the individual that will dare to refuse it, declaring it to be disassociated from salvation. What is more, Jesus is the appointed Judge of the world. How will

anyone stand before Him and explain why they were not baptized. For that matter, has God declared anything through Christ that is disassociated from salvation?

Your observations concerning Noah were excellent. You well stated that the ark "represented deliverance from the waters of the flood." But if Noah had not built the ark, he would not have been saved from the flood. He might have affirmed he was saved already because of God's promise. But the ark had to be built. Scripture affirms Noah "built the ark to the saving of his house" (Heb 11:7). It was the appointed means of effecting his salvation. Peter states this is precisely the position our baptism occupies.

Your view of Matthew 28:18-20 is novel, to say the least. To represent baptism as the way to obtain unity among denominations is foreign to everything in the text. The last thing in the mind of Jesus at that time was a divided church. The King says, "baptizing them," and some of the subjects question whether it is necessary or not? Is that appropriate? Men may haggle about whether sins are forgiven before or after their baptism--whether they are in Christ before or after baptism. Where did such questions arise? Certainly not from Scripture. Let there be obedience to the King! I am intrigued by your statement, "Baptism is a distinct act of obedience apart from salvation." Is there such a thing as an act of obedience apart from salvation? If so, why will God condemn those who have "not obeyed the Gospel?" (2 Thess 1:8; 1 Pet 4:17). If baptism is "an act of obedience," are those who refuse to be baptized disobedient? I realize there are cases where people may not be able to--extenuating circumstances, so to speak. Even that stretches our imagination, for God provided a body of water in the desert for the Ethiopian eunuch. If baptism is an "outward sign of an inward faith," as you say,

does faith ever refuse to conform to that "outward sign?" And, if so, how do we know it is faith.

The thief on the cross was our Savior's first trophy. He was an glorious example of salvation by grace through faith. He is never mentioned by any inspired writer as the pattern for those who later believed. He is the exception to the rule. God can still work exceptions, but that is something entirely within His prerogative. Paul said he was a "pattern" for those that would believe--of how God's mercy was received (1 Tim 1:16). He certainly did not balk at baptism, argue about it, or develop a novel way of looking at it. By his own confession, when he was told to "arise, and be baptized, washing away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord," he did (Acts 22:16). He had already believed. He had already repented. Jesus told him to go into the city to hear what "thou must do" (Acts 9:6). And what is the one thing Ananias told him to do? I do not believe Paul would be impressed by some contemporary reasoning reasoning.

Baptism is not meant to take the place of faith: it is an expression of faith. It is the one thing we are able to do perfectly. We do not trust in our baptism, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism is not a substitute for grace, it is a channel through which grace is experienced. It is where the "circumcision of Christ" takes place--the cutting away of the whole body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11-12).

Of course, Jesus did not mention "baptism" in the latter half of Mark 16:16. It was not necessary to do so, because unbelief invalidates everything else. What is more, those who were baptized without believing have not obeyed either. Christ's point was that faith is the fountainhead of all obedience. It is always in order to speak as Jesus did. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." He could have said, He that believed

and is saved should be baptized - but He did not. He could have said, He that believes does not need to be baptized--but He did not. Remember, the power of Christ's words is in what He said--not an explanation of what He said.

You well refer to baptism as a means of identifying with Christ. If I recall, your words were "We identify with Him by the act of baptism as a testimony to others." Of course, the last part of the sentence is not in the Scripture--unless the "others" would be angels. The Holy Spirit actually said, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." He did not say, As many of you as have been baptized have witnessed your faith to others. A proper question would be, Can I put on Christ without being baptized? Well, actually, that would be a foolish question. Who would want to ask such a question after God has spoken with such clarity. What if He had said, As many of us as make the sun stand still, have put on Christ--or as many as have raised the dead--or as many as have slain a giant etc. Why would anyone balk at the one thing they can do perfectly and heartily?

You state, "When a person accepts Christ, he is saved; when the believer is baptized, he is identified with the One who has delivered him, Jesus the Christ." Surely you do not mean a person can be saved without being identified with Christ. The phrase "accepts Christ," is not a Scriptural phrase, so people have to explain what they mean by it. Strictly speaking, we are saved by grace through faith, as you also stated. But this does not negate a response to the Gospel, such as repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). The Bible speaks of receiving Christ (John 1:12), putting on Christ (Gal 3:27), and believing on Him (John 6:29), etc. That is the sort of language we should employ when speaking of identity with Christ. None of those phrases, however, are ever presented as a way of excluding any command related to being identified with Christ. Peter did

"command" those of Cornelius house to be baptized (Acts 10:48).

Salvation is actually a process, whereby we are changed into Christ's image in stages--from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). That process does begin when we believe--and we "believe through grace" (Acts 18:27). The overriding issue in Scripture is not whether we have begun the process, but whether we are remaining in it. It is not starting the race that is the emphasis, but finishing it (Heb 12:2; Phil 3:8-13). Baptism is associated with the beginning - with coming into Christ. It is nowhere associated with growing up in Christ. It is everywhere put at the beginning of our life in Christ. Men may haggle about what point in the beginning is appropriate, but that is all a waste of time. The point is that it is at the beginning. That is where the people at Pentecost started. That is where Cornelius started. That is where the Philippian jailor and Lydia started . . . etc. Paul says that is where we all started (Rom 6:3-11; Gal 3:26-27; Col 2:11-15). Peter also associates it with starting (1 Pet 3:18). We do well to do the same.

I know there are a lot of misrepresentations of baptism in the religious world. Some are an overemphasis of the command, and others an underemphasis of it. Far be it from either of us to included in one of those extremes. Always speak of baptism in the language of Scripture. That is not only a safe procedure, it is the only acceptable one. When addressing believers, Paul assumed they had been baptized, and reasoned with them upon the basis of their baptism (Rom 6; Col 2). I have every confidence in your integrity, and personal desire to please the Lord. Speaking in words that the Holy Spirit teaches is not an option, it is a requirement (1 Cor 2:12-14).

Please send me some information about baptism in the holy spirit?

Please send me some information about baptism in the holy spirit?The subject of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit" has been heavily colored with religious tradition. If we make the Word of God the basis of our understanding, we will not arrive at some of the currently popular conclusions. Notwithstanding that situation, because salvation, and everything related to it, belongs to the Lord, it is imperative that we embrace what He has declared about it.

THE FACTS IN THE CASE

The first clear word on this subject was spoken by John the Baptist. He prepared the way for Christ, alerting men to His Person and mission. He said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). The "fire," John declared, would burn up the "chaff" of humanity with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12).

Before His ascension into heaven, Jesus referred to John the Baptist's testimony, declaring the time was nearly at hand. "And being assembled together with them, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the Promise of the Father, which, He said, you have heard from Me; for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now" (Acts 1:4-5).

After the first Gentiles were converted (the household of Cornelius, Acts 10), these words were recalled by Peter. "Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:16-17). This event occurred 10-15 years after Pentecost (Acts 2).

Nearly 10 years later, Paul confronted some disciples in Ephesus. He asked them if they had received then Holy Spirit since they believed. They said they had not even heard there was such a thing as the Holy Spirit. Paul then inquired about their baptism, and they related they had been baptized with John's baptism. When he informed them that John's baptism was not intended to be permanent, but only introduce Christ, He preached Jesus to them and baptized them. Following that, he laid hands on them, and they received the Spirit, spoke with tongues and prophesied (Acts 18:3-7). In Paul's reference to the words of John, he quoted it differently, not mentioning Christ would baptize them in the Spirit. "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (v 4).

There you have all of the references to being baptized "with the Holy Spirit." All three references were epochs, separated by a number of years. They were not standard experiences. The first was the opening of the door of salvation to the Jews. The second was the opening of it to the Gentiles. The third marked the end of the validity of John the Baptist's baptism. Three events during a period of approximately 25 years. None of these events are preached in the Epistles. No believer was ever told this was the standard experience for all believers. These are just the facts in the case.

It is important to also note there are no references, in any standard version of Scripture, to "the baptism OF the Holy Ghost" of "baptism OF the Holy Spirit." While this may appear a minor point, it is not. Vast segments of the Christian community have erected bodies of doctrine on this terminology ("the baptism of the Holy Ghost"). It is preached, and even tests of fellowship are founded upon the language. Followers of Christ are asked if they believe in this, and they are personally judged and classified upon the basis of their response. The

Word of God speaks of "the baptism of John" and "the baptism of repentance" (Matt 21:25; Mark 1:4; 11:30; Luke 3:3; 7:29; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 13:24; 18:25; 19:4), but NEVER "the baptism OF the Holy Ghost" or, in modern versions, "the baptism OF the Holy Spirit." In fact, the words "baptism" and "Spirit" are not used together in the entire Word of God--anywhere at any time. "The baptism of the Spirit" is NOT mentioned. "The baptism in the Spirit" is NOT used. "The baptism with the Spirit" cannot be found. I mention this for a very important reason. Religious folklore has taught people to think DIFFERENTLY than the Lord. When speaking of the things of God, the Holy Spirit admonishes us to use "words taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (1 Cor 2:13, NASB). While some devout people hesitate to receive this, we really have no alternative.

How does the Scripture refer to the subject in question? We can learn much from the manner in which the Holy Spirit speaks in Scripture. "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16). "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1:8). "He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit" (John 1:33). "For John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit . . ." (Acts 1:5; 11:15).

To be "baptized" means to be engulfed, immersed in, surrounded by. A vivid picture of this is seen in First Corinthians 10:2. There, Israel is said to have been "baptized in the cloud and in the sea." The water was on their sides, and the cloud was over them--they were completely surrounded by, or engulfed in, the cloud and the sea. To be "baptized with the Spirit," then, is to be engulfed by the Spirit completely immersed in Him. In that experience, men begin to think like God, talk like God, see like God. They actually become an

extension of the Lord, actuated by the Spirit of the living God. It is not an emotional experience, but a spiritual one.

The day of Pentecost provides us an example of the effects of this baptism. Jesus told His disciples they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit, and indeed they were. Notice the remarkable transformation that took place in them when this occurred. First, they were "all filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4). Their intellectual and expressive capabilities were empowered by the Spirit of God. Second, they spoke in other languages they had not learned. These were intelligent and understandable languages, enabling people from other countries to understand the "wonderful works of God" in their own language (2:4,8). Third, the people were ecstatic, causing some mock them, saying they were filled with "new wine" (2:13). Fourth, a remarkable understanding of Scripture was granted. Peter was able to expound Joel and Psalms, declaring what the prophets had prophesied had come to pass (2:17-18,25-29). Fifth, Peter saw the reason for Christ's death, and the fact of His exaltation into heaven, and declared it with power (2:23-35). Sixth, when asked by the people who murdered Jesus, what they should do, Peter had the answer, and gave it without hesitation (2:37-39). Seventh, Peter continued to exhort the people to save themselves from the wicked generation in which they lived (2:40). Eighth, you will note that all of the speaking was to people.

There you have spiritual empowerment, and it is remarkable! There was nothing about that experience driven by the lower nature. The people were completely adequate for the situation. They were not caught off guard, were in full possession of their faculties, and were able to speak precisely as God intended. No hesitancy, no stammering, no vagueness.

This was not an every day occurrence--at least not this precise set of circumstances. Later, Peter and John would be placed in prison, with no such display occurring. After that, Peter and James would be imprisoned, with James being beheaded by Herod, without the events of Pentecost taking place. Not long after this event, Stephen was stoned to death by the people while he preached an insightful message to them. When Jesus baptizes people with the Spirit, He does not do in a stereotyped manner. That way of doing things may serve the purposes of men well, but it does not serve the purposes of God.

There are some important things to remember about the events of Pentecost. First, they are never mentioned in any letter to the churches. You will find no reference to that remarkable day in any Epistle (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Peter, James, Hebrews, Jude, or 1-2-3 John. No personal letters written by Paul mentioned those events, or "the baptism." Not 1-2 Timothy, Titus, or Philemon. In view of the stress of some of our brethren, that is a most remarkable thing. No believer was ever told to seek "the baptism." It was never held out as the answer to the challenges of spiritual life. No one was ever judged or maligned for not receiving "the baptism." No one was ever commended for having received "the baptism." These are just the facts in the case. This is not a denial of the events--they are recorded in Scripture. However, it does confirm these were not the standard experience for all believers, else they would be have preached to everyone.

What, then, is being "baptized with the Holy Spirit." First, it is something done by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is an occurrence governed by Him, and Him alone. We know from the book of Acts that it was not common then. There is no reason to suppose it is now. Jesus declared it was an

empowerment, enabling His disciples to be effective witnesses throughout the world (Acts 1:8). It is associated with kingdom productivity, not an unintelligent and unconscious experience. Where no work is being done for Christ, there is no need for His baptism.

John the Baptist declared Jesus would be noted for baptizing people with the Spirit. Therefore, we conclude this is, in some sense, common to all members of the household of faith. Paul spoke of baptism in relation to the Holy Spirit in these words: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). The phrase "made to drink of one Spirit" indicates our role in the matter. God "pours out" the Spirit, but we "drink" of that Spirit. Our wills and spiritual discipline enter into the matter. Our objective is to be filled with the Spirit of God, a condition that finds God dominating our thoughts, words, and deeds. The Scripture says it this way, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Eph 5:18-20). Notice the filling is associated with beneficial activity: speaking, singing, and giving thanks. Further note that the speaking is "to one another," not to God. This parallels the events of Pentecost in this respect. Then, empowered believers spoke to people, opening the things of God to them. In this text, the people of God themselves are brought profit. All of this is the result of being "filled with the Spirit." Note, it does not say GET filled, but BE filled. That is drinking in the Spirit.

I have full confidence in Christ Jesus, the One--and only One--Who baptizes with the Spirit. He will do it with proper

measures, at proper times, and in proper ways. But when He does it, it will make His people adequate to do His work. It will empower them to speak precisely and effectively to men. It will enable them to correctly declare His Word. They will be able to properly direct inquirers to the Lord.

One last word on this sensitive subject. When men take it upon themselves to develop an official doctrine of "the baptism of the Holy Spirit," they are on their own. No such doctrine is developed in Scripture. It is purely and solely a doctrine of men. They must take the responsibility for their doctrines, and give an account to God for their development of them. There is a sectarian nomenclature that is exceeding precious to many. Words like "slain in the Spirit," "fall under the power," "the evidence of speaking in tongues," "prayer language," etc. are of human origin. The Holy Spirit did not use them in Scripture. Any legitimate spiritual experience can be described in "words that the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual words." In the meantime, we will not permit anyone to judge us or classify us by their personal doctrines.

I know it would be a really novel thought but have you ever just considered limiting things to the actual words of GOD through Jesus or as a second choice the words of the Bible as a whole that don't really need additional editorial coments.

God has placed members in His body for various purposes. Preachers, teachers, and pastors are some of them (Acts 13:1; Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28). They take the Word of God and expound it, exhort people concerning the Word, and issue correction (1 Timothy 3:16-17). All of God's people should be exposing their minds on a regular basis to the Word of God. Unless they are handicapped, they should not just rely on

someone reading the Word of God to them, or copying it in a message to them. I expose my mind every day to the pure Word of God, and I expect you do the same. After reading the Word of God through more than 1,000 times (and still doing it 20 times every year) I can tell you it gives you something to say.

When Peter preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40), he did not just read the Bible. The same is true of Stephen's sermon in Acts 7, Paul's in Acts 17, and many other places. Peter told us to give an answer to everyone asking a reason for the hope within us (1 Pet 3:15). That is not accomplished by simply quoting a passage, but by sharing an understanding of it. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he prayed the Lord would give him understanding in all things (2 Tim 2:7). That understanding is what is communicated in teaching. Paul also prayed God would open the hearts of the Ephesians to know the great purpose of God (Ephesians 1:18-20). When a person's heart is enlightened, that is what he is able to teach.

The Ethiopian eunuch that Philip encountered in the desert was reading the Bible, but he did not know what it meant. Philip explained it to him (Acts 8:35-40). That is what teaching is all about. He showed him the relationship of Scripture to Scripture, and how Jesus had fulfilled the promises of God. The Ethiopian eunuch did not get that by reading. It is through the foolishness of preaching that God has chosen to save those that believe (1 Cor 1:21).

When people are not able to open the Word of God and teach it--particularly after they have been in Christ for some time--it is not good. Hebrews 5:12-14 deals with this situation, and does so with great strength. Mind you, all spiritual understanding is based upon the raw Word of God itself. But when men see what it means, and see the interrelationships of Scripture, and their bearing upon life, they are able to teach others.

There is a ministry of grouping passages together and sharing them with others, even though there is no passage of Scripture recommending such a procedure. That does not mean it is wrong. It does mean it takes some understanding to put the texts together. That is good, and it is right--but it is not the only way God has ordained to communicate His truth.

Let's put it this way, my work is preaching and teaching, and that is what I will do. I cannot do the work of reading the Bible for those who are able to do it for themselves. But I can say some things that will assist them in their reading, and perhaps point them in some areas of spiritual thought that are profitable. After nearly 50 years of teaching and preaching, I can tell you God blesses such activities.

You do not BELIEVE in the Gifts of the Spirit?(Laying on of hands, speaking in tongues, Holy Dancing, and healing in the Name of Jesus Christ our precious Savior?) What about the Father, Son, And Holy Spirit? Can you explain that one to me? And what about the Book of Acts? and how about King David? (dancing in the holy spirit?)

We believe in God and Christ, not the gifts of the Spirit. God gives these gifts, at His discretion, and to whomever He desires. But that is His business, not ours. Whatever God gives, I accept as good and right--whatever it is. Our work is to earnestly seek "THE BEST GIFTS," which are those that edify and strengthen our brothers and sisters. There is, the Spirit witnesses, even a better way than that is we are able to receive it (1 Cor 12:31-13:13).

All of the things you have mentioned are real, and are in the hands of the Lord. He distributes according to His own will (1 Cor 12:4-11). Our goal is not to determine whether or not these

things are experienced today, but to be available to receive what God wants to give us--not what men say we ought to have. Most of the people that say they believe in these realities actually experience very little, if any, of them. The time they spend arguing about it would be better spent getting their hearts ready to receive from God. That is what the early church did.

The book of Acts is an account of the beginning of the church--how it overcame the oppositions of Satan, and was extended into even heathen cultures. It reveals to us how God works through the faith of His people. It is not intended to set forth a stereotyped pattern, but something that is living and vibrant, spontaneous and effective.

The phrase "dancing in the Spirit" is not found in the Bible--anywhere. Many have used this term to describe the exhilaration experienced when we are in rich fellowship with God--at least that is what I suppose they mean. It is a human term. The Bible does not say David "danced in the Spirit." It does say he was seen "leaping and dancing before the Lord" (2 Sam 6:16). 1 Chronicles 15:29 says he was seen "dancing and playing (celebrating)." That is how God talked about David's dancing, and that is how I will speak about it.

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three different personalities, but perfectly united in every aspect of their persons. They are "one" like husband and wife are "one flesh" (Gen 2:24), except to a higher degree. Scripture makes a big point of this, reminding us that the Father "sent the Son" (1 John 4:14), the Son "sent" the Holy Spirit (John 15:26), the Son brings us to God (1 Pet 3:28), etc. "One," in this case as not numerical. It speaks of perfect unity and harmony, with no variance. "One" is used in this way a number of times in Scripture. Jesus prayed believers would be "one" like Him and

the Father were "one" (John 17:11). He also said believers become "one" with the Father and the Son (John 17:21-22). Early believers were of "one heart" (Acts 4:32). The body of Christ is "many members," yet "one body" (Rom 12:5). There are many other references which you will be able to find yourself.

I have a friend that does not believe the Biblical account of creation, yet claims to be a good Catholic.

Your friend is not taking a sound Catholic view of creation. The orthodox Catholic theology takes the traditional view of creation--that it was seven 24 hour days. We are reminded in the inspired record of creation that a day consisted of "the evening and the morning" (Gen 1:5,8,13,19,23,31). I know of no place in Scripture where an evening and morning are called 1,000 years. Too, the fourth commandment was based upon God's rest on the seventh day (Ex 20:11), which would make no sense if those days were lengthy periods, and not seven 24-hour days. Hebrews 4:4 also refers to God resting on the seventh day, not the seventh period.

Your friend is not the first one to say the Genesis account of creation was metaphorical and allegorical. The position is wholly erroneous. Jesus referred to Moses' account of the creation of Adam and Eve, saying it was the standard for marriage (Matthew 19:4-5). Paul refers to Adam as the progenitor of our race (Acts 17:26), saying he was "the first man" (1 Cor 15:45). Eve is called "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20). Paul speaks of the fall of Adam and Eve in very precise terms (1 Tim 2:13-14). He also says sin entered the world through Adam (Rom 5:15-16). He identifies the period of time from creation until the giving of the law as "from Adam to Moses" (Rom 5:14). Luke says Adam was "the son of God"

(Luke 3:38). Enoch, who was translated into heaven without dying, is identified as the "seventh (generation) from Adam" (Jude 14).

All of these things are utter absurdities if Adam and Eve are metaphors, and the sin in Eden's garden is not an historical account. the metaphorical position cannot be defended in any sense or by any one.

Do you mean that being "slain in the Spirit" is not of God?

I mean the TERM is not a Scriptural term. The experience should be stated in Scriptural words. The word "slain" is nowhere associated with redemption. God can make a man eat grass like an ox--He can strike Saul of Tarsus to the ground--and the soldiers that came to arrest Jesus--and the soldiers guarding the tomb--and king Saul--and.....etc. I question that the term "slain in the Spirit" appropriately describes these experiences. It is not the term God used. Why should we use it, or defend its use. Say it like God said it. That is what I am advocating. Ananias and Sapphira were literally killed by the Spirit (Acts 5).

God has given us a nomenclature that will describe every spiritual experience. I am advocating TALKING like God does--particularly when talking about something God does. I am not questioning the experience. Please do not assume I am. God tells us to speak "in words that the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual words" (1 Cor 2:13-14). I am question the way of saying it, and said I was.

As to being "overpowered" -- yes, God can overpower the individual, and has on many occasions. But overpowering was not used to bring the person into intimacy with God--that was

my point. Neither Nebuchadnezzar nor Saul of Tarsus were brought into intimacy with God by overpowerment--they were thus only prepared for it. The soldiers that arrested Jesus and those that guarded his tomb were neither changed nor brought to Christ when they were overpowered. Saul of Tarsus responded in bewilderment, "Who art Thou Lord?", and was directed later what to do.

My statement was, and I stand by it: "Here, the individual is overpowered, thereby being forced into a state of involvement with God." This is not the manner of salvation. Fellowship with Christ is not coerced (1 Cor 1:9). The remission of sin is not forced upon us (1 John 1:9). I am talking about participation with God, not an experience of conflict with Him. In every case where people were struck down by God, they were enemies, hard-hearted, and opposed to Him--in EVERY case. Those are cases of being overpowered by God. They were in conflict with Him. But there is not a single example of someone committed to the Lord, living by faith, and being used by Him, that was "struck down" or "slain" by God. It is nowhere depicted as a blessing--nowhere. Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days" (Dan 8:27) when he received a revelation from God. I would not call that being "slain by the Spirit." I prefer calling it what the Spirit called it, "fainting and being sick many days." Another time Daniel received a revelation so mighty he said "there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" (Dan 10:10). Again, I would not use the term "slain in the Spirit" to describe that awesome experience. I choose to say it like the Spirit said it in the Scriptures.

I have taken some extra time on this because of my personal sensitivity to saying things like God said them. If we choose to develop our own way of saying things, we will promote confusion. People whose minds are steeped in the Word of God

will not know what we are talking about if we use our own words to describe spiritual experiences. The best among us have difficulty with this. That is why we should assist one another in clearing up our language, so it is more like God's, and less like that of man. God has provided a way in His Word for us to articulate spiritual experience. That is the proper way to describe it.

Why do you defend capital punishment? Killing is never right. God is love.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on the matter of capital punishment. Any sin that is repented of will be forgiven, including murder. There is no question about that. Scripture does deal with the matter of civil authority in these matters, although it does not dwell upon it. Paul reminded the Romans of the the governor being "the power of God" in the matter of punishing evil doers. In his inspired remarks, he said "For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer" (Rom 13:4). Personal vindictiveness is not right--but that is not to be confused with the power God has given civil government. This is a matter of revelation, not of opinion. Capital punishment is not the emphasis of Scripture, but it is there. This has nothing whatsoever to do with God forgiving the individual. Paul told civil authorities who had arrested him, "If, however, I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die" (Acts 25:11). That would have been an excellent opportunity to affirm the inappropriateness of capital punishment, but the man of God did not do so.

The matter is not as simple as some have said. I do not advocate insensitivity, nor complacency where God has

spoken. Nowhere in Scripture is "murder" related to punishment--nowhere.

There was question as to whether or not Eze. 28 legitimately speaks about Satan as well as to the fall of the king of Tyre. It is also questioned whether Isaiah 14 . . . I would appreciate your thoughts on these passages.

These passages do refer to Satan, and they do have a double meaning. In both passages, the SOURCE of the corrupt individuals is mentioned--they both obtained their characteristics from the devil.

Isaiah took up a proverb against the King of Babylon (Isa 14:4). The vivid description of "Lucifer" could not possibly be limited to an earthly king (vs 12-14). The indictment is too lofty for a son of Adam. It is something like Jesus saying to Peter, "Get thee behind me SATAN . . ." (Matt 16:23). Satan was tempting Jesus through Peter. So Satan was working through the king of Babylon, who therefore had devilish traits.

Ezekiel spoke against the king of Tyrus. He also was under the influence of the devil. The King of Tyrus was not in the garden of Eden, nor was he created in perfection (Ezek 18:12-15). Those were characteristics of Satan, who was working in the king of Tyrus.

Such lofty language as is employed in these two passages is never attributed to men alone. However, when men are under the domination of Satan, they are addressed as though they were Satan himself. In those addresses, references to origins are to Satan's origin, not the one being used by him.

I am looking for some information that i could use for both the meetings and my own prep and study on "why we worship" and how to make worship stronger in giving glory and Praise our Lord.

First, I would acquaint myself with Jesus' conversation with the woman at the well (John 4). She thought worship was a matter of place and time. Jesus told her that was not the case, that God was looking for "worshippers" -- not worship. I would develop how those in Christ provide the kind of worship God wants--worship "in spirit and in truth" (Phil 3:3)--that is, worship that is real and directed by the Holy Spirit. Worship proceeds from perception, or spiritual understanding. A text that will assist in developing this perspective is found in Ephesians 1:17-20--it is a prayer offered for the church at Ephesus.

In preparing for worship, you want to strive to see God clearer--see Jesus with greater clarity--comprehend the "great salvation" that is in Christ Jesus more precisely. Divine attributes like love, grace, mercy, etc., will assist in developing this perception.

Worship, as you know, is not by rote, or mechanical. It cannot be simulated--at least God will not be pleased if it is. Ask God to help you impress upon the people not to do as the Jews, who honored the Lord with their mouth, but whose heart was far from Him (Jer 12:2; Matt 15:8).

One last suggestion. Seek to praise Him with acceptable words. Avoid songs and choruses that are vague, ambiguous, or out of harmony with the Word of God. Remember, it is no more right to sing a falsehood than to preach one.

God will honor your effort to please Him. He will help you see pertinent things in Scripture, and guide you in the selection of

songs, etc. He is looking for a person whose heart is right, so He can undergird that person's cause (2 Chronicles 16:9). That person can be you. If your heart is right (and I believe it is), God will underwrite what you are doing.

ICan you help me better understand John 10:28--I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.

This is a hallmark text of Divine protection. There is no external force, regardless of the power it boasts, that can wrest us from the hand of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:37-39). And, Jesus declared, God is greater than all, and no one can remove us from His hand. Those in His hand are there by choice, not coercion. It is another way of saying, if you choose Christ, no one can make that choice ineffective. Satan knows this also, and that is why he tempts us to want out. Jesus put it this way, "the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37).

Jesus defined His sheep (the ones considered in this text). "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." These are people who have a preference for Christ. He is not secondary to them, and they refuse to follow competing influences. As our Lord said elsewhere, "When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers" (John 10:4-5).

Our role is to culture an appetite for Jesus, live by faith, and walk in the Spirit. God is fully able to keep us from falling while we are in that posture (Jude 24-25). The Good Shepherd wards off the enemy, protecting His own. He will NOT forsake

them. As we "cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart" (Acts 11:23), He will keep us.

People cannot fall into sin inadvertently, or accidentally--any more than Eve could have accidentally eaten the forbidden fruit. Isaiah prophesied of the way to God through Christ when he wrote, "A highway shall be there, and a road, And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, But it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, Shall not go astray" (Isa 35:8, NKJV). Satan tempts people to WANT out of Jesus hand--to do their own thing, so to speak. But, if we say "NO" to his devices (Tit 2:11-13), he is impotent to remove us. Praise the Lord for His keeping power!

I wondered if you had scripture (besides the Heb. passage) on falling away from the Lord.

Sister Karen,

Your heart is in tune with the Lord--that is why you have trouble with the "once saved always saved philosophy." Actually, the whole Bible is a warning to us about this matter. Adam and Eve were created by God, placed in a garden by God, and given authority and free access to everything but one tree. They were also expelled from the garden, and cursed, by the God that placed them there. What is more, they were morally perfect, with no blemish of any sort BEFORE they fell.

Israel was chosen by God, placed by God in a choice land, then expelled for their disobedience. God's own testimony of this is found in Isaiah 5:1-6. *"Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. And He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it, And hewed out a wine vat in it;*

Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones. And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge between Me and My vineyard. What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it? Why, when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones? So now let Me tell you what I am going to do to My vineyard: I will remove its hedge and it will be consumed; I will break down its wall and it will become trampled ground. And I will lay it waste; It will not be pruned or hoed, But briars and thorns will come up. I will also charge the clouds to rain no rain on it." Israel is a Divine refutation of the dogma that affirms when God blesses a people, they cannot revert to a decadent state.

There are angels that left their first habitation, and fell, with no hope of recovery--not to mention Satan himself (Isa 14:12-14; Ezek 18:11-20). Those are just a few historical examples that contradict the doctrine.

One of Christ's sternest warnings is found in the parable of the ten virgins. You will recall five of them were wise, and five were foolish (Matt 25:1-13). Notice that all ten virgins went to meet the Bridegroom (25:1). All of them had lamps (25:3-4). The wise had an extra supply of oil (25:4). While the Bridegroom tarried, all ten of them got drowsy and slept (25:5). All ten arose at the alert that the Bridegroom was coming (25:7). All ten trimmed their lamps (25:8). The lamps of the foolish virgins were lit, but were "going out". They therefore sought for extra oil (25:8-9). The foolish virgins went to buy oil (25:10). While they were away, the Bridegroom came. Upon their return, they sought to enter, and were rejected (25:11-12). Christ's conclusion: "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour" (25:13). *If there were no danger of those coming to the feast, with burning lamps, being shut out of the feast, this parable is an absurdity.*

Paul gives a vivid portrayal of this danger in his example of the Israelites. Here is an historical example, designed by God to teach us not to take salvation for granted, or suppose that getting out of sin locks one into going to heaven. This teaching is found in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. He reminds us that ALL of the Israelites passed through the Red Sea, and were baptized into Moses (10:1-2). They ALL ate the same spiritual food (manna), 10:3. They ALL drank the same spiritual drink from a spiritual rock, which was Christ (10:4). Notwithstanding, God was not pleased with most of them, and overthrew them in the wilderness--BEFORE they got to Canaan (10:5). These were examples for us, showing the necessity of avoiding things that bring God's wrath upon us (10:6-11). The Spirit's conclusion, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall" (10:12). Suffice it to say, it is possible to get out of Egypt, yet never make it to Canaan. Just as Lot's wife got out of Sodom, but never made it to the place of safety (Gen 19:26).

Here are some Scriptural warnings about the matter. The quotations are taken from the NASB, but read the same in all major translations.

Luke 8:13--- They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. Note: The Holy Spirit says they believed for a while, but could not stand the test of time and temptation. This could not happen, according to the doctrine in question.

John 15:6--- If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. Note: The branch was IN Christ--and that is something God alone can do (1 Cor 1:20).

Acts 1:16-20--- Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of

David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.) For it is written in the book of Psalms, 'LET HIS HOMESTEAD BE MADE DESOLATE, AND LET NO MAN DWELL IN IT'; and, 'HIS OFFICE LET ANOTHER MAN TAKE.' Note: Judas was a real Apostle, with a real ministry, that had to be replaced.

1 Cor 9:27--- But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. Note: A "castaway" is a "reject," which is what the word means. Paul was concerned enough about not becoming one that he kept his fleshly nature under control. It is evident he knew nothing of the "Once saved, always saved" doctrine.

1 Tim 1:19-20--- Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme. Note: Faith and a good conscience can be shipwrecked, or dashed upon the rocks of futility. Paul even gives us the names of individuals to which this occurred.

1 Tim 4:1-2--- Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron. Note: Departing from the faith CAN occur. People that once believed CAN give heed to seducing spirits, and have their

conscience so dulled they cannot recover. If this could not happen, this warning would be absurd.

Heb 3:12--- Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. Note: The Spirit thought enough about us to warn of this danger. Those embracing the "Once saved-always saved" doctrine, give no such warnings. They do not have the mind of Christ on this matter.

Heb 10:26-27--- For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. Note: Receiving a knowledge of the truth is equated with salvation in 1 Timothy 2:4. Those who never appropriate Christ are said to have "come to a knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:7). In this test, the Spirit says AFTER that occurs, one can willingly return to sin and expect to be devoured by the fiery indignation of God.

Heb 10:39--- But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul. Note: You cannot "draw back" from where you have not been. Believing must be "unto the saving of the soul," or all the way to the end .

2 Pet 2:20-22--- For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her

wallowing in the mire. Note: To be worse off means recovery is not possible. A foolish warning, indeed, if one cannot fall away.

Jude 1:5-6--- I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

Note: It is as though God extended Himself to show us the possibility of falling away. Israel and the fallen angels provide incontrovertible proofs of this.

We are not in heaven yet. We remain in an alienated world, hounded by a fierce adversary, and clothed with a tent of clay. Beside that, our old nature still tries to dominate us. God be praised there is grace, the Spirit, and all things pertaining to life and godliness, together with a faithful Intercessor in heaven. Certainly, there is nothing automatic about our great salvation.

If available, would Jesus have used technology?

I suggest this is the wrong question, conducive to a lot of pointless philosophizing. The question should be phrased **DOES CHRIST USE A MODEM?** Does the Lord of glory, in this day, accomplish any of His purpose via technology? Is His Word spread this way? Are men and women brought into the knowledge of God by this means? Has the printed page been used by Christ? The radio? The television? The plane?

Typewriters? Computers? If there is one among us that says He does not, a parade of believers from around the world will rise up to contradict him. From every quadrant of the world, the harvest is being reaped with the use of technology.

Believers in China, Africa, Mexico, [and other sections of the world not open to the Gospel] are being spiritually nourished and comforted by means of the "modem." When the sun goes down in these oppressed sections of the world, creative believers find ways to tap into the Internet to receive the good things of God. Jesus IS using the modem.

I have a question for you. If a man asks Christ into his heart, why would he feel that each time there is an altar call he would have to do it again and again.

First, we are in an area of interpretation here. By that I mean we are trying to figure out what people mean by what they say. The language "ask Christ into his heart" is not found in Scripture--that is the reason why it is difficult to understand what people mean by that expression. The Holy Spirit refers to receiving Christ in John 1:13, where it reads, "*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.*" Notice that the Lord equates "receiving Him" with "believing on His name," or believing what He is declared of Him in the Gospel. That may be quite different from what some believe is receiving Him into their heart.

Second, Christ dwelling in the heart is mentioned to believers whose sins had been remitted, and who had received the seal of the Holy Spirit (the Ephesians, as described in Eph 1:13). For these people, who were in Jesus, the Apostle prayed "*That He [God] would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might*

be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:16-19). This was not speaking of our initial salvation, but of its maturity. Christ dwelling within is here associated with the expansion of our spiritual understanding. Under His tutelage, we begin to see more fully the extent of His love, and the glory of personal involvement with Him. It is in this powerful insight that we can resist the devil, appropriate spiritual blessings, and glorify God in our lives.

I am going to put a favorable color on, frequent trips "to the altar." Mind you, I am only voicing an opinion. See, the idea of an "altar" in a public assembly, where people come to plead, is not in the Bible either. I am not condemning such a practice, for it provides an opportunity for sensitive souls to approach the Lord openly and without shame. What I am saying is that we cannot precisely identify what is occurring there, because such a view is not provided in Scripture.

In my opinion, some people have genuinely received Christ, and have been accepted into the family of God. However, they sense their personal deficiencies, and long for Christ to be more dominant and consistent within them--for Him to "dwell in their hearts by faith," as Ephesians 3:16 puts it. So, they seek this profound fellowship by going an "altar." They have a good desire, but are using the wrong means. First, Christ dwells in our hearts BY FAITH, as the above text states. The proper course of action is to seek an increase of ones faith. This comes by extensive exposure to the Gospel of Christ, for "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). In the continued exposure of our hearts and minds to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit begins to strengthen us within, so Christ can, in fact, reside within us. He then begins to reveal the magnitude of the Father and Himself, and their absolute commitment to our salvation (John 14:21,23).

In due respect for such souls. they can frequent an "altar" a thousand times, and miss the blessing. That is neither how or where it is obtained. But I do give them credit for their desire--they simply need to be taught more perfectly in the word of the Lord.

I know it is also possible that a person continually asking Jesus into their heart may be dominated by unbelief. They simply have never believed the Gospel, supposing that everything depended upon them, with nothing really depending upon Jesus. That condition also is only remedied by hearing and believing the good news of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world. In their case, believing is what is necessary. not praying.

What about prophets deceiving people, as mentioned in Deuteronomy 13?

<< What does this word "prophet" mean here....false prophet? one who dabbles into the unknown via evil spirits? or a dreamer of dreams normally known to be used by God?>> It is not necessary to know the derivation of the word "prophet," although there certainly is no harm done in knowing it. The word comes from the Hebrew nabi', naw-bee', and means "*a prophet or (general) inspired man:--prophecy, that prophesy, prophet.*" The word is used in Genesis 20:7 in reference to Abraham. Moses used it to identify the coming Messiah in Deuteronomy 18:15,18. Moses himself is described by this word in Deuteronomy 34:10, as well as Samuel (1 Sam 3:20), Gad (1 Sam 22:5), and Nathan (2 Sam 7:2). The same word is used by Jeremiah to describe Hananiah, who taught the nation to trust in lies (Jer 28:15), while Micah used it to describe prophets who lied so they could obtain strong drink (Micah 2:11). Using the same word, Ezekiel spoke of a prophet

deceived by God Himself (Ezek 14:9). This is only a brief sampling of the use of the word. It confirms, however, that the answer to your question is not found in the area of etymology.

The "prophet" in this text was one that came as a representative of deity. He was not, however, sent from God. The prognostications he gave did not unveil his falsehood, however, for what he said came to pass. It was his message that identified him as false--he told the people to follow other gods. The message may have been self-conceived, but it is more probable it was received from the dark world of Satan and his hosts.

<< Regarding the religions of today...those who claim the gift of prophecy, or one who foretells by dreams and visions...they are not claiming that we worship another god>> "Another god" may not be an idol with another name. It may be a fabrication of the devil or human imagination that bears the name of Jehovah or Jesus, yet is a complete misrepresentation. Paul warned the Corinthians of the existence of such gods and lords. "For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Cor 8:5-6). A representation of a god, for example, who saves by works, or does not require the intercession of Christ, or has no grace for the sinner, is not the true God. Such an one may be presented as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," but is only a devilish fabrication, created to distract men from the true God.

As to those who claim to have the gift of prophecy, nothing in Scripture indicates their words are simply to be brushed aside because no such thing exists. We are to "try the spirits, whether they be of God. For many false prophets are gone out

into the world" (1 John 4:1-2). Elsewhere we are admonished to "prove all things, and hold fast to that which is good" (1 Thess 5:21). Theological lies cannot hold up under spiritual scrutiny. They will always prove inconsistent with some aspect of the truth of God.

<< Do you consider this to be a part of that powerful delusion?>> In some cases, but not necessarily in all. It is possible to be tested by false prophets, as in Deuteronomy 13:1-3. The powerful delusion mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:11, is one from which men cannot recover. It is sent in order to justify their condemnation. I would not presume to identify when such delusion occurs. The purpose of that Scripture is to warn men of the possibility of such delusion, not to identify when it occurs. The point is, by a love of the truth, to avoid such Divinely-sent delusion.

<< They firmly believe that the gift of prophecy (given guidance in I Corinthians) has ceased. I do not, but I'm having a difficult time knowing how far to go.>> Those who make such affirmations build their case on a paper foundation, namely a human interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13. In my judgment, however, that is not the point being made by the Spirit in that text. Later in Paul's discourse on the subject of prophecy, he identifies what he means by prophesy. "But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort" (14:3). There is no indication he was speaking of inspired direction, or some form of Divine, yet temporary, tutelage. That view is a concoction of men, not a revelation from God. Paul prayed the Ephesians (who were certainly not apostles) to be given "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph 1:17). Such allows for the gift of prophecy as described in 1 Corinthians 14:3.

Much of the theology to which both of us have been subjected is a reaction to false prophets and misrepresentations of God. However, it is never in order to formulate a view of God or truth in reaction to an abuse of doctrine. In my judgment, that is just as wrong as perpetrating a false doctrine. Truth has a value of its own, and stands on its own. It is not affirmed as the divinely appointed opposite to error. Truth will remain truth in the world to come, where there will be no lie.

Isn't a genuine conversion irreversible. If an individual sees no personal involvement with the Lord Jesus, isn't their original "conversion" suspect!

It all depends on the term "genuine conversion." We are in the realm of philosophy when we so speak. I do not believe the Scriptures ever speak of a spurious or, conversely speaking, genuine conversion. They do mention people that made a claim to knowing Christ, when in fact, they did not. Jesus will tell such people He "never knew them" (Matt 7:23).

Israel was really delivered, but did not get into Canaan (1 Cor 10:1-10). Judas was really an apostle, but "fell by transgression." Adam and Eve were really placed in the garden, but were expelled. This is, of course, the lower side of the coin. Viewed from God's perspective, "the Lord knows them that are His," and nothing, indeed, can reverse that. The other side of the coin, and the conclusion of that very verse, is "And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim 2:19).

Jesus spoke of those "which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away" (Luke 8:13). He also spoke of branches IN Him the Father would remove because of their unfruitfulness (John 15:2). Also, God did give Israel a bill of

divorce, indicating they were really His people, yet were "cut off" because of their unbelief (Jer 3:8). The Spirit warns us to avoid similar judgment (Rom 11:22).

In my judgment, care must be taken in saying things are irreversible. This view of the Lord and His work can be disarming. God has represented Himself as repenting that He made man at the time of the flood (Gen 6:7). We should zealously avoid any attempts to systematize these expressions, because God has not done so.

It must ever be remembered that our relationship to Christ is maintained by grace THROUGH faith. Salvation is no more sure than our faith. We are continually admonished to maintain that faith, fight to keep it, and walk in it. It is not to be taken for granted. Believers are warned about an "evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God" rising in them, just like it did in Israel (Heb 3:12). I take those warnings quite seriously. and have exercised myself to avoid theological terms that neutralize them.

God, of course, knows the end from the beginning, and will bring all the children home. That is an area in which we are not licensed to operate, making judgments and formulating theological expressions. In the meantime, we are not to take salvation for granted. Rather, we are to "examine ourselves, to see if we be in the faith" (2 Cor 13:5). Then we are to "give diligence to make our calling and election sure" (2 Pet 2:10), believing no outside influence can take us from His hand. In my opinion, any view that makes such texts inconsequential, or robs them of their motivating power, is dangerous, and is to be abandoned. It will mean men cannot classify you as they would like, but it will result in a sensitivity that will be used of God to strengthen, guide, and nourish us.

One other observation: A considerable amount of Scripture is addressed to people that are in a spiritually deteriorating situation. Consistently these people are warned of the outcome of their backward stance, and of God's displeasure with it. They are addressed as "saints," told they passed from death to life, were translated into the kingdom of God's Son, called into the fellowship of God's Son . . . etc. Yet, they are warned that the outcome of their waywardness will be that they "cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Whatever our view of salvation, conversion, etc., we want to maintain a heart and spirit that will allow the Holy Spirit to minister those warnings to us in power.

How does one know that it is God, when He is telling you to do something that is against His own Laws and Ordinances. How can one obey when the only substantial evidence I have of God's commandments can be disobeyed by abiding by them?

While I am not able to chart the precise manner in which God works, I can give you some word on this matter. (This question was prompted by my reference to Samson's choice of a heathen woman as a wife. Scripture declares the matter was "of the Lord" (Judges 14:1-3).

First, the case adduced was true, yet was under the First Covenant, which was true, yet inferior to the one over which Jesus presides. We have "a better covenant, established upon better promises" (Heb 8:6). People were not regenerate in those times, because sin had not yet been removed by Christ Jesus (Heb 9:24). In Christ, we can expect the thrust of God's activity to be blessing, not judgment (Acts 3:26).

Second, those who live by faith will not be ashamed or confounded (disappointed) (Rom 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet 2:6). His

intention for those in Christ is to bring them to glory, not to condemnation or judgment (Heb 2:10). He has appointed Jesus as our High Priest to ensure this happens. As you place your trust in the Lord, He will not respond by confusing, confounding, or disappointing you.

Third, God does not use believing people to accomplish unseemly purposes. Scripture tells us God uses two different kinds of people--honorable ones and dishonorable, or ignoble, ones. "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Tim 2:21-22). Notice, as we remove ourselves from evil influences, God will use us for honorable purposes--every "good work." You can trust Him to do this.

Fourth, God speaks to us primarily through His Word, not mere impulse. That is the point being made by Hebrews 4:12. "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." God never asks us to obey an impulse. How could we establish if it was a good one or not? That is why the above verse mentions the discerning qualities of the Word of God. It is never wrong to obey the commandments of God, and it is never right to disobey them. In the case of Abraham, he was directed in an audible manner. Remember, however, that the purpose of the test was to show an angel the strength of Abraham's faith (Gen 22:11-12). He did not kill Isaac, even though he was willing to do so, if God commanded it--KNOWING God would raise him from the dead (Heb 11:17-19).

Fifth, the point of texts such as the ones I have given (and others are to follow) is to confirm that God does what He wants to do. But that by no means is designed to make us wonder if He will bring a curse upon us, or use us to fulfill evil purposes. He has revealed His will in Christ Jesus--and it is always to bless those in the Son. He has marshalled angelic hosts to serve and protect us (Heb 1:13-14), provided a Savior to take away our sins (1 John 3:5), and appointed Him as Intercessor to ensure we make it safely to glory (Heb 7:25). His commitment to our salvation has been confirmed.

Sixth, do not think of God as "breaking His own laws." In the case of Abraham, Isaac was not killed. In the case of Samson, God used Samson's lust, not his faith. It was something like God using Pharaoh to declare His glory (Rom 9:17). Pharaoh was a vessel for dishonor, and therefore was used to display God's wrath. Samson was also used for ignoble purposes. In his case, however, the chastening of the Lord awakened him, and he died in the faith, vindicating God;'s displeasure with the idolatrous Philistines. In both cases (as well as all others), God was righteous. The day of judgment will confirm He was impeccably just in all He has done. In the meantime, He has promised to be with us, support us, and bless us according to our faith.

God will not disappoint you, or tempt you to sin (James 1:13). If these things every seem difficult to grasp (and that will occur to the best of us), Jesus taught us to pray, "And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (Matt 6:13).

Is Jesus Christ a created being?

The incarnation of the Word is the source of misunderstanding among those who imagine Jesus is a "created being." They are fond of using the following texts to support their imagination.

(1) "These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev 3:14). (2) "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Col 1:15). (3) "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?" The following explanations are elementary. You can develop them further.

(1). Jesus is not the first One created, but the Source of all creation, as is abundantly confirmed throughout the Apostolic writings. In this particular text, His preeminence is declared. This text also views the Son of God in relation to the Father--that is, the Father considered the incarnate Christ in eternity past BEFORE he contemplated any other creation, be it men or angels. This does not deal with the BEGINNING of the Person of the Son, but of the beginning of His incarnation, when He humbled Himself and became obedient (Phil;. 2:5-10).

(2). Christ is frequently called "the Firstborn" (Colossians 1:15, "Firstborn of every creature," Colossians 1:18, "from the dead"; Romans 8:29, "among many brethren"; Hebrews 1:6, brought into the world; Revelation 1:5, "from the dead"; Luke 2:7, Mary's firstborn son; Hebrews 12:23, "church of the Firstborn"). In each of these cases, Jesus is portrayed as the first of a new order of redeemed humanity--the pattern to which we are being conformed. These are not declaring the origin of Jesus, but the declaring Him as the pattern for the sons that follow.

(3). Jesus of Nazereth had a beginning, but the Person of Jesus (or more precisely, "the Word") has neither beginning of days

nor ending of days. Micah reminded us the holy child came from "everlasting," being an eternal Person (Micah 5:2).

Can I be suffering because there is obstinance in my heart that I am not able to see?

A person with a sensitive heart is NOT obstinate. Obstinance dulls our sensitivity and hardens the heart. You are not obstinate, and that is NOT why you are experiencing trials. I speak as one who has passed through an unusual number of trials myself. I will share with you a great source of comfort to me.

Chastening is not the only reason for suffering. There is another, and it is a most precious consideration. There are two worlds--one is seen, and one is not seen. The latter is called "the world to come" (Matt 12:32; Heb 2:5; 6:5). Salvation is a Divine summons to that world to come--to the participation in glory, where we shall be forever with the Lord.

Our participation in glory is determined, in part, by our sufferings in this world. We are apprized that "if we suffer with Him, as shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim 2:12). This is not a suffering for wrong doing, or suffering as in chastisement. It is a "fellowship" in Christ's sufferings (Phil 3:10). Such sufferings are like our employees, working for us, and accruing an abundance in the world to come. Scripture states it this way. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the

things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:16-18).

The Apostles saw this truth, and were able to rejoice in their sufferings for Christ's sake. Remember their reaction to the beating and imprisonment? "So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" (Acts 5:41). Their sufferings became a beacon that illuminated the future.

This did not end with the Apostles, but continues to be the experience of believers of all generations. When the Thessalonians suffered opposition for their faith, the Spirit associated that suffering with being qualified for a great reward in heaven. "We ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer" (2 Thess 1:4-5).

When this world, the devil, and circumstance appear to convene against us, and oppress us, it may very well be because we have been called out of this world for a glorious inheritance. Such sufferings confirm we do not fit in here. They also confirm a great reward in heaven. Take heart, child of God. You are being readied for an unimaginably great inheritance.

If we are forgiven our sins, how come we are still going to be judged?

The purpose of the judgment is not to determine whether we are saved or lost--that is done in this world. Sins that are forgiven will not be brought against us in the judgment. As it is written, "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is

God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Rom 8:34-35).

The verse to which you refer is threatening if we are sloppy about our spiritual lives. However, it is comforting if we are fighting the good fight of faith. Think of appearing before His throne "faultless" -- God is able to make that happen! We are encouraged to take hold of this truth by the Holy Spirit. "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, And to present you faultless Before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, To God our Savior, Who alone is wise, Be glory and majesty, Dominion and power, Both now and forever" (Jude 24-25). Do not think of the judgment as only illuminating things done against the Lord. Think of it as proclaiming what has been done for Him--often in secret. The Lord, Who sees in secret, will reward openly--at His judgment seat (Matt 6:4,6,18). He will not forget what we have done for Him--even at the judgment. It is written, "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister" (Heb 6:10).

Rewards will be dispensed at the judgment as well as retribution. God will vindicate the faithful as well as curse the unfaithful. He will praise the ones that have believed and served Him (1 Cor 4:5).

I believe I am being directed to do a special work for the Lord. However, I am afraid that I will make a mistake in going ahead with it.

Struggles with fear (the kind you mention) are not uncommon to the people of God. Paul once said of himself, "For indeed, when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears" (2 Cor 7:5). This was not the consistent pattern of his life. However, there were occasions, like the one in Macedonia, when the good fight of faith involved grappling with fear. It is the same with us. This is not the type of fear that made Adam hide from God, or the kind that alienates the heart from God. It is an aspect of the faith-life, when we have to fight to "keep the faith."

Always remember that faith pleases God--and you most certainly have faith. God has made certain commitments to believers. "Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame" (Romn 9:33). "For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame" (Rom 10:11). You can count on that commitment. God will not go back on His word.

When your heart is set to glorify the Lord--particularly in innovative and aggressive ways--Satan will not take a nap. He will hurl his "fiery darts," or "flaming arrows" at you (Eph 6:16). These "darts" are THOUGHTS--tempting thoughts. They are considerations that tend to neutralize the promises of God--like the thought he suggested to Eve. The "shield of faith" (or focusing upon Who God is and what He has promised) will defuse Satan's efforts, or "quench" the "fiery darts."

Feed your mind on the good word of God, draw close to Him, so He is dominant in your thinking, and the world recedes into the background. Then your faith will be stronger, and you will be directable. God will direct your steps, as He has promised

(Prov 3:5-6; 16:9; Psa 23:2-3; 37:23). I have every confidence you will do the right thing, and will be blessed in the doing of it. I can say of you what Paul said to the recovering Corinthians. "Therefore I rejoice that I have confidence in you in everything" (2 Cor 7:16).

Is it enough to just begin and end everyday with a prayer to the Lord, our God, that we receive Him body and soul? Or, shall we make it a ritual to sit down at table and break bread with fellow Christians and drink wine to obey the last request of our Lord Jesus Christ before He died for our sins?

Think of it this way. Would it have been all right for Naaman, the Syrian leper, to NOT dip seven times in the River Jordan for cleansing, as the prophet commanded him (2 Kings 5:1-14)? Was that a "ritual"? Or the children of Israel coming out of Egypt--could they have just prayed the evening of the exodus, not placing the blood on the door post as commanded, and still have enjoyed deliverance (Exodus 12)? Was that just a ritual? Or, what of simply refusing to gather with believers, choosing to remain alone. Could a person avoid that without displeasing the Lord and handicapping their own spiritual life (Heb 10:25).

The word "ritual" is not appropriate for the Lord's Table, and that for a reason. As you already know, it is a lifeless term, and speaks of mere routine. However, anything the Lord asks us to do is not a mere routine. When John the Baptist came baptizing people, some thought it was not necessary, and so refused to be baptized by him. After all, they might reason, it was only a routine. But that is not the case at all. The Holy Spirit says of those people--people who rejected what they thought was a routine-- "*But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected*

the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him" (Luke 7:30).

I desire for you to be blessed by the Lord, and to have a good conscience about your relationship to the Lord. First, you DO have a right to eat at the Lord's Table because He has invited you to do so. This is the LORD'S TABLE (1 Corinthians 10:21), not the church's table, or man's table.

Second, this act is invested with life because Christ is in it. Remember these words, about taking the Lord's Supper. "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*" (1 Corinthians 10:16). To "commune" is to "participate in" (NIV) or "share in" (NASB). It is to enjoy the benefits that are realized from the sacrifice of Christ in our behalf. It is a fellowship with Christ. See, we are not the only ones involved in the Lord's Table -- Jesus is there also. His presence is what puts life into the matter. It is what makes communion a fellowship or participation. That is anything but a ritual.

***"In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes"* (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). This is a special way of remembering Jesus--something He asked us to do at this table. Look at the Lord's Table like a photograph. It lost one of my daughters in January of 1996. She died of Lou Gherig's disease. I remember her often, for she was a lovely young mother of two. I also carry a photograph of her. Frequently I look at it, recalling what a blessing she was, and how thankful I am she is now with the Lord. Now the Lord's Table is the same way. We think of Jesus often, and remember Him in a variety**

of ways. But when we come to His table, it is something special, not to be compared with anything else. It is so vital, the Spirit adds we "*proclaim the Lord's death till He comes*" when we take the Lord's Supper. Proclaim it to who? We openly declare our faith in Christ, and our acceptance of His death, to one another, to the Lord Jesus Himself, to God the Father, to holy angels, and to the world! As you already know, that is anything but a ritual.

It is tragic that many churches choose to neglect the table of the Lord. Sometimes when we travel, we can find no group of believers that break bread together in remembrance of Jesus. So we do it ourselves. As a family, we prepare some bread and fruit of the vine, and recall the sacrifice of Christ in our behalf. That is what I would do if I were you. I would then inquire among my friends to see if others felt the same way you do. What a blessing it would be to open your home for taking the Lord's Supper on the Lord's day. The disciples at Troaz came together on the first day of the week to "break bread" (Acts 20:7), something the early church continued stedfastly in doing (Acts 2:42). What a ministry you could have to people by doing the same.

Some people refrain from regular participation in the Lord's Supper because they do not want to offend friends or relatives that do not participate. You also do not want to offend the Lord Jesus--and He is the one that invites you to examine yourself, and then eat and drink.

Why would God punish Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar for serving His will and purpose?

God did not punish Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar because served him. In fact, He even gave them Egypt for their wages

(Ezek 19:19). What God DID punish them for was (1) For their iniquity, Jer 25:12, (2) Because they strove against the Lord, Jer 50:24, (3) For being proud against the Lord, Jer 50:29, (4) They refused to let Israel go, Jer 50:33, (5) For their graven images and idols, Jer 50:38; 51:47, (6) She refused to be healed of her wickedness and idolatries, Jer 51:8-9, (7) Because they went further in destroying nations than they should have gone, Jer 51:25, 34 (8) Greatest of all--because Babylon rejoiced and took pleasure in destroying the people of God, Jer 50:10-11. God does not delight, even in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23), and He would not allow the Chaldeans to rejoice in the chastening of His people.

Can you explain what blaspheming the Holy Spirit means?

The blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is not specifically described. The texts that tell us it cannot be forgiven are found in Matt 12:31, Mark 3:28-29, and Luke 12:10. Jesus does not precisely define the sin, because it would not serve His purpose. If people knew exactly what this sin was, they would get as close to it as they could without committing it. The point Jesus is making is this: The Holy Spirit is the one who works with our hearts--convicting, illuminating, comforting, etc. If we steal ourselves against Him to the point we scoff at Him, and deride Him, there will be no means of recovery--i.e., we will no longer have sensitivity to the Lord. There is a moral line we can cross, where we become hardened against the Lord, and derisive of the Holy Spirit. All sin leads in this direction, and we have no guarantee that dabbling in iniquity will not end up like this. Hebrews 6:4-6 speaks of a similar condition, as well as Hebrews 10:26-30. No person can afford to live in a state where they are backing away from God. Unless that condition is averted, condemnation is sure. That is the purpose of these

warnings--to help people wake up to the seriousness of being hard against the Spirit of God.

Since there was no salvation or sanctification by the blood of animal sacrifices, is it legitimate to compare these two covenants. Don't they in fact work side by side?

The Spirit is the One Who makes the comparisons between the Old and New Covenants. He does this to accentuate the superiority of the New Covenant to the Old. This is not done to make a theological statement, but to correct those with an inclination to the Old Covenant and its manners--to empty ceremonies and the works of man as a basis for righteousness.

The book of Hebrews compares these two covenants repeatedly, showing the absurdity of gravitating to a system of works as a means to Divine acceptance. The New is a "better covenant established upon better promises" (8:6). The "first covenant" was not "faultless," while second is (8:7). Jeremiah's promise is reiterated concerning a "new covenant" that would not be after then "manner" of the one made with Israel (8:8-10). A comparison is made between the "ordinances" of the first covenant and the effective ministry of Christ in the New Covenant (9:1-14). A powerful comparison is made between the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, and the single offering of the body of Christ once for all. The blood of the animal sacrifices could not take away sin--the blood of Christ does (Heb 9:13-14; Heb 10:4-14). Another comparison is made between punishment under the Old Covenant, and the more severe punishment that shall be exacted upon those who reject the Lord's Christ (10:18-29).

An extensive comparison of these two covenants us is made in 2 Corinthians 3. There the accent is on the glory of the

covenants. The first was written on tables of stone, the second upon fleshly tables of the heart (3:3). The First was in "letter," the Second is in "spirit" (3:6). The First ministered death, the Second ministers life (3:6-8). The First ministered condemnation, the Second ministered righteousness (3:9). The glory of the First Covenant faded, or deteriorated, while the glory of the New Covenant excels, increasing in glory, never fading (2 Cor 3:10-18).

The fourth chapter of Galatians also draws a comparison between the two covenants. The First is associated with bondage, while the hallmark of the Second is liberty (4:22-5:1).

Rather than the Two Covenants "working side-by-side," the First prepared the way for the Second. As it is written, the Law was our Schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ (Gal 3:24). It also prepared the way for the Second in convincing men of their sinnerhood, so to speak. As it is written, "The Law was given that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom 3:19).

It must be remembered that the Law, or the Ten Commandments, was called "the words of the covenant" (Ex 34:28). The tables upon which they were written were called "the tables of the covenant" (Deut 9:9,11,15; Heb 9:4). This does not mean the Ten Commandments have been obviated as a moral law. They are still there "for the lawless" (1 Tim 1:9). They no longer exist, however, as a means to righteousness, or a basis of Divine acceptance. While the First Covenant declared "That the man which doeth those things shall live by them," the New Covenant promises "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom 10:5-11)--another comparison.

In a conclusion of His powerful proclamation of the superiority of the New Covenant, the Spirit testifies, "In that he saith, A

new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away" (Heb 8:13). That accentuates the covenants do not, in fact, work "side-by-side" in the matter of our acceptance with God. As soon as "the New" was inaugurated, the "old" began to fade and pass away as a covenant. The place of the Law remains that of defining sin (Rom 3:20). But it is no longer a Covenant, having been obviated by the achievements of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has "ended" the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4)--or as a Covenant.

I was baptized as in infant, but my conscience is not clear now. Should I be rebaptized?

Baptism is a response, not something imposed upon us apart from our conscious involvement. Peter "commanded" the people at the house of Cornelius house to be baptized (Acts 10:48)--he did not command someone to baptize them. There is a big difference. After the Ethiopian eunuch heard the Gospel of Christ, he asked why he could not be baptized in water. Philip answered if he believed, he could (Acts 8:36-38). Saul of Tarsus was told by Ananias to himself "arise and be baptized, washing away thy sins, calling upon the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). It was something HE did, not something merely done to him.

In infant baptism, the forgiveness of sins to which they refer is "original sin," or the sin past on by Adam. In Christian baptism, the forgiveness is of our personal sins (Col 2:11-13). Also, baptism must be preceded by believing the Gospel (Mark 16:16), which an infant is not capable of doing. Peter states that baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience (1 Pet 3:21), something of which an infant is not capable.

Baptism is also preceded by repentance, or a renunciation of sin and an embrace of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38) -- again, something of which an infant is not capable. We emerge from the waters of baptism to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4), something an infant cannot do. Those who are baptized, are then taught to observe the things Jesus has commanded us (Matt 28:19), hardly an appropriate procedure for infants. People who were baptized in Scripture "gladly received the Word" (Acts 2:41), which infants cannot do. Those who are baptized "put on Christ," gaining His qualities in their lives (Gal 3:28), hardly available to infants.

All of this is to say, sister Bernie, that it is most appropriate for you to be baptized--not rebaptized, but baptized once for all. Your own conscience affirms the need of this. You need answer to no one but God on this matter. It is personal, and it is a matter clearly taught in God's Word. Incidentally, you are not baptized to become part of a local congregation. You are baptized into Christ's death (Rom 6:3-5), and into Christ Himself (Gal 3:28).

How can I trust in God's will and at the same time believe that whatever I pray for will be granted?

The promise is not that God will give us whatever we ask, but "If you believe," and "believe that you have received them." Further elaboration on this matter includes, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you" (John 15:7). "And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father" (John 14:13).

All of these are conditions requiring Divine involvement. Believing is not a simple exercise of the intellect or human will. It is not making up our mind we want something. Believing is a gift from God. As it is written, "For it has been granted to you

on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him" (Phil 1:29). Abiding in Christ and His Word remaining in us enables us to have "the mind of Christ." The possession of that mind alters how we pray, and what we pray for. A prayer that does not reflect the preferences of God has no Divine guarantee of satisfaction. To pray "in my name" is more than saying "in the name of Jesus." It involves having the mind of Christ, and being so immeshed with Him that it is as though He Himself was speaking through our mouth.

<< If I pray according to God's will, then I am not sure whether my prayer(s) will be granted, because I don't know what God's will is for that particular person or situation. If I am unsure of whether my prayer(s) will be granted, then I doubt and doubting is opposed to believing, right?>>

This is not necessarily so. We have the example of the Lord Jesus Himself, in the most crucial hour He faced--when His sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42). This flies squarely in the face of much of what is being taught about prayer today. The King of glory prayed in this manner--appealing to God's will and subordinating His own will. In this case, God did His will, not the will of the Son (Who was being tempted). But the Son embraced the Father's will, making it His own. He did not seek to impose His will upon God.

John also promised, concerning prayer, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us--whatever we ask--we know that we have what we asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15). God has NEVER pledged Himself to answer prayers that are not in harmony with will. The obligation is placed upon us to "be able to test and

approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom 12:2). There are no unconditional guarantees in prayer. Rather, there are conditions everywhere--believing, remaining, according to His will, His Word remaining in us, etc.

One other thing, it is possible to ask for the wrong thing so insistently that we finally receive it to our own hurt. There are at least two examples of this in Scripture. Israel, in their wilderness wanderings, were given bread from heaven--light bread that was appropriate for their journey. However, they wanted meat, and kept on asking for it until they got it. Here is the record. "Tell the people: 'Consecrate yourselves in preparation for tomorrow, when you will eat meat. The LORD heard you when you wailed, "If only we had meat to eat! We were better off in Egypt!" Now the LORD will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month--until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it--because you have rejected the LORD, who is among you, and have wailed before him, saying, 'Why did we ever leave Egypt?'" (Num 11:18-20). Later it is said, "But while the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague" (Num 11:34). Of this occasion, the Psalmist said, "In the desert they gave in to their craving; in the wasteland they put God to the test. So he gave them what they asked for, but sent a wasting disease upon them" (Psa 106:14-15).

The other occasion concerned Israel's request for a king, like other nations had (1 Sam 8:5-20). God told Samuel the people had rejected Him (the Lord), in preference for a king like the other nations (1 Sam 8:7). He gave a king, and not for their good.

I do not share this to create doubt, but to simply stir up your pure mind concerning what you already know. There are times when we know the will of God. Perhaps, it is from the Word itself. We have a weakness in an area where God has pronounced a curse. We pray that He will strengthen us in that area, lest we sin against Him. We have prayed according to His will, and He will answer. There may be other times when the Word has not spoken specifically on a matter. Still, we have an inner persuasion that convinces us of the will of God in the matter. It is like the time Paul "saw" that a lame man "had faith to be healed" (Acts 14:9). His prayer was answered, because it was in accordance with the will of God and in perfect harmony with Christ Jesus and His purpose.

There were other times, however, when such faith was not possessed. Like the time Paul left Trophimus "sick in Miletus" (2 Tim 4:20), and when he prayed repeatedly for Epaphroditus, who nearly died in the cell with Paul, until God had mercy upon him (Phil 2:25-27). Not to mention Paul's own "thorn in the flesh," which was a vexation to him. In three protracted occasions, he pled with the Lord to remove this thorn from him. Certainly if any man had faith and knew the will of God, it was this Apostle, who "labored more abundantly than they (the other Apostles) all" (1 Cor 15:10). Yet his prayer was off-center, so to speak. He did not know it at first, but finally it was opened to him. Jesus did not intend to take the handicap away, but to accentuate His grace by making him equal to it. He quit praying for the removal of the thorn, and began boasting in his infirmities, knowing that when he was weak, then he was strong (2 Cor 12:7-10).

In our prayers, it is always best to be utterly honest with God. He invites us to let our requests be known to Him with thanksgiving. He then promises His peace will keep our hearts and minds (Phil 4:6-7). The fact that we want something

strongly is not to be equated with believing--although it is possible this can be the case. Because we plead in the name of Christ does not mean the thing will happen. Jerusalem did not receive Jesus, even though He wept over her, and wanted her to turn (Matt 23:37-38).

What about women teachers? Aren't they forbidden in the Word of God?

If miracles did not produce faith, as you say, what about these two texts. What do you think of them? "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: BUT THESE ARE WRITTEN, THAT YE MIGHT BELIEVE that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." Likewise in John 2: 23, "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did."

On the first, the written record of the miracles have more moral power than the sight of them. That is one of the points I am seeking to establish in this series: namely, that moral change cannot be accomplished through the senses.

On the second, the belief in reference was of a preliminary sort, not of the New Covenant order. It was much like that of Nicodemus, I gather, who also was persuaded of the superiority of Jesus by the miracles which He did (John 3:2). In John 6:14 a similar thing took place: "Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world." Also, John 7:31: "And many of the people believed on him . . . " because of the miracles they saw. There is a remarkable similarity in the above texts. In John 2:23, the people believed

on Jesus when they saw His miracles. Yet Christ's response indicates this is not the sort of believing through which righteousness is reckoned-- "But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all men." In John 3:2, Jesus counteracted Nicodemus' conclusion by saying unless a person was born again, he could not see the kingdom of God (John 3:3). In John 6:14, Jesus withdrew from the very people that believed when He "perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king." In John 7:31, the people did not even conclude He was "the Christ" -- "When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done?"

From these references, I conclude they believed genuine miracles had been wrought, and generally that God was with Him. But their faith was not like that mentioned in John that resulted in "life through His name." Their believing was similar to that of the "chief rulers" who "believed on Him," yet did not confess Him openly because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God (John 12:42-43). It is the sort of believing Thomas did when He saw for Himself the risen Christ. In his case, the blessing was not pronounced him, but upon those who "saw not," yet believed (John 20:29). Beside all of this, the faith that saves is the "evidence of things not seen," not the evidence of things that are seen.

Can you explain to me what the "doctrine of demons" is mentioned in 1Tim 4:1??

"Doctrines of demons" are teachings originated by Satan and perpetrated by demons. They have a wide range of application, from heathren religions and idolatry to doctrines that are represented as being from God. Two of these doctrines are specified in the First Timothy Four text. "They forbid people

to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods" (verse 3).

These doctrines, or teachings ("doctrine" means teaching, or what is taught), are brought to men through "seducing spirits," part of Satan's wicked hierarchy. Using deception, like Satan did with the case of Eve, they allure people to embrace things that are not only untrue, but will bring condemnation upon them. These seducing spirits, praise God, have no power over those who live by faith and have received the love of the truth.

From another Scriptural viewpoint, this is how God sends "strong delusion" to people who refuse to receive the love of the truth that they might be saved. As it is written, "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness" (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). O, that more people knew the seriousness and jeopardy of refusing to believe and cling to the truth of God in Christ Jesus!

Glory to God, there is absolute safety in the Lord Jesus Christ, when we live by faith and quench not the Holy Spirit of God. But when this is not the case, Satan, with God's approval, and as His messenger, will see to it that people embrace what is not true. Those bodies of untrue teachings are "doctrines of demons."

Remember, you have nothing to fear from these as you abide in the Vine, keep the faith, and maintain your love of the truth.

During the thousand year reign, it appears to me that sacrifices will again be offered.

Most of the teaching on this subject has been contrived by men. There is no clear statement in Scripture saying animal sacrifices would be reinstated with the approval of God. He has made it clear that Christ's "one offering" completely satisfied Him (Heb 10:12,14). God is the ONLY reason for sacrifice. If He is satisfied, it becomes unreasonable for additional ones to be reinstated.

In teaching about the conversion of Israel, the Holy Spirit moved Paul to pen Romans 9-11; a most superb coverage of the subject. He does not refer a single time to sacrifices, or the millenium. This does not mean the Jews will not again engage in such sacrifices. It does mean that is not the means to be used in turning them to their Savior. Mind you, the Holy Spirit had Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel Daniel, Zechariah, and Malachi at His disposal when commenting on this subject. He declares the means of recovery to be this. "I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins" (Rom 11:25-26).

Notice, the return of Israel is associated with two primary events. First, the "fulness of the Gentiles," which, in my opinion, is at hand. They have thoroughly confused the matter of salvation, as Israel did the the Law. As the times of the Gentiles runs out, the Lord will again turn His attention to the ancient people. The "Deliverer" is ultimately Jesus. Yet, He will apparently work through a great proclaimer, perhaps

Elijah Himself. It is a MESSAGE that will turn the Jews, not a practice. Second Corinthians 3 pictures the event as the veil being lifted from Israel's eyes so they can see what is presently hidden to them--namely, the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ, their Messiah.

There is an old aphorism that has helped me in deciphering some of these matters. "*Tis through the known, and only through the known, that we come to learn of things unknown.*" That is, of course, a principle that is found throughout the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. It has always been of interest to me that they did not speak of the thousand year reign of Christ with any degree of clarity--in fact it is only mentioned in the book of Revelation, which is apocalyptic, or symbolic, in nature. It is the clear teaching of Jesus and the Apostles that is the means of understanding the less clear proclamations of some of the prophets and John the Revelator.

Peter declared the heavens will retain Jesus until everything spoken by the prophets has been fulfilled (Acts 3:20-21). That is highly disruptive of a lot of teaching on this subject. They spoke of the end of the world (Isa 13:13; Hag 2:11), the resurrection of the dead (Isa 25:8; 26:19), and the conversion of Israel (Ezek 36:26; 37). Jesus will not leave heaven until those, and all other prophecies, have been fulfilled.

Christ's initial entrance into this world was in order to effect the salvation of God. His "second appearing" will be the consummate all things. When He comes as a thief in the night, the entire natural order will dissipate (2 Pet 3:10-12). That is a matter of precise revelation. It is at that time the saints will be glorified, and the ungodly will suffer the eternal vengeance of God (2 Thess 1:7-10)--at the same time.

Our view of the millenium and Israel's conversion, or any other matter related to the last days, must fit into these grand proclamations of the Spirit.

Your questions have been produced by your honest and good heart. You have sensed a conflict in some teachings on this subject, as well as the very nature of the Kingdom of God. Your heart has hold of the reality, and God will help you to correlate the Scriptues in a satisfying and truthful way. When you aim your heart and mind in the right direction, you will arrive at the correct conclusion. Like Abraham, your attention must be aimed toward the heavenly country, not the land of our pilgrimage, which is to be destroyed. A theology that focuses upon earthly events is off center, and will wobble, causing disruption and confusion to the heart. Keep looking to the consummation, when heaven and earth shall be done away, and we will enter a new heavens and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness. That perspective will shine light on the subject at hand.

Please send me a lesson on the gifts of the SPIRIT 1-Corinthians 12 chapter.

While First Corinthians Twelve deals with gifts of the Spirit, it is not the exclusive teaching of the Lord on the subject. Other spiritual gifts and instruction are provided in Romans 12:5-8 (*prophecy, serving, exhorting, giving, leading, and showing mercy*), Ephesians 4:11-20 (*Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers*), and 1 Peter 4:10-11 (*speaking and ministering*), etc.

The Corinthian text approaches the subject in view of the doctrinal and moral abuses that were being experienced in Corinth. 1--They had divisions among themselves (1:10; 3:3;

11:18).

2--They were spiritually immature, prohibiting Paul from speaking to them in mature spiritual language (3:1-3).

3--They were even tolerating immorality so gross, even people that did not know God practiced such a thing--a man living with his father's wife (5:1-13).

4--As if this were not enough, they were suing one another in courts of civil law in order to fatten their own purses (6:1-7).

5--They had people in their assembly that needed spiritually mature brethren--people that did not even know there is only one God (8:6-11).

6--They had doubted the Apostleship of Paul, through whom they had been begotten by God and born again (4:15; 9:1-10).

7--Because of their carnality, they stood in danger of being cut off from God, just as the Israelites of old (10:1-14).

8--They were attempting to drink from the Lord's cup and the cup of devils (10:15-22).

9--Their conduct at the Lord's Table was reprehensible; so much so that God had stricken some of them sick, while others even died because of this sin (11:23-34).

I have taken the time to go over these conditions because this is the context in which Paul provides instruction concerning spiritual gifts. Corinth was anything but a model congregation, and is nowhere held out as the example for us all. Nor, indeed, was their participation in spiritual gifts intended to be the pattern for all congregations. Their seriously deficient spiritual status occurred while they "came behind in no gift" (1:7).

Those, therefore, who suppose that spiritual gifts are a remedy for spiritual deficiency do well to study the Corinthian case.

In the 12th chapter, Paul shows several things about spiritual gifts.

Observation 1--They are not an area in which we should be ignorant (v.1).

Observation 2--Spiritual gifts are not associated with ignorance, or the side-stepping of the intellect. That is a trait of idolatry, not spiritual graces (v.2).

Observation 3--The ultimate confession is that "Jesus is Lord," something that can only be heartily said through the Holy Spirit (v.3).

Observation 4--There is diversity in spiritual endowments, yet they are harmonious, working together, and not competitive with one another. This is because One Spirit gives them (v.4).

Observation 5--Spiritual gifts do not all function in the same manner. There are different kinds of service--serving others, like ministering to their needs (i.e., Martha, Luke 10:40 or taking a collection, 1 Cor 16:15; 2 Cor 8:4). Yet, they are all directed to the Lord, serving to fulfill His will and purpose (v.5).

Observation 6--There are also different kinds of workings, or effects accomplished through the Spirit's working. You might call these differing manifestations of the Spirit's working. Everyone does not minister on the same way--like spiritual clones, so to speak. Even though these differing manifestations exist, the same God works all of them. This means they are perfectly harmonious with one another, one gift strengthening another one--no competition or conflict (v.6).

Observation 7--The purpose of all of the spiritual gifts is to bring benefit to the body of Christ. There are no spiritual gifts that are for personal benefit alone. In giving them, the Lord has His body, the church, in mind (v.7).

Observation 8--A wide variety of gifts is then provided. The list is by no means intended to be exhaustive, but rather appears to reflect how God had worked with the Corinthians. The listing shows diversity, or difference. It also shows how these gifts work together for the common good. All of them are brought to the individual through the Holy Spirit. All of them are given at the discretion of the Lord, and for the fulfillment of His purposes.

The message of wisdom--A word of spiritual insight concerning the things of God--like Paul opening up the matter of justification by faith (Romans 5).

The message of knowledge--The ability to apply the truth of God to specific circumstances, like Paul's elaboration of the inner warfare experienced by the believer (Romans 7).

Faith--This is not "the faith" possessed by all in Christ, but an unusual faith that enables one to remove mountains. It is keen insight into what God is doing. This is the kind of faith that, like Jesus, does what the Father is doing (John 5:19,30; 8:28; 8:38; 10:32,37).

Miraculous powers--These are unusual works of Divine power, like working "the signs of an Apostle" (2 Cor 12:12), or "special miracles" (Acts 19:11), or "miracles and signs" like Philip wrought in confirming the Word he preached (Acts 8:13).

Prophecy--This is insightful declaration of the Word of God which results in "strengthening, encouragement and comfort" (1 Cor 14:3). It is more forthtelling than foretelling, as Paul develops in the fourteenth chapter.

Distinguishing between spirits--Many false prophets have gone out into the world (1 John 4:1). John taught that the anointing,

or Holy Spirit, teaches us to distinguish between true and false proclaimers (1 John 2:20-27). The person with this gift will not be fooled by the most crafty doctrines of demons.

Speaking in different kinds of tongues--"Tongues" means intelligent languages--languages that transmit a message, and within which the Word of the Lord can be made known to humanity. Some have been given the ability to speak in languages they have not learned--like the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4-11). This gift was apparently accompanied

Interpretation of tongues--Outbursts of speech that were not intelligent to the hearers could be opened up by those with this gift. Because the purpose of all spiritual gifts is to benefit the whole body, this gift was necessary. No expression is to be left beyond the grasp of the hearers. Thus this gift was given.

***Observation 9*--All of these gifts have one Source--they are the "work of one and the same Spirit." They are not under the control of men, either in distribution or in function. What is more, the Spirit grants them in accordance with His own will. He is the One who determines the recipient of them and the use of them. The individual's persuasion of the existence of these gifts is not the point at issue. These are under the administration of the Spirit of God, and Him alone.**

***Observation 10*--With great care, the Spirit develops the spiritual logic behind these gifts. The body of Christ is made up of many members, all of which are in union with Christ Jesus by virtue of their baptism into Him (v.12-13). All the members do not have the same function in the body, anymore than all members of the human body have the same function (v.14-17). These gifts are provided to assist the body in working together for the glory of God and the edifying of itself in love (v.18-27).**

***Observation 11*--All members do NOT have the same gift, nor do they play the same role in the body of Christ. Categorically, the Spirit affirms that all are not Apostles or prophets or teachers (all spiritual gifts). All are NOT workers of miracles. All do NOT have gifts of healings, nor do they all speak with tongues, nor are they all interpreters of tongues, or languages (v.28-30).**

***Observation 12*--With a single sentence, the Holy Spirit sweeps aside the idle curiosity of men, diffusing a fleshly interest in "spiritual gifts." "But eagerly desire the greater gifts. And now I will show you the most excellent way." Those majoring on spiritual gifts rarely deal with this expression. There are some gifts that are "greater." They are consistently the gifts that minister edification and comfort (both of which are intelligent) to the hearers. With great power the Spirit affirms, "He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified" (1 Cor 14:5).**

***Observation 13*--The 13th chapter of First Corinthians unveils "*the more excellent way.*" It is not a way of doing, or receiving gifts, at all. It is participating in the love of God--not only by receiving it, but by exhibiting it. In particular, the Spirit is referring to having an intense interest for the welfare of our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is the best way, even though it is not commonly acknowledged to be the case.**

***Observation 14*--Chapter fourteen decimates the the notion that edification can be ministered apart from the understanding (14:6-19). Pointedly, the Spirit brings out that communication which is not understood is a curse, not a blessing (14:21-33).**

I feel discouraged and lonely...I'm really focusing on looking at God's goodness and faithfulness--being content in what He has

laid before me--but I'd really love to have companionship at this point in my life. What should I do?

As you already know, companionship cannot be developed at will. It is too important to be properly enjoyed by happenstance. Oh, it is possible to compromise our faith and standards, and obtain a temporal relationship. I do not believe that is what you desire, and I know that is not the will of the Lord.

At this point, there is a very wonderful promise that is appropriate. It approaches issues where answers are not apparent. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 4:6-7). God can cross your path with the person best suited for you. Until He does (and that does not have to be a long time), He can settle your heart, and keep it protected against encroachments by our adversary the devil. It is really not the lack of companionship that is troubling, but the effect of it upon the heart. It is quite possible for God to make your heart strong during this time.

The top priority with the Lord is the knowledge of Himself--you having a close and productive relationship with Him. In fact, that is the definition of eternal life: knowing God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent (John 17:3). Ministering to others is a good activity, but it must not take the precedence over personal involvement with God.

Jesus referred to this sort of relationship to the woman at the well. He spoke of giving her water that would well up within, springing up to life eternal (John 4:14). This similitude is speaking of satisfaction -- unparalleled satisfaction. Jesus told her she would have to drink again from Jacob's well.

Eventually, the thirst it once assuaged would again return -- but it would not be so with the water He would give her. In the times when she needed satisfaction the well would spring up, yielding the sweet elixir of consolation and encouragement.

That is the immediate need. Out of your fellowship with Christ (something into which God has called you, 1 Cor 1:9), the rest of your need will be met. Remember, God supplies all of our NEED (not needs) according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19). That simply means that in the light of the Person and fellowship of the Lord Jesus what we really require will be supplied. It will be given copiously, graciously, and tenderly. God gave Adam a companion, but not until he has spoken with Him and walked with Him. He will do no differently with you.

May the Lord bless you in your quest for companionship. Just know, temporal companionship will be given to you out of the abundance of Divine fellowship. God will not let you down. I know this is the case because He promised, "*Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame*" (Rom 10:11).

Can you explain more about the relationship of the Father to the Son? Are they the same Person revealed in two different ways?

It is not "they" that say God sent the Son, but God Himself. "*And we have seen and testify that the Father has **sent the Son** as Savior of the world*" (1 John 4:14). "*For God did not **send His Son** into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved*" (John 3:17). The Gospel is called "*the Gospel of **His Son***" (Rom 1:9). The death by which we are saved is "*the death of **His Son***" (Rom 5:10). Believers are, according to the purpose of God, being "*conformed to the image of **His Son***" (Rom 8:29). God has "*called us into the fellowship of **His Son** Jesus Christ our Lord*" (1 Cor 1:9). God has "*sent the Spirit of **His Son** into our hearts, crying Abba Father*" (Gal 4:6). The

commandment to us is that we "*believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ*" (1 John 3:23). The Gospel is called "*the testimony God has given of His Son*" (1 John 5:9-10). As you know, the revelation the Father gave Peter was that Jesus "*is the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (Matt 16:16-18). This is the confession that qualified the eunuch to be baptized--that "*Jesus Christ is the Son of God*" (Acts 8:37). This is also the truth Satan attacked when Jesus was tempted at the threshold of His ministry (Matt 4:3-6).

These texts could be multiplied many times, but I am sure you are familiar with them. My point in sharing them is to confirm the sanctity of the term "*the Son of God.*" He is the "*only begotten Son of God*" (John 3:16), or the "*only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*" (John 1:14). We never need to fear using language the Holy Spirit authored, or saying things the way the Scriptures say them.

Perhaps some of the confusion has come by the false representation of this by the Jehovah's Witnesses. They say the "Son" is the first personality the Father created, and that He is not equal to God. This is not, however, the case. The "Son" was "*the Word*" in the beginning, Who was "*with God and was God*" (John 1:14). He is a different personality, but is still God. The Father Himself said of Him, "*But to the Son He says: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever . . .*" (Heb 1:8). Like God, the Son is eternal, having no beginning nor ending of days (Heb 7:3) -- in direct contradiction of the Jehovah's Witness heresy.

When Jesus said, "*I and the Father are One,*" He did not mean there are the same Person. When He prayed to the Father in Gethsemane, He mentioned this oneness. "*And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me*" (John 17:22-23).

Theologically, we would say they are "one in essence," with no variance between them. Both are eternal, omnipotent, and omniscient. In a lower sense, husband and wife become "*one flesh*" (Gen 2:24), and those in Christ Jesus become "one" (Gal 3:28). That is only a faint reflection of the oneness that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Candidly, their oneness goes beyond our capacity to understand--but not beyond our ability to believe.

In the case of the Lord Jesus, there came a point in time when He "*humbled Himself*," divesting Himself of Divine preogatives, and becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:5-8). The Father, however, did not Himself stoop to become like those He was going to save, and die for them. He "*sent the Son*" to accomplish this. Hebrews 10:5-10 declare the Son volunteered for this assignment, accentuating His great love for us and the will of God. The Son did not cease to be God, but He did become a man, for we needed a man to save us.

Knowing people would wrestle with this matter, the Spirit affirms, "*For it pleased the Father that in Him (Jesus) all the fullness should dwell*" (Col 1:19). That "fulness" brought God within the range of human perception. Later the Spirit declares, "*For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily*" (Col 2:9). This is most remarkable from a human point of view, yet was absolutely essential to our salvation. In fact, it was becoming of God to do it this way (Heb 2:10).

This truth is further accentuated by the conferment of blessing upon the people of God by both the Father and Jesus Christ-- AFTER the Son returned to heaven. "*Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord*" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; 6:23; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 2:14; Philemon 3).

A most precise statement of the case is made by John in 2 John 3: "*Grace, mercy, and peace will be with you from God the Father*

*and from the Lord Jesus Christ, **the Son of the Father**, in truth and love."*

The agonizing prayer of Jesus in Gethsemane was certainly not a prayer to Himself, as some affirm. "*And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, **Father**, if it is **Your will**, take this cup away from **Me**; nevertheless not **My will**, but **Yours**, be done*" (Lk 22:41-42). The extended prayer of John 17 is filled with repeated references to the Father by the Son. "***Father**, the hour has come. Glorify **Your Son**, that **Your Son** also may glorify **You** . . . **O Father**, glorify **Me** together with **Yourself**, with the glory which **I** had with **You** before the world was . . . **Holy Father**, keep through **Your name** those whom **You have given Me**, that they may be one as **We are** . . . **You, Father, are in Me**, and **I in You** . . . **Father**, I desire that they also whom **You gave Me** may be with **Me** where **I am**, that they may behold **My glory** which **You have given Me**; for **You loved Me** before the foundation of the world . . . **O righteous Father!** The world has not known **You**, but **I have known You**; and these have known that **You sent Me**" (John 17:1,5,11,21,24,25).*

During His ministry, the Lord Jesus declared His dependency upon the Father. This by no means meant He was not Divine -- it did mean He had humbled Himself to become like us in order that He might die for us, and become a faithful and effective Intercessor. We must not recoil from His expressions. "*I do nothing of Myself; but as **My Father** taught Me, I speak these things*" (John 8:28).

Also, those who confess Jesus before men will be blessed by the Son confessing them to the Father. "*Therefore whoever confesses **Me** before men, him I will also confess **before My Father** who is in heaven. But whoever denies **Me** before men, him I will also deny **before My Father** who is in heaven*" (Matt 10:32-33). Everything Jesus had (in the capacity of a Man) was given to Him by the Father. Jesus further said only He knew Who the Father was, and

only the Father knew who the Son was. *"All things have been delivered to Me **by My Father**, and no one knows the Son **except the Father**. Nor does anyone **know the Father except the Son**, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal **Him**"* (Matt 11:27). In fact, Jesus said no one could come to Him unless the Father drew him (John 6:65). Jesus, in turn, brings us to God (1 Pet 3:18).

In the end, when the saints shall be glorified, and forever with the Lord, it is written, *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. **God Himself** will be with them and be their God"* (Rev 21:3). The Son will also be with us, as it is written, *"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, **and to the Lamb!**"* (Rev 7:10) . . . *"These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God **and to the Lamb**"* (Rev 14:4) . . . *"But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty **and the Lamb** are its temple"* (Rev 21:22).

I say, that if we stray in our Christian walk and do not ask forgiveness, that the unclean spirit that WAS in us can come back 7 times stronger.

You are correct! The Lord Jesus dwells in our hearts "by faith" (Col 3:16-17), which can be "denied" (1 Tim 5:8), departed from (1 Tim 4:1), and made shipwreck of (1 Tim 1:19). This is when love for Christ waxes cold (Matt 24:12), and people leave their first love (Rev 2:4). We are told a falling away would occur on a large scale before the end (2 Thess 2:3). Peter spoke of such a condition as worse than never coming to Christ in the first place (2 Pet 2:20-21).

The domination of Satan is inevitable if we are not dominated by Jesus. We either serve sin or righteousness--there is no neutral position. The Spirit warns the church that Satan works in the children of disobedience (Eph 2:1-2). If we do not resist him by

being steadfast in the faith, he will overcome us--and there are no exceptions (1 Pet 5:8-9). If we become basically disobedient, Satan will work in us, and there are no exceptions.

There is no question that God and Satan [or any of his hosts] cannot occupy a person simultaneously. There can be no concord between Christ and Belial (a name for Satan), or light and darkness. The indwelling of Deity is conditioned upon us coming apart from defilement (2 Cor 6:15-18). Those who live by faith cannot be indwelt by demons. Their faith is a shield against such possession. Demons will, however, attempt to seduce us from the outside, drawing us away from Christ. Sadly, we are apprised, they are successful with many in drawing them away from the Savior back into the realm of darkness (1 Tim 4:1-3).

The real question is not whether "**a Christian cannot be demon possessed.**" In God's Word, such an approach is never taken to the subject. That is thinking of a "Christian" as someone that at some time made a decision to come to and receive Christ. But that is not Spirit's way of looking at it. The real "Christian" is the one that is "walking in the light" (1 John 1:7), "living by faith" (2 Cor 5:7; Heb 10:38-39), and "looking unto Jesus" (Heb 12:1-2). God has "called us into the fellowship of His Son" (1 Cor 1:9).

Make no mistake about this, if Christ is not dwelling in us, there is no protection against being possessed by Satan and his hosts of darkness. Now the question becomes whether or not Jesus will remain where He is not wanted. If He will continue inhabit and protect those who do not hear His voice. Will we benefit from Him if we do not fellowship with Him? Can a person--any person--be kept from the wicked one without active involvement with Christ Jesus? To ask the questions is to answer them. No such people, their profession notwithstanding, are promised protection from the devil and his demons. If a professed believer could be saved while living in sin, then God has become a respecter of persons--which

He emphatically denies (Acts 10:34). That would mean He would save and protect people who, by their return to sin, had become "worse" than they were before, while condemning others who lived the same way, because they had not made a past decision in favor of Christ. Such a view is an insult to the grace of God, and causes applause in hell.

we just learned in western civilization that the AD 1 was the year Christ was born, but some one else said that he was 4 or 5 when they started the date. Can you answer me please?!?

The comments to which you refer were prompted by the knowledge of different calendars (Jewish, Gregorian, Julian, etc). The New Testament makes no reference to a specific calendar. Precise calendar-dating is not the point of Scripture, but the *significance* of the events that occurred.

We use the Julian calendar system, which was in place in New Testament times. This calendar was instituted by Julius Ceasar in 46 B.C., not A.D. 4-5.

The New Testament refers to rulers and events rather than dates. For instance, the ministry of John the Baptist is said to have started in "*the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar*" (Luke 3:1). According to the Julian Calendar, this was A.D. 28-29. Within six months, Jesus was baptized by John at the age of 30 (Luke 3:21-23). That would make the A.D. 1 date generally correct, according to the Julian Calendar.

The real problem with dating is not the determination of the birth of Christ, but of the total number of years the world has been here. Take the year 2,000, for an example. Roughly speaking, this would be the 6,000th year of history. However, because of the change of calendars, some believe there is a possible difference of 3-7 years.

I believe that is observation is what caused the remark about Jesus possibly being born in A.D. 4-5. The person making that statement did not do their homework. Jesus was born about A.D. 1, according to the Julian calendar.

Having said all of this, it is interesting, but has no real bearing on knowing the truth of God.

What about a wife calling her husband "lord"? I heard someone say they should do this.

Before you jump to conclusions, the above reference is taken from the Word of God. It is found in First Peter 3:6 (O.T. reference, Genesis 18:12). "Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear." The text does NOT say, however, that the wife SHOULD use this terminology. That was a purely human explanation of the text.

You will notice in this text that the word "lord" is not capitalized, as when speaking our the Lord God or the Lord Jesus Christ. The word used is the same as used for God, but the meaning is not the same. Our allegiance to the Lord is total. Allegiance to a husband only pertains to this life, and is void if it requires us to contradict or compete with our commitment to the Living God.

Peter's use of this word denotes the respect and recognition of the husband. it is NOT meant to connote worship or a commitment that neutralizes the wifes devotion to the Lord.

This word ("lord") is used in a variety of places in Scripture for those placed over others. With the exception of references to God and Christ, English versions alway distinguish the word by using a small "l" (versus "Lord" or "LORD").

- Master of a servant or slave (Matt 24:50).
- A subject of a king or ruler (Acts 25:26)
- A child that inherits his father's wealth (Gal 4:1)

It really makes little difference what opinion we mortals entertain about the the use of this word. The Holy Spirit uses it relating to associations between mortals. But it is never used in the sense of total allegiance or worship in such associations. Nor, indeed, are men ever required to ask or expect their wives to call them "lord." No position should be adopted, however, that would constrain people to criticize Sarah for callign Abraham "lord," when the Holy Spirit commended her.

If God chooses us and our NOT choosing Him takes priority over His choice of us -- then, catch this, we have something to boast about.

Your argument is too philosophical--saturated with man's wisdom. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, affirming many times He would have gathered them together, yet they would not--and He did not. He even said their house was left desolate because they did not recognize the day of their visitation. He said the things they rejected "belonged" to them. (Matt 23:37-38; Luke 19:41-44). Why didn't He gather them anyway? He said He wanted to? Scripture affirmed Jesus came to His own "and His own received Him not." It further affirms that those who "received Him" were given power to become the sons of God (John 1:12-13). These are, indeed, strange words if choice is not involved in Divine acceptance. How do God's words fit into your philosophy? There is an obvious clash between these Divine statements and your philosophical ones.

Without a doubt, you have often heard the claim that Jesus is God, the second person in the "Holy Trinity." However, the very Bible

which is used as a basis for knowledge about Jesus and as the basis for doctrine within Christianity clearly belies this claim.

You need to do a little more homework. First, the Scriptures provide God's assessment of Jesus the Son. "But of the Son He says, "THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM" (Heb 1:8). Having heard from God, it really is not necessary to obtain a second opinion, particularly the one you provided.

In comparing Jesus with Moses, Jesus is said to have built the house over which He presides. The very next verse states, "For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things IS GOD" (Heb 3:3-4). Prophesying the birth of Jesus, Isaiah affirmed His name would be called "The mighty GOD," and "the EVERLASTING FATHER" (Isa 9:6-7). The incarnate Word is specifically called "GOD with us" (Matt 1:23). Jewish leaders rejected Christ Jesus because they said He "made Himself out to be GOD" (John 10:33). Thomas, when convinced of the resurrected Christ, cried out, "My Lord and my GOD"--and was not rebuked by Christ (John 20:28). Titus 2:13 refers to Jesus as "the great GOD and Savior, Jesus Christ." In a grand proclamation of the present ministry of Jesus Christ, John wrote, "This is the true God . . ." (1 John 5:20).

Your comparisons of God and Jesus overlook one key consideration. When Jesus came into the world, He laid aside Divine prerogatives in order to taste of death for every man (Phil 2:6-8). He did not cease to be God, but voluntarily took a lower station, making Himself dependent upon God in order to become a faithful and effective Intercessor (Heb 2:9-12).

WHAT ARE THERE SO MANY CONTRACTIONS AND INEQUITIES IN THE BIBLE?

You have a lot of questions which have plagued people from the beginning. They never were caused by the Bible, but by a misunderstanding of it. They are produced because what God is doing in Christ Jesus is not seen clearly.

First, I do not believe you are receiving my daily devotions, some of which will address these questions. I am adding you to the mailing list. At time you want them to be stopped, your name will be removed. Secondly, I will answer as many of your questions as time will allow.

Christ's first 30 years on this earth are practically ignored by the gospel writers - why? The purpose of Scripture is to unveil the purpose of God, not provide detailed biographies, or an account of events not directly related to that purpose. The first 30 years of Christ's life are passed over because a detail of them would have distracted us from His purpose. He came into the world to take away sin (John 1:29; 1 John 3:5). The part of His life immediately associated with that is given.

Did Isaiah REALLY make prophecies about the life of Christ or do Matthew and Luke simply plagiarize Isaiah's work? All Scripture was given by the inspiration of God (2 Tim 3:16), and therefore is interrelated. Isaiah specifically spoke of the manner in which God would deal with sin, with one Person (His Son becoming responsible for and taking away the sins of the world--vicarious, or substitutionary, atonement)--Isa 53. The purpose of the sacrifices under the Law was to prepare men for this transaction. Jesus said (in the Gospel of John, with which you are familiar) the Scriptures are all about Him (John 5:39). He is the real theme, with everything pointing to Him in the role of a Savior and Mediator. The Apostles, inspired by God, saw this, and quoted the prophets accordingly.

And I cannot understand why the synoptic gospels imply that Jesus spoke primarily in parables when John's gospel contains no record of Jesus EVER using them. Jesus spoke primarily in parables to the disinterested and unconcerned, not to those who wanted to know the manner of His kingdom. Jesus referred to such p[people as "others," declaring the parables actually concealed from them the truths they abhorred, and did not want to hear in the first place (Luke 8:10-11). The purpose of John's Gospel was to confirm Jesus was the Christ (John 20:30-31). Therefore He wrote those things which demonstrated that to be the case. There was a different purpose for each Gospel. They are harmonious, but directed to different audiences.

He came to set a man against his family, He did not come to bring peace (but a sword) This is another way of saying there was a fundamental difference in people. Some wanted the Lord, some did not. Some wanted the truth, some did not. Some loved sin, some did not. Jesus came to make these distinctions apparent. People that did not get along before, sometimes became friends in their opposition to Jesus (like Pilate and Herod (Luke 23:12)). There were also some people who got along until they heard Jesus, and His Person and words brought a sharp division between them (John 7:43; 9:16; 10:19). Sometimes this occurred in a family (as in Gen 4:8-10; Jer 12:6). This is the sword He came to bring--a division between the godly and ungodly, the righteous and unrighteous, the believer and the unbeliever. He brought peace to those who received Him (Rom 1:7).

we must give up all of our possessions if we wish to become disciples Jesus spoke of giving them up as priorities. He told a rich young man to sell everything he had because his riches were standing between him and eternal life (Matt 19:21)--but Jesus nor the Apostles ever commanded people to do this as a general rule. Otherwise, they would not have had resources to share with those in need (Matt 5:42; Eph 4:28).

we should "hate" our parents and we are encouraged to leave the recent dead unburied. The word "hate" does not mean loathe or detest, but to consider second place. We are not to love father, mother, brother...more God (Luke 14:26). The word literally means "love less." When we love God, we will be considerate of our parents and relatives, and properly care for them. When they become our primary concern to the neglect of God and Christ, we need to take Christ's words to heart.

We are even told that Jesus rejects a man for wanting to say goodbye to his family before giving his life to Christ and joining the disciples. This is not exactly what Christ was saying in Luke 9:61. The meaning of "farewell" here includes the idea of setting things in order, disposing of business, closing out the affairs of the house, etc. It is not the same thing Elisha did when he kissed his parents goodbye when determining to follow Elijah (1 Kings 19:19-20). This man had other matters important enough to him to delay following Jesus. In this respect, he was not like Peter and Andrew, and James and John, who left their nets and followed Jesus at His call (Matt 4:20-21).

We are told that Christ kills 2000 pigs - for no apparent reason!! Jesus did not kill pigs, but let demons enter into pigs as they requested. It was the demons that caused the pigs to run violently off a cliff and into the sea (Matt 8:30-32). Jesus allowed this because they had grievously tormented a man for some time. Man is in the image of God, and has the capacity to walk with Him. Pigs do not. This is too apparent to speak any further about the matter.

We hear of strange and cruel teachings on divorce, the rich are condemned, the lonely are told that there will be no marriage for them in Heaven, countless facts vary from one gospel to another and contradictions abound. The teachings of Jesus are "strange and cruel" only to those who do not think like Him--

people who do not have all of the facts before them. His teachings were not on divorce, but upon marriage, which God did not intend to be handled at the caprice of fickle people. It was instituted by God, and that for the purpose of mutual help, the means of satisfying natural desires, and the bearing of children. Divorce is what is cruel, not the teachings of Jesus. It is a heartless thrusting away of one to whom a commitment has been made in preference for other desires (Matt 19:9).

The rich are NOT condemned. Abraham was rich (Gen 24:35), yet was the "friend of God" (James 2:23). Job was rich (Job 1:3), yet was highly esteemed by God. Riches are condemned when they are an end of themselves--when they draw the heart from God. The "rich" men in Scripture who are condemned receive judgment because they did not use their riches properly (Luke 16:19-22), or trusted in them (Luke 12:16-18). Riches are temporal, and as such are not to capture our hearts. We are to use them, they are not to use us.

Jesus performs many miracles, but very few details are given regarding the miracles themselves (the epistle writers don't even mention them) The point is not the details of the miracles, but the REASON for them. John, with which you are familiar, covered this subject when he wrote, "And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:30-31).

we are never told why Jesus accuses God of forsaking him. Jesus did not "accuse" God of forsaking Him, but revealed it. The purpose is delineated in Scripture. It was during this time that Jesus was "made a curse" for us (Gal 3:13). It was then, upon the cross, that Jesus "became sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). After enduring this unspeakable

judgment against our sin, which was "in His body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24), Jesus came back from the dead, fully recovering-- something we could not have done. Thus the full penalty for sin was paid.

St Paul, who, as far as I can tell, never even met Jesus, condones slavery and homophobia and tells us that "it is good for a man not to marry". Paul did not say, nor does any inspired man, that slavery was condoned. What he did do, under the inspiration of God, was instruct slaves to live their lives for the Lord, honoring their masters, especially if they were believers (Eph 6:5-6; Col 3:22-23). Masters, on the other hand, were told to be considerate of their slaves, treated them equitably and fairly (Eph 6:9; Col 4:1). By doing this heartily, and to the Lord, slavery would eventually disappear. This was nothing less than a Divine strategy to remove the practice.

As to "homophobia," that is a human term and concept. God has declared without any ambiguity whatsoever, that man lying with men and women with women contradicts nature itself, as well as God (Rom 1:26-27). The fact that such a manner of life cannot produce another generation speaks for itself. The preferences of fallen humanity will not be forced upon God. God will, however, eventually bring every such work into judgment. We will find out at that time who was right. Of course, it is to our advantage to get in on that answer now.

Paul's advise to remain single was given for a "present distress," or unusual circumstance (1 Cor 7:26). This probably was a fierce persecution (which history seems to confirm) that would mean the death of many believers. Marriage, under such circumstances, would not only be cut short, but would be a handicap when facing death for Jesus' sake.

He tells us that women should have long hair (and cover their heads) but men should not, women should be silent (especially

in church), avoid teaching, expensive clothes, jewellery, etc. and "submit" to their husbands. Paul did give recommendations concerning hair, saying it was the glory of a woman. He also said there should be no contention about the matter, saying that was the custom of the churches at that time (1 Cor 11:16). It appears to be more cultural than a spiritual requirement for all generations.

Under ordinary circumstances, women were not to assume leadership in teaching. Paul did say they could, under proper consideration of God and their brethren, prophesy and pray in the church (1 Cor 11:5). This was to be done with the Divine order of things in mind: namely, the head of woman is man, the head of the man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor 11:3). Jesus doesn't complain about having a Head, and neither should the man or the woman.

The Scriptures do not say women should not wear expensive clothes, jewelry, etc., but that this should not be the source of their beauty (1 Pet 3:3-4).

We are told to "rejoice" in suffering, while those who have not yet heard the gospel are condemned. Rejoicing in suffering is done by way of comparison. When considering the glories of the world to come, and eternity with the Lord, the sufferings of this world become light (2 Cor 4:17; Rom 8:18). They are confirmation that we are strangers in this world, which is going to pass away. Particularly when they are for righteousness sake, they are a form of fellowship with Christ, who was rejected by this world, and endured suffering from it (Phil 3:10; Col 1:24).

And in the Old Testament, incest is seemingly condoned, circumcision (self-mutilation) is encouraged, children are stoned, beaten, sacrificed and ripped apart while a "vengeful" God kills and tortures (often innocent) people with frightening consistency. God "wrestles" with Jacob, attempts to kill Moses, dictates (?) the specifications of the ark, introduces very

specific food laws and punishes children for the sins of their parents. There are constant sacrifices, rituals and new laws, insane visions and long (seemingly pointless) lists of names. Noah becomes a father at the age of 500, Adam lives to be 930 and Satan appears in Heaven (Job 1:6-12). The Old testament prophets seem to predict very little and fail to mention ANY of the important events which have shaped the 20th century.

This entire assessment is an attempt to stuff God into the mold of human understanding. I can answer all of these objections, but do not feel inclined to do so. It seems to me that it is on the part of wisdom to ask God for wisdom to understand Him, rather than trying to explain why He is not like man. There are reasons that will be adduced in the day of judgment that will explain things difficult to discern now. We will find God was righteous in all that He did, even though it was not clearly perceived here. This is where faith must take over, believing God is righteous in all that He does. If we cannot believe that, there is no hope for us, nor any satisfactory explanations. I ought to add, the things you mentioned were temporary, and eventually came to a conclusion.

The 20th Century has produced significant things in human estimation, but they are not significant in view of eternity. The earth, and all the works that are in it, are going to be burned up (2 Pet 3:10-12). In view of that, the innovations of this century are not really significant.

In the final book of the New Testament, Jesus promises, "I am coming soon" - why? That was almost 2000 years ago!! This is language to faith, not to a time-calculating mind. It is saying the next significant event will be Christ's return. It is "soon" in the sense that every believing generation has expected it, and looked forward to it. Faith makes it "soon"--it is lengthy from any other point of view.

And the "Heaven" described in the book of Revelation is a surreal and terrifying place (Revelation 4:2-8). The book of Revelation is an apocalyptic book, portraying things in symbolic language. In the case of heaven, there is no other language capable of transmitting to our understanding a precisely accurate picture. The symbols in the text you mentioned denote value, preciousness, a holy environment, and one that is arresting to those around the throne.

PERSONAL WORD. Your communication was troubling to me. I did not care for the tone of it, and recommend that you revisit your questions from a different point of view. It is obvious that you lack wisdom, as you yourself acknowledge. God can, however, give you satisfying wisdom from above (James 1:5). But you must ask Him for it in faith, not in the grip of doubt and unbelief. I humbly suggest you stand on precarious ground when you charge God Almighty with indiscretion, thoughtlessness, brutality, and the like. You must repent of such intemperant language.

Where are the dead?

The Word of God gives us some information on this subject, but not enough to satisfy the curiosity of men. The purpose of the information is to assure us the dead are not non-existent--that they have not ceased to be. The Word of God sets everything in the context of God's purpose. Things that are relevant to that purpose are delineated. In regards to the dead, we will find they have not ceased to exist, and they are conscience. Their present state reflects their eternal lot--i.e., they are either being tormented or comforted. Scripture will also confirm they are confined to their present location until the time of the resurrection. With these preliminary thoughts in mind, here are some Divine utterances on the subject.

1. "Spirits now in prison" (1 Pet 3:19). In one of the passages that has mystified men for centuries, Peter refers to those who were disobedient in the time of Noah. He states that Jesus, in the Spirit,

went and preached to these "spirits." Later in First Peter, he informs us that the "Gospel" was preached to "those who are dead" (1 Pet 4:6). Without extensive elaboration, we are told they are "NOW in prison." The use of the word "prison" does not necessarily connote punishment, but is rather descriptive of a state of confinement or restriction--a place of holding. Those in this place are conscious, because the Gospel was preached to them. We are not told of their response, and it is not wise to speculate on the matter. We are not apprized of the location of this place of holding.

2. "Underneath the altar" (Rev 6:9; 20:4). Here, reference is made to those who were martyred for the name of the Lord Jesus. They did not pass into oblivion, or cease to be. They are depicted as being "under the altar, or in close proximity to the Living God. They are perceptive, and know something of what is occurring upon the earth. They ask "How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:10). They knew their persecutors remained unpunished for the despicable sin of killing God's witnesses. They were told to "rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also" (Rev 6:11), and were given a "white robe," depicting the recognition of the righteous state in which they now exist. With this sparse amount of information, we learn the righteous dead are close to the Lord, commune with Him, and He with them. They are also aware of the activities upon earth to some degree.

3. "Present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). Here Paul describes death as being "absent from the body," indicating the complexity of humanity. There is a part of us--the fundamental part--that leaves the body at death. For the believer, that part (our regenerated spirit) goes to be with the Lord. We are not told to what degree this presence is realized. It cannot be the fulness of it, or what will be experienced in the world to come, but it is

decidedly greater and more blessed than our walk with the Lord in this world. Suffice it to say, death will bring us closer to the Lord, inducting a state for believers that is "far better." That condition, Paul says, is "preferred" over life in this body .

4. "In hell (hades) he lifted up his eyes" (Luke 16:23). Jesus provides us with a glimpse beyond the grave in the sixteenth chapter of the book of Luke. Some have said this is a parable, but this is not true. Jesus used specific names here, even referring to Abraham. He never did this when using Parables. In them, people were always characterized by anonymity ("a certain man," a "judge," a "widow," etc.), but this account is specific. Here is the solitary glimpse of the present state of the ungodly. The rich man is said to have "lifted up his eyes, being in torment." He "saw Abraham far off," and even spoke with him. He knew about his brothers upon earth, and asked that someone be sent to them to warn them of this place. He also saw Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, and asked that he be sent with his finger dipped in water to cool his burning tongue. Here we learn another aspect of the state of the dead. Abraham said personalities could not cross over from the place of torment to the place of blessing, or vice versa. We are not told of the location of this realm, called in general terms "Hades." We do know it is comprised of two areas--one of torment, and one of comfort and blessing. We also know it is a place where spirits learn of things they did not know when in the world. Abraham spoke from this place of "Moses and the prophets" (Luke 16:29). Neither Moses nor the prophets were in the world when Abraham lived. He learned of them after he died, showing he was conscience and capable of learning understanding.

5. "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). While the rich man was in torment, Lazarus was being comforted, or consoled. He had experienced hardship in the world, being a "beggar full of sores." But now he was free from all of that--no more torment, only consolation. We are not told of the nature of this comfort, or

provided any further details. It is enough to know, the godly, after their death, will be richly repaid, and gloriously comforted for any hardship they endured while in the world.

Once again, we are not provided further details about the location of the dead. Hebrews 12:1-2 suggests the righteous dead are, in some sense presently around us as a "great cloud of witnesses." Hebrews 12:22-23 declares we have come into the fellowship of these "spirits of just man made perfect." So, in some sense, we are even now with them. We must allow this amount of information to satisfy us for now. It is enough to confirm to us that we will continue to exist after we die.

When did satan fall?

Once again, we are not provided a lot of details on this subject. The reason for the lack of details is that it is not pertinent to our salvation. We are, however, told enough to give us an intelligent view of our adversary. The information may appear vague, and some students of Scripture reject the following passages as even referring to Satan. I will show why their assumption is not warranted.

1. Lucifer's fall - Isaiah 14:12-14. Scripture indicates that Satan was not always evil. The word "Lucifer" means "Star of the morning," and depicts a lofty state. The fourteenth chapter of Isaiah speaks of Lucifer's fall. The direct reference of the passage is to the fall of Babylon. "Lucifer," or "son of the morning," is mentioned because Babylon had satanic attributes. Thus God refers to the fall of the wicked one. His fall is attributed to his desire to "exalt" his throne "above the stars of God." he said, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the

Most High" (Isa 14:13-14). We are not told WHEN this occurred. That is of no value to us. It is enough to know that when our adversary sought to displace God, he himself was thrust out from the presence of the Lord. Pride was the cause of his downfall, and he now seeks to fill men with that same diabolical desire.

2. Perfect, then fallen Ezekiel 28:12-17. A most arresting picture of Satan's fall is described in the book of Ezekiel. Again, on the surface, the text does not appear to be talking about Satan. It is addressed to "The king of Tyre." However, this wicked king has taken upon himself the traits of the devil, and thus was addressed as though he were the devil himself. No one should balk at this, for Jesus once spoke to Simon Peter as though he were the devil, saying, "Get behind me Satan . . ." (Matt 16:23). The Ezekiel text confirms Satan was created upright and perfect, that he was unusually wise, that he was in Eden, and was perfect in his ways from the day he was created (verses 13-15). None of that was true of the king of Tyre--but it was true of Satan. However, Satan's heart was "lifted up because of his beauty," and he became corrupt (verse 17). For this reason, he fell, being cast out of heaven.

The falling of Satan is seen from another perspective in the Gospels. The above texts speak of the corrupting of Satan's nature, which led to his expulsion from the presence of the Lord. There is, however, another sense in which Satan has fallen--in the loss of his dominating influence among men. Although cast out of heaven, he still reported back to God, so to speak. This is seen in the first and second chapters of Job, where Satan is seen appearing before the Lord, giving an account of his activities (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). Here is seen as an accuser, bringing charges against the people of God before the throne of God. The following texts unveil how he has been toppled from that accusing role.

3. Jesus beholds Satan fall from heaven - Luke 10:18. When Jesus sent out the seventy, He gave them power over Satan's

domain. Their particular mandate was, "heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:9). When the seventy returned, they reported phenomenal success. "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name" (Luke 10:17). The Lord replied, referring to the overthrow of Satan. "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall injure you" (Luke 10:18-19). In this case, the hold of Satan over men was being broken--not because men were so powerful, but because he had been deposed by the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus was binding the strong man (Matt 12:29-30). He could not hold men when Jesus released them.

4. Depicted as being overthrown by angels - Rev 12:7-10. The overthrow of Satan is also associated with the coming of salvation through the atoning death of Christ. This is seen in the apocalyptic (symbolic) language of the book of The Revelation. There most precise language is used to show the effectiveness of Christ's death, and the availability of salvation to all men. "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev 12:7-9). We are not left to conjecture about the meaning of this overthrow. It is not the same as the one mentioned in Isaiah and Ezekiel. Nor, indeed, is it the same as that of Luke 10, where his power was effectively offset by the seventy. Here is a description of salvation, and the complete removal of Satan as an accuser of the brethren before God. That is another way of saying sin had been effectively removed. There was no longer any basis for accusing the brethren, therefore the accuser was removed. The heavenly response to this removal confirms this

to be the case. "And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death" (Rev 12:10-11).

God be praised! Satan has been overthrown in every respect! He has been cast out from the presence of the Lord as no longer accepted. He has fallen in the matter of his dominion over men. He has also been thrown down as an accuser, unable to raise an accusation against the people of the Lord. That is, the redeemed can overcome the devil--in their death, as well as in their life.

What is the meaning of Luke 5:37-38 (new wine in old wineskins)?

"No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, he pours new wine into new wineskins."

The comparison is made between the Old and New covenants. The Old Covenant was primarily one of form or procedure. Hebrews 9:10 reminds us that, at its pinnacle, it "stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation." The law did not impart spiritual life (Gal 3:21), and was not an economy of faith (Gal 3:12). It brought the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20), but provided no power to overcome it. Because of its convicting power, it brought us to Christ (Gal 3:24), but could not put us into Him.

The New Covenant, on the other hand, involves being alive to God (Rom 6:11), fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and eternal life (1 John 5:13). Jesus came that we might have life, and have it "more abundantly" (John 10:10). There is a reciprocity to God within the New Covenant that was not offered under the Law. In Christ, there is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). We emerge from the waters of baptism to walk in "newness of life"--something never experienced under the First Covenant.

Jesus is saying you cannot take the spiritual life experienced in the New Covenant and adapt it to the Old Covenant manner. You cannot proceduralize life, or confine it to a mere routine. It cannot be seasonal, as were the feasts under the Law (Ex 23:14-17). While form is involved in the New Covenant, spiritual life cannot be confined to it. Life in Christ cannot be held within the boundaries of a code or set of procedures. Believers are told, God "is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph 3:20). The Apostle prays that God will open the eyes of believer's hearts to see "the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Eph 1:19). That kind of life cannot be put into the old wineskins of Law. Neither can it be superimposed upon a proceduralized religion.

This is the point Paul made to the Colossians. "Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations; 'Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,' which all concern things which perish with the using; according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh" (2:20-23). A routine--even a God-ordained one like the Tabernacle service--could never take away the love or appetite for sin. Life in Christ can.

The New Covenant is a better one, established upon better promises (Heb 8:6). It cannot be poured into the form of the Old Covenant without destroying that covenant, and losing its own vitality as well.

The remedy is stated in the next verse, Luke 5:38. "But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved." Our new life becomes effectual by a New Covenant walk -- a walk that includes knowing God, walking by faith, and walking in the Spirit. The way to preserve our life in Christ is to avail ourselves of the glorious privileges of the New Covenant--i.e., Having His law written upon our hearts and minds, knowing the Lord, and experiencing complete exoneration from guilt (Heb 8:10-12). IN OTHER WORDS, WE OURSELVES BECOME THE NEW WINESKINS. The "newness of life" is preserved, so to speak, within us, and we are also preserved, or sanctified, by that life. To put it in words of Scripture, "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

WHAT IS, THE CIRCUMSION OF CHRIST, MENTIONED IN COLOSSIANS 2:11?

"The circumcision of Christ" is a rarely addressed by our brethren, but is a great source of strength for us. The very word "circumcision," as used in this text, would have no significance at all were it not for its introduction in Abraham, and codification under the Law. In Christ, circumcision involves more than the remission of individual transgressions. It is "the removal of the body of the flesh" (Col 2:11, NASB). The NIV says, "circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature." This is the reality to which Romans 6:6 refers (also commenting on the effects of baptism). "knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our

body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin."

The removal of "the body of sin," or the "body of the flesh," or the "sinful nature," declares our liberty from enslavement to sin. In our justification, the essential person is a "new creation in Christ Jesus." Although we find "another law in our members, warring against the law of our minds," that wayward principle is really "not I" (Rom 7:16,17,23). The reason it is not, is owing to "the circumcision of Christ," which cut away from us the whole mass of sin, making it distinct from us. Because of this, we can say "NO" to worldly lusts and ungodliness (Tit 2:11-12). This is why "sin shall not have dominion over" the person who lives by faith (Rom 6:14). The person in Christ is a dichotomy. He is a new creation in Christ Jesus, yet carries with him the "old man" which is "corrupt according to deceitful lusts." Because that part of us has been legally and effectively cut off by the circumcision of Christ, and is really separate from us, we can "put off the old man" (Eph 4:22-23). Were it not the "the circumcision of Christ," this could not be done.

If this "circumcision" did not occur, there has been no genuine baptism at all. The power of baptism is what is accomplished by God and Christ in it. In the case of "the circumcision of Christ," the Holy Spirit declares it takes place IN our baptism. That is what enabled us to be "raised up with Him through faith" following our burial with Him into death.

Was Jesus in the tomb three full days and three full nights? Why is it said He rose on the "third day?"

The question you raise is a common one among doubters and critics of Scripture. I realize this is not the case with you. Several difficulties surround the texts in question. Most of them are owing

to the Western way of reckoning time. "Day"=24 hours in our culture. It equals evening and morning in the Scripture. The Jews had no word for "day" as a 24 hour period.

A good example of this is found in the book of Esther. The value of the passage is that is almost an exact parallel to the phraseology found in Matthew. It also shows the manner of reasoning in the Eastern culture. When preparing to go into the king, Esther said, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." Note the phrase "for three days, night or day." When the time came for Esther to go in to the king, the account reads this way. "Now it came about on the third day that Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the king's palace in front of the king's rooms . . ." The same expressions are used by our Lord. "for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth . . . and be raised up on the third day" (Matt 12:40; 16:21; 20:19; Luke 24:7, NASB).

The same type of language is used in reference to the Noahic flood. It rained for forty days and forty nights (Gen 7:4,12). This is not to be construed as synonymous with forty full days and forty full nights, any more than "I slept all night" means "I slept for 12 hours," or "eight hours." In all cultures, so far as I know, a part of a day still counts for a day, and a part of a night still counts for a night. The Lord knew how to express things in terms of "hours," i.e., "twelve hours" (John 11:9), "three hours" (Acts 5:7), "two hours" (Acts 19:34), "sixth hour" (Matt 20:5), "eleventh hour" (Matt 20:6), "ninth hour" (Mark 15:34), "tenth hour" (John 1:39). Had God means "72 hours," that is what He would have said.

Several times in Scripture, some occurring after a specified number of days is said to have occurred on the last day of that specified period. 1 Kings 20:29 reads, "So they camped one over against the other seven days. And it came about that on **THE SEVENTH DAY**, the battle was joined, and the sons of Israel killed of the Arameans 100,000 foot soldiers in one day." Other examples of this type of expression are found in Exodus 13:6; Lev 23:8; Judges 14:17.

Suffice it to say, "three days and three nights" in the heart of the earth, and rising on "the third day" does not contradict God's way of stating things. The only difficulty comes when attempting to superimpose our culture on the Word of God. This is neither right nor honest, as ought to be apparent to any thinking person.

I am considering joining a church that requires I believe in speaking in tongues. Please give me some advice.

It is important that we refer to "tongues" in the same manner and with the same words that God did in His Word. He at no time made this a requirement of any sort, or in any way. Wherever the legitimate gift is found in Scripture, God gave it, and the people were not seeking it. There are no exceptions to this. It is never made a test of fellowship, never proclaimed as applicable to all believers, and is never said to give personal advantage. This in no way condemns those who say they have the gift. It does confirm they are also in no way superior to the rest of the body--at least not because of the gift of tongues.

The only instruction we have on "tongues" is given because there was a problem with them, and distorted understanding. In his exhortation to pursue spiritual gifts, Paul admonishes us to seek the "BEST" ones (1 Cor 12:31). He also says there is even a more excellent way--that of spiritual love (12:31b-13:1-13). With firm words, the Spirit affirms "Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts, but **ESPECIALLY** that you may prophesy" (1 Cor 14:3). Lest there

be any question about what he means by "prophecy," he explicitly explains what He means. "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (14:3). He is not, therefore, speaking of foretelling events, or unfolding the future. Rather, prophecy, in this sense, brings definite advantage to the saints, whatever is said.

He further says, "I would that ye all spake with tongues, but RATHER that ye prophesied: for GREATER is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying" (1 Cor 14:5). It takes an extraordinarily biased mind read this insist that other believers either speak in tongues, or acknowledge them to be a sign of spiritual superiority.

In delineating spiritual gifts, the Spirit declares why they are given. "But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one **for the profit of all**" (12:7). They are given for the body, and not for the individual alone. Secondly, they are addressed to the understanding, which is the means God uses to edify, or strengthen His people. He categorically says that tongues could bring no profit to the saints unless it could be understood; i.e., either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching" (14:6). He then expounds the necessity of understanding with extended teaching. When, for instance, a musical instrument is played, there must be an understandable distinction of sounds, we we will not know what is being played (14:7). Taking the trumpet as an example, he says, "For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?" (14:8). If the trumpeteer is does not blow understandable notes, the army will not know whether they are to go to battle, go to bed, retreat, or get up. The sound has to be understood to be of profit. Speaking in words that cannot be understood by the hearers, he affirms, is "speaking into the air" (14:9). Interestingly, speaking to God's people in a language they cannot understand violates both of the reasons given

for spiritual gifts--profiting everyone, and speaking in understandable words.

Not content to let the matter go, he elaborates even more. He reminds us that there are many languages in the world, and all of them have significance, or are meaningful. A language that cannot be comprehended cannot advantage those to whom it is spoken. The person hearing, yet not understanding the language, becomes "a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me" (14:10-11). Anyone contending this is an advantage has surely missed something. Believers are then told to seek to excell in edifying the brethren--something, he has affirmed, is accomplished through the understanding.

The individual speaking in tongues is admonished to pray that he can interpret what he is saying--not to himself, but to the body. Remember, the gift was given to profit the brethren, not for self-gain. The aim is to excell in edifying the people of God--giving them something understandable that will strengthen them in the faith. Paul says he spoke in tongues more than all of them in Corinth. Yet, in the assembly, he would rather speak five understandable words than ten thousand that could not be understood (14:11-19). In rather extensive involvement with people and congregations who hold this gift to be superior, I have rarely, if ever, seen this attitude portrayed.

God's people are then admonished to grow up in their understanding (14:20). Paul cites a test from Isaiah to support his teaching. "With men of other tongues and other lips I will speak to this people; And yet, for all that, they will not hear Me" (14:21; Isaiah 28:11-12). He concludes, upon the basis of this text, "Therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe but to unbelievers; but prophesying is not for unbelievers but for those who believe" (14:22). This is a most arresting argument. Isaiah's prophecy was not of a blessing, but of a curse. The prophet

foretold the Babylonian captivity, which was a chastening judgment upon Israel. God had spoken to them, but they had not listened. For with stammering lips and another tongue He will speak to this people, To whom He said, "This is the rest with which You may cause the weary to rest, And, This is the refreshing; Yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was to them, Precept upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little, That they might go and fall backward, and be broken And snared and caught" (Isa 28:11-13). Because they refused to hear understandable words from God, God would bring against them a nation whose words they could not understand. When they heard the foreign language, they would have their sign: they were being judged for their unbelief and refusal to hear God.

Moses told Israel this would happen to them if they were not faithful; i.e., a nation would come against them whose language they would not understand (Deut 28:49). Jeremiah foretold exactly the same thing (Jer 5:15).

Following the reasoning of Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, if , in the congregation, people began to speak in a language that was not understood, it would be a sign of judgment, not of blessing. If people doubt this to be the case, we have the events at the tower of Babel to confirm this is the effect of God's judgment. There, in the plain of Shinar, God brought the work to a grinding halt by confusing their language--i.e., they could no longer understand each other (Gen 11:5-9).

This is how the Spirit reasoned on the matter. It simply is not possible to have but a cursory understanding of his words, and conclude that one has to believe in speaking in tongues, or needs to do so, or is to assume they are in any way superior or make the individual more blest than other members of the body.

Again, this does not mean we have to deny the profession of someone that says they speak in tongues. They are, however, under obligation to edify their brethren by saying things that are understood. Their personal persuasion is their business, but it cannot be bound upon God's people, in any sense, or at any time.

I am physically handicapped, and feel as though God has forgotten me. What should I do?

There are some things in life that are very hard to bear. A physical handicap is one of them. Did you know the Apostle Paul had a physical handicap? We do not know exactly what it was, but suspect it was deficient vision. He wrote one time with very large letters (Galatians 6:11), and reminded some of the believers in Galatia that they had been willing to give him their eyes (Galatians 4:15).

At any rate, Paul called this handicap a "thorn"--like a painful brier sticking in him. He asked the Lord to take it away from him, because he felt it handicapped him in his Apostolic work. The Bible tells us he asked the Lord on three different occasions to do this (2 Corinthians 12:7-8). This means three different seasons, or periods of time, in which he pled with the Lord to take the handicap away. For a long time, he received no answer.

Finally, Paul tells us, Jesus answered him. He did not take the handicap away, but said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9). What Jesus meant was this: he would make Paul strong enough to hold up under the handicap, and still do everything Jesus had asked him to do. Jesus made Him stronger, giving him more strength than the ordinary person has. When Paul's strength ran out, Jesus' strength would come in, making him greater than his handicap.

When Paul understood this, he changed his mind about his handicap. Here are his words. "Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10). He realized Christ had empowered him to leave a greater impact upon people than he had ever dreamed possible. He did not like handicaps, any more than you do. But while other people rejected him, Christ had received him, and made him equal to the extraordinary challenges of life.

How can I learn how to speak to people about Christ?

You will recall that our blessed Lord always knew how to reply to people, be they enemies or hungry seekers. He can also direct in knowing how to answer people, and to initiate conversations about the Lord Jesus. Scripture provides the secret to this direction in 1 Peter 3:15-16. "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed."

As we dedicate ourselves fully to the Lord, making room for no one but Him in our hearts, we become directable, so to speak. He will enable us to have right words--words that will reveal the individual's real attitude toward the Lord. Unbelievers, if seeking the Lord, are first attracted by our lives, then our words carry power, by the grace of God.

Everyone Jesus spoke to did not rush to Him in thankfulness. Neither will they do so with you. If you continue to seek the face of the Lord and live for Him, you will obtain the same response from people that Jesus would. That is really what you want.

What do you think of the revivals that are happening in pentacostal churches?

Something of significance is occurring--like a ground-swell in preparation for a great move of God. People are being made more conscious of God and sin, and that is good. As with all works of God, there are those who seek to exploit them for their own gain. There are also those who view preliminary things as fundamental things. Such will not be prepared for the greatest blessing. Those, however, who have been moved to seek the Lord, declare war on sin, and become more productive in spiritual life, have gained much from these preliminary happenings.

I'm looking for a better understanding of what Jesus meant when He said "ye are gods".

It is important to note that Jesus did not say, "*ye are gods*," but rather, "*Is it not written in your law, 'I said, "You are gods"'*"? The difference is that Jesus was not teaching them they were gods, but showing them how their view of Him violated the manner in which their own Scriptures spoke.

The occasion of this reference was a time when the Jews sought to stone Jesus. Their charge was, "*You, being a Man, make Yourself God*" (John 10:33). He had not categorically said He was God, although He was precisely that. Rather, the Jews were angered by the way He spoke of the Father and Himself. The particular words to which they objected are found in verses 27-30. "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to*

Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are one."

Christ's quotation reminded them of what God had said about Jewish leaders, which some of them claimed to be. The quotation is from Psalm 82:1,6,7. "*God standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among **the gods**. . . I have said, **Ye are gods**; and all of you are children of the most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.*" The point of of the Psalm is that those who spoke for and judged in God's behalf, stood as His representatives. In that sense, they were "*gods*." They were not, however, "*gods*" by nature -- like Jesus is.

But there is something important to note here. These judges are themselves judged by the one true God: i.e., "*he judgeth among the gods*." Also, even though God has referred to them as "*gods*," they would all "*die like men*"--**not exactly an attribute of Deity**.

Jesus alluded to this passage because He had said He was God's Representative. In His case, He was God's EXCLUSIVE Representative (Heb 1:1-2). Unlike those to whom He spoke, Christ would not "*die like men*." He would die in behalf of men, and because of their sin. It would be an atoning death. Beside this, the Father's testimony of Jesus was quite different than that of the judges in Psalm 82. it is written, "*But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions"* (Heb 1:8-9). In Psalms, the statement was one of accommodation, and acknowledged the inferiority of the earthly judges. With the Son, it was one of affirmation, declaring the Deity of the Son, and the everlasting nature of his kingdom.

The term "*gods*," even in the accommodating sense, is never applied to men in general. Rather, it was only applied to judges,

because they stood as God's representatives. Although not identical, an exalted way of looking at God's representatives is also expressed by Paul. "*And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus*" (Gal 4:14).

Those who insist on using the term "*god*" in reference to men do well to rethink what they are doing. Adam, you will recall, is identified as "*the son of God*" (Luke 3:38). However, when Adam sinned, he thrust the entire human race into sin and a fallen state. He was called "*the son of God*" because God made him in His own image. That image, however, has been marred by sin. It is written, "*All have sinned and COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD*" (Rom 3:23). The point is that Scripture emphasizes our **dissimilarity** to God. No Apostle ever calls men "*gods*" -- and they are the appointed interpreters of Christ's words (John 14:26). The reason is that they opened to us the depth to which mankind fell in sin. The Psalmist was indicting religious judges for standing in the place of God, yet failing to recognize they would die like men.

In redemption, we are being restored to that Divine image (Col 3:10), and become "*the sons of God*" (1 John 3:1-2). While it is true that we become "*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*" (Rom 8:17), we do not become co-equals with God, as Jesus is. Christ is over us (1 Cor 11:3), and we are under Him. Our life is derived, Christ's was not. In act, Jesus is called "*that eternal life which was with the Father*" (1 John 1:2). That makes Him God (with a big G). The redeemed, however, are not "*that eternal life which was with the Father.*" Our eternal life is the "*gift of God*" (Rom 6:23).

The first commandment was "*Thou shalt have no other gods before Me*" (Ex 20:3). Would your friend suggest there really were other "*gods*"? That term is applied to idols (Ex 12:12; 1 Kgs 9:6;

Isa 36:18; Jer 10:11, etc., etc.). That does not mean, however, that they were really gods. Concerning the reality of the matter, God said, "*You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one*" (Isa 44:8). Additionally, Paul said, "*But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods*" (Gal 4:8).

You are correct in being suspicious of the manner in which your friend is speaking. He has taken a comment made in sarcasm, and treated it as though it were an official doctrine taught by Jesus. That is not the case, nor did the Apostles so represent mankind. His position is more like that of Satan, when he said to Eve, "*For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil*" (Gen 3:5).

Could not the Law really be kept, thereby obtaining eternal life?

One of our readers write, ". . . but we should not make the mistake of thinking that the law **could not** accomplish these things. It seems clear from these passages that it **can** accomplish salvation to eternal life; and if it can, we should in no way disparage it."

The Scriptures are clear about what the Law could NOT do, and WHY it could not do it. It was not because of any inherent flaw in the Law itself. The Spirit witnessed, "*For what the law **could not do** in that it was **weak through the flesh**, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit*" (Rom 8:3-4). Man is not capable of keeping the Law. That is the point of this text. When God removed the Old Covenant, replacing it with a new one, He made clear it was because He found "*fault*" with the people (Heb 8:8-13).

Elsewhere, the Spirit reasons that righteousness CANNOT be achieved through law--any law. *"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain"* (Gal 2:21). Again He says, *"For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law"* (Gal 3:21).

The point of the statement, *"Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD"* (Lev 18:5; Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12), was NOT to affirm the possibility of this occurring. The Law, in this way, was our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ. Man soon found he could not keep the Law flawlessly, and therefore needed a Savior. That is why it is written, *"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God"* (Rom 3:19).

As to Ezekiel's words, they by no means convey the message that a person can, in fact, keep the law perfectly. This is seen in the word Ezekiel spoke with great firmness. *"Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"* (Ezek 18:31). If they could make themselves a new heart and spirit, they could keep the Law perfectly. It seems to me that it is obvious this was beyond their capability.

If men CANNOT be saved without Christ, grace, or faith, then they cannot be saved by the Law. The Law had none of those things, and did not itself require faith, without which it is impossible to please God (Gal 3:12).

Do you have some thoughts on anger and forgiveness?

These subjects are contemporary hot-buttons. Because of this, there have been a variety of answers/workshops prepared on them. I have found, for the most part, that they are being addressed from a psychological point of view, rather than that of the Spirit. In your presentation, take care to give God's perspective. Here are some thoughts I have had on the subjects.

First, Christ has made no provision for a lack of resolution to do His will. When addressing these matters, "trying" and "attempting" to do what is right will not be sufficient. The grace of God comes to us when we are committed to the Lord. As soon as the individual is fully determined to do God's will in these matters, God will enable them to do it.

FORGIVENESS. The secret to forgiving others is comprehending and cherishing our own forgiveness. "And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just *as God in Christ forgave you*" (Eph 4:32). "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; *even as Christ forgave you*, so you also must do" (Col 3:12-13).

There is no limit to forgiveness. "Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven" (Matt 18:21-22). The recollection of God's faithful forgiveness of us will make this doable.

The experience of God's forgiveness depends, in part, upon our forgiveness of others. "But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt 6:15). When, therefore, I need to forgive, I need to ask myself if I want to be forgiven by God. A sensitive heart will always do the right things.

In these texts, and others, we see that forgiveness is really a matter of perspective. It results when our hearts are made tender in the realization that we have been forgiven "all trespasses" (Col 2:13). When people do not forgive others, the problem is not their lack of forgiveness, but the defilement of their heart. There is no acceptable excuse for such a condition.

ANGER. With dilligence, avoid approaching anger from a worldly point of view. In some instances, anger is justified. "*Be angry*, and do not sin": do not let the sun go down on your wrath" (Eph 4:26). On one occasion, Jesus looked on a skeptical and unbelieving crowd "*with anger*" (Mark 3:5).

Under no occasion, is anger or wrath to be sustained (Eph 4:26). God simply does not allow it. There is no grace or strength given by Him to keep anger boiling. The reason for this is stated by James; "the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God: (James 1:20). At no time are God's people free to conduct themselves unlike their heavenly Father.

The word of the Lord is straightforward. "Let **all** bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph 4:31). Again, it is written, "Let **all** bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice" (Col 3:8). As you can see, "resolution" is a word that can easily dull the conscience of people. As an expression of the flesh, "ALL" anger is to be eliminated from the life of the believer. The fact that such a serious requirement is given means that serious grace is available for its accomplishment.

Is God really capable of repenting? You wrote that God "repented."

Thank you for taking the time to write your thoughts. I understand where you are coming from. I do not believe I said God **HAD** to repent. In fact, all I did was convey what the Spirit inspired to be written ("*And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.*"). Nothing in the text, or sound spiritual understanding, indicates God **HAD** to repent.

You are correct in saying the idea is "*to turn from*"--that is the meaning of repentance. In the case of sinners, they turn from sin. In the text with which I was dealing, God turned from His fierce wrath. He did the same with us. We were once "*by nature the children of wrath*" as others, but are now the recipients of His great mercy. Jesus spoke of those who believe not on Him as having the wrath of God abiding upon them (John 3:36). That condition changes, however, when the Son is embraced (John 1:12-13).

To me, one of the most challenging considerations along this line relates to Christ's vicarious atonement. Although He was the "*only begotten Son*" in Whom the Father was "*well please*," yet He was "*made a curse*" for us (Gal 3:10-13), and "*was made to be sin*" for us (2 Cor 5:21). While it was a temporary condition (praise the Lord), yet it did involve the Father having a different view of the Son when He bore our sins in His body on the tree.

This is not the only time this expression ("repent") is used in relation to God--Gen 6:7; 1 Sam 15:11,35; 1 Chron 21:15; Jer 26:19; Amos 7:6; Jonah 3:10. The NKJV and NIV translate this word "relent." The NASB and NIV translate it "changed His mind." There are times, of course, when the Lord affirmed He would "*not repent*," or change His mind--under any conditions (Psa 110:4; Jer 4:28; Heb 7:21). One such time is when Israel so incensed Him He declared He would not hear any prayers uttered for them, even if they came from a righteous man (Jer 7:16; 15:1).

It is true, from another perspective, that God "*is not a man that He should repent*" (Num 23:19). That is, He never thinks, speaks,

or acts in a way inappropriate, and from which turning away is necessary. When He is represented as changing His mind, or turning from a declared course of action, it is not because He sinned. That does not, however, mean the change was not real.

We must take care not to oversimplify our view of this matter-- particularly if it causes us to stagger at Divine affirmations in Scripture. God has represented Himself as capable of changing His mind. This in no way reflects upon His Sovereignty. It does, however, challenge some notions concerning His Sovereignty. When He was about to destroy the ancient people, He sought for someone to stand in the gap so He would not have to destroy them (Ezek 22:30-31). We must not allow any theology to neutralize the staggering power of those words. It is not that God was tempted to sin in destroying the people (God forbid that such a blasphemous thought should arise in our hearts). It IS that God prefers to have mercy. His anger against sinners can be averted--a change of mind. It was seen in Moses' intercession in behalf of Israel. It is seen in Christ's admonition to flawed churches. He would take them away unless they repented, and even fight against them if they did not turn from their iniquitous ways (Rev 2:5,16).

Just a thought here. If we look at God's Sovereignty from a stilted point of view, it will seem unreasonable that God would "turn from" anything. We may conceive that, because He is omniscient and unchangeable, He cannot change His mind, turn from His anger, reconcile an enemy, or cast someone out of a garden into which He Himself placed them. But that is not a fair representation of the case. His *character* does not change. His *holiness* does not change. His *Person* does not and cannot change. But He has represented Himself as changing His mind, being sorry, and being grieved--all of which are remarkable Divine reactions. We must be spiritually fluid enough to receive these representations, knowing they have in no way mitigated His Sovereignty.

Our minister said it is always wrong to lie. Does this mean it was wrong for Corrie Ten Boom lied to the Nazis about the whereabouts of the Jews?

I was interested in your observations about your pastor's remarks on lying. I am afraid it is not as simple as he seemed to indicate. In a broad sense, it is true that men are not to lie, and that it is contrary to the nature of God, Who "cannot lie" (Tit 1:2), and who "is not a man that He should lie" (Num 23:19). He does hate a "lying tongue" (Prov 6:17), and "lying lips are an abomination" to Him (Prov 12:22). We are solemnly admonished, "Therefore, putting away lying, Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Eph 4:25). As children of God, we embrace those statements heartily, and find no fault with our Lord for delivering them to us.

However, there are several other factors that show us another facet of this subject. When Samuel was sent by God to anoint young David king, he remonstrated, saying, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me. And the LORD said, Take a heifer with you, and say, I have come to sacrifice to the LORD" (1 Samuel 16:2). That is really NOT why Samuel went, even though he did offer a sacrifice.

Again, Rahab the Harlot hid the Israelite spies who came into Jericho. When asked by men from the King of Jericho about the spies (while they remained in her house, and she knew who they were), she said, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them" (Joshua 2:4-5). To confirm this was really NOT the case, the Word adds, "But she had brought them up to the roof and hidden them

with the stalks of flax, which she had laid in order on the roof" (Josh 2:6).

When Israel destroyed Jericho, the deed of Rahab was remembered by Joshua. It is written, "And Joshua spared Rahab the harlot, her father's household, and all that she had. So she dwells in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho" (Josh 6:25). To further accentuate the appropriateness of what she said, Hebrews states, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb 11:31). What is even more remarkable, she is in the lineage of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt 1:5).

In both of these cases, a lie (from God's perspective) was NOT told, but wisdom was employed. It takes a heart of faith to detect the difference, but here are two examples in the Bible of what some people would call a lie. God told Samuel what to say in the first instance, and commended what was said in the second one.

The lying that is prohibited in Scripture refers to saying things under the influence of the wicked one, and with no regard for the honor of God. It is a misrepresentation that gives an advantage to the flesh, and is a child of sinful pride.

Wine is reported to be healthy when consumed in moderation. Can a Christian drink alcoholic wine?

First, as compared to the Law of Moses, very few rules of conduct are outlined for the person in Christ. The reason for this is that believers are directed from within, by a new heart, not by laws. This is the point of Colossians 2:20-23. Laws cannot take away the appetite for sin, but a new heart can. For this reason, in Christ Jesus, God's law is written upon our heart (Heb 9:8-13), bringing

us into agreement with our Lord. That means, we will want to do the right thing.

The Bible does not say believers cannot drink hard wine. Of course, it does not say they cannot shoot heroin or smoke pot either. There are believers in foreign countries who drink fermented wine as a table drink. This is largely because of the impurity of the water. Paul told Timothy to take a "little wine" for his stomach and frequent sicknesses ((1 Tim 5:23). It is interesting to note that he does not say "drink a little wine," but "USE a little wine" -- indications is was for medicinal purposes. Even then, he said a "LITTLE wine."

Concerning the influence of our conduct upon weaker believers, the Spirit says, "It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak" (Rom 14:21). The eating of meat referred to eating meat offered to idols, which was sold in the local meat markets (1 Corinthians 10:22-33). That passage says that we are not to become enslaved to any form of eating and drinking, particularly at the expense of harming our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are strictly charged not to cause offence to the Jews, the Gentiles, or the church of God. All of this, of course, requires judgment, discernment, and consideration on the part of the individual believer. A simple law saying not to do it is not given.

Drunkenness, of course, is unanimously condemned by Scripture, as you already know (Luke 21:34; Romans 13:13; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:21; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Peter 4:3). A groundwork for this was set forth under the Law. There, the priest was strictly forbidden to drink any hard liquor before entering the tabernacle. If they dared to drink hard drink before they entered the tabernacle, they would die (Leviticus 10:9; Ezekiel 44:21).

A remarkable outline for a Nazarite is provided in Scripture. This was a person dedicated to God. John the Baptist was a Nazarite

(Luke 1:15). Here is the prohibition for the Nazarite, who was separated to God. "When either a man or woman consecrates an offering to take the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD, he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin" (Num 6:2-4). Because grapes and grape juice, even when fresh, ferment in the stomach, the Nazarite was forbidden to partake of grape in any form. Note--this was a law imposed upon someone dedicated to God.

There is no Bible verse that answers your question. It is a matter of conscience. Our conscience, however, is to be molded by the word of God and a desire to please Him. The word from the King is, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). When a Christian drinks wine, for whatever reason, they must realize they are in an area of temptation, where many people have fallen. If it is countered that it is good for the health, this cannot be denied. In our time, however, there are a number of alternative medicines that will accomplish the same results. Each believer must determine for themselves what they will do in this matter. Whatever they choose is to be for the glory of God, and must not result in harmful effects upon our brethren.

How serious do you think this misunderstanding of the Triune God is? He feels that there is no distinction between the persons of the Godhead and that everything such as prayer and baptism should only be in the name of our Lord Jesus.

The whole matter of salvation, with all of its intricate details, depends upon the inter-relationships of the Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit. The Father sent the Son (1 John 4:14). The Son did the will of the Father (John 5:30). Jesus sends the Spirit (John 15:26; 16:7). The Spirit enables Christ to dwell in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17) . . . etc. We have access to the Father through the Son and by the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:18). The Father raised the Son, and exalted Him (Acts 2:24; 4:10; Rom 6:4; Gal 1:1). Presently, Jesus is on the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33;). After "the end," the Son will deliver the Kingdom back to God, and He Himself will be subject to God (1 Cor 15:25-28)--an absurdity if they are both the same Person. I know there are many who hold to the view you mentioned. It is not only wrong, it is utterly absurd. There simply is too much about this in Scripture to justify any one concluding there is one Person in the Godhead with a multiplicity of names. Abraham had two names, as well as Sarah, Peter, and others. But they never talked with themselves using these different names--and when they received a new name, the old one ceased to be used (Abram/Abraham, Sarai/Sarah, Simon/Peter....etc. But when it comes to the Father, Son, and Spirit, they are all three mentioned as working simultaneously. These terms were not designations applied to a particular time in which only one was active. For instance, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying "Abba Father" (Gal 4:6). Other Scriptures mentioning the simultaneous and complementary work of the Father, Son, and Spirit, include Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:3; 2 Cor 13:14; Eph 1:17; Phil 3:3; Heb 10:29; 1 Pet 1:2.

I personally consider this to be a very grievous error, striking at the root of our salvation. The good confession, after all, is that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16-18; 1 John 4:4-5). The atonement of Christ was the result of Him humbling Himself, and becoming obedient to death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:5-8). He certainly was not obedient to Himself, but to God, as He repeatedly asserted (Matt 26:39; Lk 10:22). For that matter, Jesus cried out "Abba, Father" Himself--a cry of absolute dependency upon God.

Jesus once said, "All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and the one to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). Remember, the Father told Peter Who the Son was (Matt 16:18)--now the Son reveals who the Father is. Of course, that would be foolish if He and the Father were the same. When He said "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," He did not mean they were the same Person, but the Father was being made known through Him.

Does God have fun? Does He have a sense of humor? Is He always serious? When I hear of God I get serious, and it makes me afraid.

The Bible never speaks of God "having fun" or "laughing," or "having a sense of humor." But there is a reason for that. God does not want us to think of Him like we think of ourselves or other people, because He is not like that. He is God! With us, having fun is a form of distraction, to keep life from being so boring. God is never bored, so does not need that form of distraction like we do. Pleasure, or having fun, is good, but it is not the best thing. If I go in for brain surgery, I sure do not want my doctor to "have fun" while he operates. The reason is quite simple, when we are "having fun," we are not fully involved in what we are doing. We are just touching the surface of life, so to speak.

God expresses what you have called "fun" in a higher and better way. The Bible word would be "joy," or "rejoice" "glad," or "happy" (Acts 2:28; Luke 15:10; Hebrews 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; Philippians 4:4; Matthew 5:12; rOM 14:22; 1 pET 3:14). Another good word is "blessed," when means joyful and with a real benefit (1 Timothy 1:11).

God rejoices over His people, taking great pleasure in them. Zephaniah 3:17 reads, "*The LORD your God in your midst, The*

Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing." That is much more than fun, and it is more satisfying, and beneficial. God enjoys His people, their faith in Him, and the fact that they trust Him.

Serious, in the true sense, does not mean morose, or not pleasant and enjoyable. It means alert--wide awake in our souls, so that we will not be fooled. To be serious means we will not miss God's blessing because we do not know it is available, or that we will not be brought down by the devil because we are not aware he is around. A person can be serious and laugh, cry, consider, and enjoy.

The reason you become serious when you hear about God is because that is the time to be serious. Being serious means you can then receive the good things He has for you. It also means you can avoid being judged by Him. This does not mean you have to be afraid -- you can be glad when you hear about Him. When, for instance, you are in a serious situation and need help from God, it is good to think of Him--good to pray to Him--pleasant to consider He wants to help you.

Remember, Alanis, that "having fun" is not wrong, but it is shallow. It is like a one year old baby playing in a play pen. That little baby is enjoying himself--having fun. But when that child grows into a man, he doesn't like playing in the play pen anymore--just having fun. He still wants enjoyment and satisfaction, but he finds it in more important things. Also, the enjoyment brings a sense of satisfaction that "having fun" cannot bring.

The reason for Jesus is so we do not have to be afraid before God. Since we are all going to stand before Him some day, it is good to come to Him in Christ Jesus now, and learn to enjoy Him. He is, after all, good and gracious. You can enjoy Him!

I hope this helps. If you want to talk more, let me know. In Jesus,
Brother Given

I have always felt we will see God as he really is. I know for sure we will see Jesus. But someone told me that we shall not ever see God. Can you explain this to me. I know you must be busy, but whenever you have time.

Jesus said it, and it is true, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt 5:8). That sight begins now by faith, and will be culminated when "God Himself" will be with us in the glory (Rev 21:3). Even Job, long before the Bible was written, knew this. He said, "And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:26).

The particulars of this blessed sight are not provided--only that it will occur. It will be a lofty experience, unable to be fully conveyed in words to us while we are in the body. You are right in saying we will see God as He is. If Jesus said the pure in heart "shall see God," it is certainly out of order for anyone to say we will not.

Take two unbelievers; why would God open the heart of one and not the other?

Some would say God does so arbitrarily, but that is not the case, for it would violate the Divine imagery in man to do so. The Lord has told us the type of heart or spirit that will be honored by Him. It is stated in several ways in scripture. "For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a CONTRITE AND HUMBLE HEART, To revive the spirit of the HUMBLE, And to

revive the heart of the CONTRITE ONES" (Isa 57:15). Another view--"But on this one will I look: On him who is POOR AND OF A CONTRITE SPIRIT, And who TREMBLES AT MY WORD" (Isa 66:2). Jesus put it this way, "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a NOBLE AND GOOD HEART, keep it and bear fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15). The eyes of the Lord are running to and fro throughout the whole world to find such individuals. As it is written, "For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those WHOSE HEART IS LOYAL TO HIM" (2 Chron 16:9).

The Holy Spirit works ON the hearts of those who do not believe, to convince them of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:7-11), and He does it through the Word of God, which is His sword.

I do not believe culture is the determining factor in believing God. Enoch, for example, lived in a decaying society, drifting rapidly from any semblance of sensitivity to God--yet he believed, and walked with God. Noah was in a culture in which he alone stood with God. Abraham, together with his father, came from an idolatrous background, yet believed God when it was illogical from the human point of view (Rom 4:18). At Pentecost, we read of devout men from every nation under heaven--all radically differing cultures--yet receiving the Word with gladness (Acts 2:41). Lydia, from the idolatrous culture of Thyatira, believed (Acts 16:14-16), the Philippian jailor from a rather unique culture (Acts 16:25ff), and an Ethiopian eunuch from a section in Africa (Acts 8:36ff). Some from Caesar's household even believed (Phil 4:22) etc. In all of these cases, the culture was AGAINST believing God, not something that aided it. Each of these people had to overcome their culture to embrace the Word. Because their hearts were tender, God enabled them to do so.

This is why Scripture speaks of believing "through grace" (Acts 18:27), being "given" by god to believe (Phil 1:29), and receiving "like precious faith" (2 Pet 1:1). From this point of view, God's grace is discriminating. It is given to those who will receive it-- whose hearts are attracted to the truth.

God's Word cannot be properly understood apart from faith. That is why Scripture says, "By faith we understand that the world were framed by the Word of God . . ." (Heb 11:3). People can understand the grammar of the Bible--much like the Pharisees did, who were prodigious Bible students. Yet Jesus said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mark 12:24).

One further thought here. There are some people who CANNOT believe because of the hardness of their hearts. Scripture speaks of some people in this category. "Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them" (Isa 12:39-40). Their hard hearts constrained God to render them incapable of perceiving the truth that could save them.

"Jesus died as a martyr and God reversed the actions of wicked people by raising His Son."

This statement, of course, is in no way related to the representation of the Holy Spirit in Scripture. It presents God as reacting to men, and men as overpowering the Son of God. It disassociates Christ's death from Divine purpose, and removes the factor of Christ's obedience. It is a philosophical view of Christ's death, not a revealed one.

First, Jesus declared "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father" (John

10:18). Christ's words clash with yours. He states His life was NOT taken from Him but that is the case with a martyr. He relates His death to the commandment of God. The Spirit also attests to this in Philippians, affirming He "became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross" (2:8).

In delineating the death of our Lord, Peter affirms He was "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." That is why the people were able to put Him to death through the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23). In fact, it was God Himself Who "delivered Him up" (Rom 8:32). We are categorically told that the death of Christ, prophesied by the prophets, was "fulfilled" by God Himself (Acts 3:18). It is He that "put him to grief" (Isa 53:10). David once said, "the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Psa 69:9). Confirming this to be a most precise prophecy, the Spirit later witnessed, "For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me" (Rom 15:3). And how were those reproaches put upon Him. There is no need for conjecture here: "the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isa 53:6).

Calling this "child abuse," or even allowing for such an ungodly conclusion, reveals several things. First, the nature of God Himself is reproached. Second, the magnitude of sin is minimized. Third, the power of men is accentuated. Fourth, our salvation is associated with Divine reaction rather than "eternal purpose." Fifth, there is a failure to recognize that Christ was GOD's sacrifice, not the victim of wicked men. He is "The Lamb of God," not the victim of men!

Christ's death fulfilled a Divinely revealed objective. The fact that there are aspects of that death that are offensive to you have no bearing whatsoever upon the truth of God. That condition does, however, have an effect upon you personally. At the point Christ's death, as it is affirmed in Scripture, becomes foolishness to you,

you fall into the category of those who "are perishing" (1 Cor 1:18). For that reason alone, you should recoil from a philosophical analysis of the only vicarious death that has ever occurred the only death through which the world could be "reconciled" (Rom 5:10). The only way for our reconciliation to occur "through the death of His Son," is for the death itself to be objective.

The heinousness of sin, and its offensiveness to a holy God, demanded Christ's vicarious death. For 1,500 years, God readied people for this sacrifice through a sacrificial system. The Law taught people the sacrifice had to be deliberate, as well as spotless. The value of blood was emphasized with such remarkable consistency, it is difficult for me to believe anyone embracing the Son could be repelled by an emphasis on that blood, or entertain any form of revulsion at the sacrifice of Christ Jesus.

In the world to come we will see the Lamb "as it had been slain" (Rev 5:6) as a newly slain sacrifice. If your position were true, this would be an impossible situation, for we would be forced to recognize what humanity did to Jesus, making Him a martyr. Instead, praise the Lord, we will view Him as One Who was "made sin for us," and "became a curse for us," that we might be brought to God (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 3:18).

How does one "present" themselves to someone they cannot see or touch?

Here is where faith comes into the picture. God is a real Person, and so are you. However, while you are in this world, you do not have the capacity to see the Lord with your physical senses as He is. That is why he has told us of Himself in Scripture. Presenting yourself to God is making yourself available to Him--believing that He is (exists), and that He is a Rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). This means you will not

allow anyone or anything to become more important to you than the Lord.

You cannot see God or touch Him with your physical senses, but you can see Him with faith. It is said of Moses, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Hebrews 11:27). Paul also said, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day" (2 Timothy 2:12). Both Moses and Paul saw the Lord by faith. They were convinced of His reality, and lived their lives with Him in mind.

There is more than one way of seeing. Faith is like the eye and hand of the soul. It enables the individual to be convinced of the truth of God's Word, then reshape his entire life to please the Lord. God can give you that kind of faith. Faith is, after all, something we "obtain" (2 Peter 1:1). Ask the Lord to increase your faith (that is what the disciples asked Jesus to do--Luke 17:5). He will answer your request. Believe that!

In one of the "Thought for the Day" e-mails I received, you stated that a Christian should not believe he/she is "Once saved, always saved". Please show me the scripture that establishes this fact.

First, the phrase is not in the Word of God, so no one is under any obligation to receive it. Again, the matter of salvation is taught and explained in Scripture. It is entirely out of order to bind upon any soul language originated by men. Second, salvation is unequivocally promised to those who are "in Christ" and are believing and there are no exceptions. Nothing can separate such people from the love of God, or pull them out of the hands of the Father and the Son. But that is not the end of the matter. Jesus specifically said those "IN" Him that did not bear fruit would be

removed by the Father (John 15:2). That does not mean we are to live in fear of being removed. It DOES mean we are to concentrate on abiding in the Son which is precisely what Jesus said (John 15:4). That DOES mean that abiding in Christ is not automatic. It requires effort on our part because we are not in glory yet. We are in the war zone. Our efforts to remain in Christ will be undergirded by God, and are not in vain never (1 Cor 15:58). The Word of God, however does not take for granted this will happen. Jesus spoke of those who believed only "for a while" (Luke 8:13). He was precise in His language. The Spirit also admonishes us, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it. For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it" (Heb 4:1-2). This was spoken to people who had already believed. Our theology must allow the same words to be said to us. The Spirit did not say "Once saved always saved," and neither should we. We must say it the way He did.

In another "Thought for the Day" , the e-mail I received stated that Christians are wrong in believing that the church will be taken before the terrible days of the tribulation period. Please show me the scripture that establishes this fact.

Here again, we are dealing with interpretations of Scripture, and not Scripture itself. Jesus told the church at Philadelphia He would spare them from "the hour of temptation that was coming upon all the earth" (Rev 3:10). He did not say this to any of the other seven churches to whom Revelation was written. He also told the church at Philadelphia WHY He would spare them: "Because you have kept My command to persevere" (Rev 3:10). I know a number of people who would object to saying it that way but that is the way Jesus said it. After telling His disciples of the destruction of Jerusalem, and key events that would precede His coming, Jesus told them, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be

counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36). That would have been an ideal time to tell them they could not possibly go through such a time were that a true doctrine.

How then do we explain what Jesus said in John 10:27-29 and Romans 8:35-39. If these scriptures do not secure the saving of the believer, it can only be because they, in some way, never were actually saved in this first place. Only God truly knows the heart!

These are very wonderful promises to those who are believing and cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23). Such are to know that nothing in heaven, earth, or hell can pluck them out of the protective hand of Jesus or God the Father. Jesus defines His sheep as those who "hear His voice and follow Him." Nowhere does Jesus or His Apostles assume that those who hear will ALWAYS hear, and those who follow will ALWAYS follow. The Word speaks of those who have become "dull of hearing" (Heb 5:11), and of those who "draw back to perdition" (Heb 10:38-39). It speaks of those who have left their "first love" (Rev 2:4), "depart from the faith" (1 Tim 4:1), "deny the faith" (1 Tim 5:8), and "erred from the faith" (1 Tim 6:10). Nowhere are such individuals promised good things and nowhere are they told they never had faith in the first place. Men make such comments, but God does not. All of the promises are to believers all of them. Believers are not people who HAVE believed, but people who ARE believing and the Word of God does not take for granted they will just keep believing.

The Spirit admonishes one of the most stable of all believers, Timothy: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim 6:12). Does that suggest that Timothy did not have eternal life already? Not at all. Like every one in Christ Jesus, he HAD eternal life

(John 5:24; 6:54; 1 John 5:11,13,20). But we do not have it all! The bulk of our inheritance is yet ahead of us. What we have is the "firstfruits of the Spirit," and not the full harvest (Rom 8:23). That is why Scripture says we are "waiting for the adoption," even though we are already adopted (Rom 8:23). It is why salvation is not only experienced now, it is also yet to come (1 Pet 1:5). As the Word says, "Let not the one who puts on his armor boast like the one who takes it off" (1 Kgs 20:11).

Jude challenges us to remember what has happened before us. After God has "saved the people out of the land of Egypt, [He] afterward destroyed those who did not believe" (Jude 5). Do not suppose for one moment that has no relevance to us. That was written to believers, to assist them in not taking their faith for granted. As if that were not enough, he rises even higher. "And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). Our theology must make provision for us to speak in this manner. I see no harmony of "Once saved always saved" with this language. My objection is to the phraseology, NOT to the belief that those relying in Jesus are absolutely safe. Is there anyone in all the world that would say the Israelites that fell in the wilderness never really came out of Egypt? Or that the angels that fell were never really in heaven? Or that Adam and Eve were never really in the Garden? Or that Judas was never really an Apostle? How we say things is important, unless it makes no difference to God if we add to or take from His Word.

and as for the blessed hope of the church, (when it is to be taken out of the way before the great and terrible days of God's wrath); Why would Jesus tell us to look for his coming if we first were to go through seven years, the last 3 ½ years of which are to be so terrible that they can be compared to no other time in the world's history? Wouldn't we rather hope to die before this time?>> Would

the Hebrew children rather die than go into the fiery furnace (Dan 3). Are you suggesting that God cannot give us strength to go through anything? Scripture speaks of people of faith who "were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb 11:35-38). What would they say of this doctrine? Of course, the doctrine is not in the Scripture. It represents what men THINK the Scripture means.

You have asked me if I am convinced of what I teach, and I have told you I am. It would be wrong for me to teach under any other circumstances. I do not take these things lightly. They are me life. Men live by "every word of God" (Luke 4:4). They do not, and cannot, live by every word or doctrine of men.

Now I must ask you a question, and I do so with all integrity, concern, and without doubting your faith or commitment. Have you read everything God has said about the tribulation, the seven years, and the 3-1/2 years? It will not take long for you to read every syllable the Holy Spirit has inspired on this. The term "great tribulation" is mentioned three times in the Bible (Matt 24:21; Rev 2:22; Rev 7:14). The latter reference (Rev 7:14), speaks of saints that came "out of great tribulation," which means they were in it. The NIV version mentions the term only one time and it is Revelation 7:14). The term "seven years" is not even in the New Testament. The theory is based upon Daniel 9:27, which certainly does not clearly speak of a seven year tribulation. The 3-1/2 years, as taught by some, are based upon the phrase "time, times, and half a time," found in Revelation 12:14. There, the church is depicted as a "woman" who is "nourished from the face of the serpent,"

sustained during an assault Satan makes upon the people of God. That length of time is also related to "forty-two months," mentioned in Revelation 11:2 and 13:5. This is described as a time when the "holy city" is trodden down by the Gentiles and a period when great blasphemies are spoken by a foe of Christ and His people. This same period is also related to 1,260 days, which is 3-1/2 years. This is mentioned two times in Revelation 11:3 and 12:6). You can read them for yourself. They speak of two witnesses prophesying with sackcloth, and the "woman" being fed in a place prepared for her by God.

In my judgment, it takes a prodigious imagination to take those texts and weave the tapestry of doctrine that is often declared and it is declared as though it were plainly taught in Scripture. In my judgment, those texts are to be viewed through the more clear teaching of Jesus and the Apostles on His coming. We should not take these texts, wrap a human interpretation around them, and impose them upon the people of God. That is what I object to.

How do you feel about Christians drinking, listening to secular music, and watching certain movies (not pornographic films)

I feel all three are open doors for Satan. The acid test is not whether or not these things are wrong, but whether or not they are right. The Scriptures admonish us, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Colossians 3:17). it also says, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Corinthians 10:31-33). it also says, "And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the

inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality" (Colossians 3:23).

If a person can "drink, listen to secular music, and watch certain movies," and fulfill those things, it is all right. I seriously question, however, that this is possible.

If you are baptized as a little child in the Catholic Church, do you have to be baptized again in any of the other Christian Churches? I thought baptism was needed only once? Please answer. Do you have to be completely submerged? Where in the bible does it say so?

No matter what denomination is involved, the baptizing of children is not taught in Scripture. It is even against what is taught in Scripture. Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). On the day of Pentecost, when the door of salvation was opened to the world, inquirers were told, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you..." (Acts 2:38). It is said of those being baptized, "those who gladly received his word were baptized" (Acts 2:41). It should be obvious that believing, repenting, and gladly receiving the Word are not the responses of little children. At the age individuals become capable of those responses, and if they have believed and repented, they are candidates for baptism.

If you were not baptized AFTER you believed, AFTER you repented, and AFTER you gladly received the Word, then you should be baptized now. Whatever was done formerly was really not baptism.

Baptism is called a burial in Scripture. It provides a picture of Christ's burial and resurrection. We are "buried with Christ BY

baptism into death" (Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12). Because of this, baptism is called "the form of the doctrine" of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:17). When Jesus was baptized, He went down into the water, and came up out of the water (Matthew 3:16). When a political official from Ethiopia was baptized, he also went down into the water, and came up out of it (Acts 8:38). The language can only be fulfilled by being placed into the water--not by water being placed on us (as it is in sprinkling and pouring).

YES, baptism is being submerged in the water. That is why it is a vivid picture of being buried with Christ Jesus.

There are principalities and powers that rule certain areas of darkness. An angel visited Daniel after he has fought for 21 days with such a principality, called "the prince of Persia" (Dan 10:18-20). After the overthrow of this power, the nation of Persia fell from world dominance, and Greece arose under "the prince of Grecia.

I do not know how far a person can carry these matters. There are "rulers of the darkness of this world" (Eph 6:12) against which we wrestle. These spirits promote spiritual darkness in the world. I have no doubt about them having unusual influence in certain areas. Jesus told the church at Pergamum they were located "where Satan's seat is" (Rev 2:12-13).

All of these powers are subject to Christ, of course. Also, to the degree that we are in fellowship with Christ, and in accordance with our faith, they are also subject to us. this is an area, however, in which we had better not presume.

"I feel as though I should be baptized again considering I now have truly come to know Jesus even though I was baptized in my youth.."

There is only "one baptism" (Eph 4:5), and therefore is not necessary to repeat, when it was done from the heart. "One baptism" does not mean one KIND of baptism, but ONCE baptized. Romans 6:17 speaks of "obeying from the heart the form of the doctrine." Baptism is the "form" of the doctrine, depicting the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

You will have to determine your heart at the time you were baptized. If it was right, you do not need to be rebaptized. For those "baptized into Christ" (Gal 3:27), God simply says to "confess" or acknowledge our sin, and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins (1 John 1:7,9). That is a promise for believers.

Baptism has some parallels to the time Jesus washed the disciples' feet. Remember, Peter said Jesus could not wash his feet, because he felt he was unworthy. Jesus told him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me." Peter replied, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" It was then that Jesus gave a principle of the Kingdom of God. "He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean" (John 13:5-10).

In your baptism, you were thoroughly washed, your sins being "washed away," and you became completely clean (Acts 22:16). That washing you do not need again. You do need the smaller, so to speak, cleansing, a sort of spiritual washing of the feet.

What denomination are you? What is the influence in your writings? Charismatic..... probably not Catholic.... What are the beliefs of the writer of this devotional?

I do not claim identity with a specific denomination. I am only a Christian, but not the only Christian. The influence of my writings is my own familiarity with scripture and walk with the Lord. Over 55 years, I have also profited from many preachers and teachers of the Word, both living and dead, and from a variety of backgrpounds. I have a great deal of fellowship with brother and sisters from a variety of denominations. God's people rise above denominational walls, which are not recognized by the Lord.

All of my devotions are written by myself, unless otherwise stated. My beliefs can be found on my website (<http://wotruth.com>). I believe in, and follow, the Lord Jesus Christ. I am persuaded God sent Him to die for the sins of the world, and reconcile men to God. I confess we are saved by God's grace, and empowered to live for Him by the Holy Spirit. I receive the Scriptures as the very Word of God. I also accept all who have been born again as the children of God, and consequently, my brothers and sisters. I know this world is passing away, and that I will someday stand before the Lord of glory. I am, therefore, a stranger in this world, being readied by the Lord Jesus Christ, to be with Him eternally.

Now, a personal word. God evaluates us according to our relationship to His Son. You must seek a better way to identify people than associating them with a denomination. Some God-fearing people are in bad denominations, but do not accept everything they teach. Some faithless people are associated with basically sound congregations, yet do not subscribe to what they teach. Seek to discern a person's affiliation with God, through Christ, and by the Spirit.

I don't believe in cremation....but then neither do I believe that the body that is going to be raised to meet Jesus is going to be

the one that is buried . . . how does it matter what the condition . . . Help.....comments please...

The Word of God affirms that the very body that was consigned to corruption will be the one that is raised--much like a stalk of wheat comes from the very seed that decomposed in the ground. Admittedly, there is an element of mystery to all of this, but our faith can still lay hold of it.

The NIV reads as follows, "So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, **IT** is raised imperishable; **IT** is sown in dishonor, **IT** is raised in glory; **IT** is sown in weakness, **IT** is raised in power; **IT** is sown a natural body, **IT** is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body." (1 Cor 15:42-44).

Again, we read, "For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For **THE PERISHABLE** must clothe itself with the imperishable, and **THE MORTAL** with immortality. When **THE PERISHABLE** has been clothed with the imperishable, and **THE MORTAL** with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (1 Cor 15:52-54).

The resurrection involves a **CHANGE**--from corruption to incorruption; from mortality to immortality. Even those who are alive at the time of Christ's coming will experience the transformation of their body. "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be **CHANGED**--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, **THE DEAD** will be raised imperishable, and we will be **CHANGED**" (1 Cor 15:51-52. This is, of course, a miracle in every sense of the word. It simply does not conform to natural Law, nor does it have a parallel in earthly experience.

When Jesus was raised from the dead, it was the same body that went into the tomb. The only difference was that His body did not decay or decompose--but it was the same body (Acts 2:27). When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, decomposition had already set in, and stench filled his tomb. Still, the body that was raised was the very one that was placed in the tomb. In fact, it was still wrapped in grave clothes (John 11:43-44).

The fact that bodies return to dust does not mean that they cease to be. God made man from dust in the beginning, but it will be personalized dust, so to speak, in the resurrection. In my judgment, we must take care not to attempt an explanation of this in scientific terms. It cannot be explained from a human point of view. It is to be believed. That is why burying the body is called "sowing," or planting, it in the earth. This procedure is not done in obedience to a commandment, and I have tried to avoid leaving that impression. Rather, it is an act of faith, just like sowing seed in a field. In my opinion, we can glorify God by burying our dead with the resurrection in our minds, rather than merely disposing of a body.

I have always believed that our "souls" were sleeping until that great day and that is "the dead in Christ" that would awake and meet the Lord in the heavens.....

Our souls are not asleep until the resurrection. Solomon's writings reflect this type of thinking, but he did not receive wisdom pertaining to the world to come. His wisdom was confined to "under the sun," as he himself acknowledged (Eccl 1:3,9,14; 2:11,17,18,19,20,22; 3:16; 4:1,3,7,15; 5:13,18; 6:1,12; 8:9,15,17; 9:3,6,9,11,13; 10:5). Both "life and immortality" are brought to light in Christ, not in Solomon (2 Tim 1:10). Jesus told of the rich man and Lazarus, together with Abraham, after their death. All were fully conscience of both their surroundings and life upon the earth. Abraham spoke of Moses and the Prophets, which came

several hundred years after he had died, and about which he knew nothing when in the world. The rich man knew about his brothers upon earth (Luke 16:22-31). I know that some consider this to be a parable, but there is no indication of this being the case. Even if it were, a parable always parallels realities with Kingdom truth. If the dead are not conscience, Jesus used a misrepresentation to portray eternal truth--something inconceivable to me.

John the beloved also saw the souls of the martyrs in the unseen world. They were conscience, and asked concerning the vindication of their blood (Rev 6:9-10). For that matter, both Moses and Elijah returned from the unseen world to speak with Jesus when He was transfigured. We are told they spoke with Him concerning the death He would shortly "accomplish" (Lk 9:30-31). Neither of them spoke of Christ's death when they were on earth. Not only, therefore, were they conscience prior to the resurrection, their understanding had increased, like that of Abraham in Christ's account of the rich man and Lazarus. The Lord Jesus Himself preached to some spirits while He was in the Spirit following His death. Peter, elaborating upon the event, said the Gospel was preached to spirits. A most intriguing text, yet worthy of our embrace (1 Pet 1 Pet 3:18-19; 4:6).

There is an additional perspective to this subject which is worthy of consideration. Jesus told us eternal life was "knowing God, and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent" (John 17:3). John reiterated the same truth in 1 John 5:20. This knowledge, as you must know, is spiritual intimacy, or participation, with the Father and Son--an experiential knowledge--like Adam knowing Eve, and Joseph knowing Mary (Gen 4:1; Matt 1:25). If, therefore, the soul sleeps until the resurrection, we have an interruption of eternal life, or knowing the Lord. In my understanding, such a view contradicts the very nature of eternal life. That is why it is written, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8-9).

I have donated my body to medicine at our local university and I would like to know your thoughts on this subject.

I respect your desire to advance the cause of medicine, and see it as a noble one. In my opinion, I think it would be best to simply request the burial of my body after their work with it has been finished. That is, however, just an opinion. In the last analysis, you must honor your own conscience in the matter. Make your decision as unto the Lord, seeking to honor Him and conduct your affairs in strict keeping with your faith. God will honor such a decision.

What should be our response on donating body parts?

Like many other areas, this is a matter of conscience. Every person is responsible for arriving at their own conclusion, because God has not spoken on the matter. That decision should be in strict keeping with your faith, and in no way distractive from your perception of our Lord. Make your decision to honor the Lord, and he will bless it. It is really just that simple.

Could you please give exegesis on Roman 13: 8-10

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom 13:8-10, NKJV).

This passage approaches conduct in the world from the New Covenant point of view. Everything is done in the knowledge of the reigning Lord, Who is working all things together for our good (Rom 8:28). The "great salvation" which we experience in Christ Jesus anchors us in the world to come, delivering us from the dominion of the flesh and sin. We are not to approach life as though there were no God working in our behalf and for our good. Neither, indeed, is self-gratification our primary motivation. This was not the case under the Law, when the hearts of the people were not in harmony with the Lord, and His law chafed against their spirits.

Now, in Christ Jesus, we are freed from living for ourselves in the world. Earlier in this book, the Spirit witnessed, "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom 6:11). The same truth is expressed in 2 Corinthians 5:15. "*And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*"

To "*owe no man anything*" involves not being unduly attached to this world--a stance strictly forbidden by the life of faith. In Christ, we are constituted strangers and pilgrims in the world (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13), and are citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20-21). This does not strictly forbid indebtedness, which sometimes cannot be avoided. Paul spoke of paying off the debt of Onesimus to Philemon, should such be necessary (Phil 1:18).

The point of the text, however, is not indebtedness, but the superiority of life in Christ Jesus. The Law, as a covenant., was incapable of changing the hearts of its constituents, remitting their sin, or strengthening their hearts. How different is life in the Son! Now, the love of God is "*shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*" (Rom 5:5), enabling the Law to be "*fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*" (Rom 8:1,5).

The monumental challenges of interpersonal relationships are all answered in Christ Jesus. Once the love of God has gripped our hearts, we will "do no ill" to our neighbor.

Paul's point in this text is that living contrary to this reveals a wholly unacceptable state. In Christ it becomes illogical to do harm to our neighbors or exploit them. It will do no good to harp at the people of God about these things. They must be challenged to consider the day in which they live, and the approaching judgment of all men. As verse 11 and 12 say, "*And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.*"

By faith, we live in this world in anticipation of entering the next one. Consequently, we do no harm to our neighbors, avoid indebtedness, choosing to bless instead, and thus fulfill the Law--without it being imposed upon us. How beautiful the thought that His commandments "are not grievous" (1 John 5:3).

I am having a time understanding the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming.

The reason you are having trouble with this is because the Word of God does not make such distinctions. First, the term "rapture" is nowhere in Scripture. It represents a theological concept--a conclusion men have reached by reading Scripture. It is based on the teaching of 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where all believers are said to be "caught up" to meet the Lord in the air. The passage gives no indication this event is secret, or that it is unrelated to the second coming of Christ. In fact, the occasion in which this takes place is the extremely noisy (not secret) return of the Lord, Who descends "with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump

of God" (verse 16). Peter reminds us that when the Lord returns as a "thief in the night" all of nature will pass away in a climactic conflagration (2 Pet 3:10-12).

The second coming of Christ is the conclusion of all things. He will raise the dead--all of them--with his great voice (John 5:28-29), the heavens and the earth will flee from before His face (Rev 20:11), and "every eye shall see Him" (Rev 1:7). It is then that the "harvest" of the earth will take place, and the people of God will be gathered to their Lord. Until then, the tares and the wheat, by Christ's own word, will "grow together" (Matt 13:30,40-42).

The coming of Christ is the blessed hope of the church (Tit 2:11-13), not the "rapture." The hope of seeing the Lord as He is the hope that constrains us to purify ourselves, even as He is pure (1 John 3:1-3), not the rapture. Just stick with the verbatim statements of Scripture, and you will be right and not confused.

I have a friend who lies so much, it has become addictive. Each time he lies, he asks forgiveness. However, he then goes back to lying. What are the implications of this?

There are several implications to the scenario. First, it confirms that the flesh is "weak," as Jesus said (Matt 26:41). Second, it verifies how subtle the devil is (2 Cor 11:3). Third, It reveals that a sensitive heart is the way to recovery (1 John 1:7-9). This is not something you want to philosophize about, because it involves the heart. God will honor a sensitive heart, even though many failures have taken place. This does not justify failure or condone lying, but it does offer hope out of the delimita. Remember when Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive someone who sinned against him? He suggest the high number of seven. Jesus responded, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to

seventy times seven" (Matt 18:22). Why did Jesus say that? I mean, that is 490 times. It is because that is how the Father forgives.

Some will take this to be a license for sinning, but it is not. Each time soul seeks forgiveness from the Lord, lingering in his presence until a sense of forgiveness grips the soul, strength to overcome sin is increased. remember, you cannot sin while you are in God's Presence. I would suggest that your friend spend more time in the presence of the Lord BEFORE he falls into sin. He will find victory before long.

What denomination is the most based on the word of God?

As much as possible, you want to avoid thinking in terms of groups. There are some very flawed denominations in which very godly people can be found, who have embraced the truth of God, and declare with power and Divine approval. There are also denominations who have basically sound creeds, yet have congregations identified with them that are in left field.

It is best to evaluate each congregation on its own. That is the way Jesus does it. There were, for example, seven churches Jesus addressed in Asia. They were all from the same geographical area, and were all identified with him -- yet they were not all the same. Each one was evaluated by the Lord on the basis of its standing with Him. You can read His assessments in Revelation, chapters two and three. The point I am making will be very apparent as you read those chapters.

You want find congregation where the Word of God is held very high--high than tradition, and higher than experience. As a former Roman Catholic, you have been exposed to a religion dominated

by tradition. There are other forms of religion that are dominated by human experience. By that I mean the primary theme of preaching and discussion is what has happened, or can happen, to people. The resolution of interpersonal relationships are also fundamental in such congregations. Neither of these emphases (tradition or experience) is proper.

By holding the Word of God high, I mean the following. Jesus Christ is declared as He is represented in Scripture. Salvation is declared in the words of the Bible. As much as possible, there is an avoidance speaking of Bible things in human terms. Rather, people will speak of Bible things in Bible terms.

You will not be able to find a perfect church -- at least not on earth. Look for one where the members WANT to be perfect, and are not at home in the world. It should be a congregation that helps people get to heaven -- whose assemblies are not a hindrance to spiritual progress. Too, look for a real appetite for the Word of God, where sermons and teaching is not brief to accommodate a lack of spiritual appetite. Classes should allow for some discussion of the Word of God, and an openness to the Word should be apparent. Where these qualities are found, you have found a good fellowship. You may find things taught with which you will not agree, but in due time, the environment will allow such matters to be corrected.

I take the position that there was a satan but not any more (a facet of the Preterist view)

If there is no Satan, then we no longer have a stalking adversary (1 Peter 5:8). Temptation exists no more, for he is the Tempter (1 Thess 3:5). Lies, of which he is the father, have then passed away (John 8:44). It is not possible for Satan to get an advantage of us (1

Cor 2:11). There are no more children of the wicked one, or tares, if there is no more Satan (Matt 13:38). If Satan is in the lake of fire now, then so is the false prophet, who was thrown in with him (Rev 20:10). Obviously, gross sinners can no longer be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:5), and Satan can no longer tempt married people who separate for prayer and fasting (1 Cor 7:5). With him no longer existing, he no longer can transform himself into an angel of light, nor can he have deceiving ministers who transform themselves into ministers of righteousness (2 Cor 11:14). The servants of God can therefore no more be hindered by him (1 Thess 2:18), and there is no more unrighteous deception (2 Thess 2:9). If he is non-existent, people can no longer turn aside after Satan (1 Tim 5:15). No need to warn people to "make no place for the devil" (Eph 4:27), There is no further need, under this circumstance to put on the whole armor of God, for we do not have to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:11). No need to be concerned about a novice falling into the condemnation, reproach, or snare of the devil (1 Tim 3:6-7). With his purported demise, no one can be taken captive by him any longer (2 Tim 2:26). No need to resist him -- at least not if he does not exist (James 4:7). The children of the devil are no longer made known, because he is not there to father them (1 John 3:10).

All in all, I would say the teaching that the devil no longer exists is one of his own teachings. Either such an imagination is in sharp conflict with the Scriptures, or many of them have been reduced to obsolescence. I think the old serpent will be pleased with either conclusion -- but God will not, and neither am I.

What if a Christian commits suicide? Would a loving Father reject one of His children who preferred going to be with Him?

Life is a stewardship -- and therefore does not belong to us. Remember, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you,

whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:19-20).

We are often tempted to reason about these things from an earthly point of view--and none of us are exempt from this temptation. How is one to know they are no longer able to bring glory to God? or is it necessary that we think in such a manner? Our times are in His hand (Psalm 31:15). We must encourage one another to believe this--it is the truth. If this assessment is true ('My times are in Your hands'), suicide is not an option open to us. Death is an appointment best left in our lord's hands.

God is to glorified in our death as well as in our life. Peter, for instance, was told by the Lord Himself of the death through which he would glorify God (John 21:19). It seems to me that it would be most difficult for God to be glorified by means of suicide. Suicide is driven by human perception. It is surrounded with discouragement, and is not noted as resulting from strong faith and hope. Unless the Lord leads a person to commit suicide, which I think is highly unlikely, it is the result of someone taking matters into their own hands.

There is no need for any of us to sit in judgment upon poor souls who have been bludgeoned by pain and sorrow -- but neither are we within a Divinely appointed role when we attempt to justify such a deed.

How does one know if he has blasphemed against the Holy Ghost and if he has what is left for that person?

The sin of which Jesus spoke is one from which recovery is NOT possible--either in this world, or the world to come (Matt 12:31-32; Mark 3:28-29; Luke 12:10). Such a person has so steeled his heart against God that all sensitivity is lost. The conscience becomes so hard and calloused that the Holy Spirit Himself cannot convict such a person of sin.

For this reason, the person committing this sin is not concerned about it. The person wondering if he has committed this sin has NOT committed it. The very presence of concern proves this to be the case. Such a person would never have a thought about how God would treat him, what would happen in the judgment, or if there is any hope after death. All of those reactions are evidence sin can still be forgiven. As a matter of interest, the Word of God does not define the point at which such insensitivity is reached. There would be no point to identifying that point, as you can see.

"Please explain the Trinity. I know the word is not found in Scripture, but am confused about Jesus being called "God" and the "Son of God."

The phrase "Jesus is God" is never found in Scripture. God the Father is, however, declared to have said to the Son, "But to the Son He says: "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom" (Heb 1:8). the doctrine of Scripture is that when Jesus entered into the world, He "emptied Himself" (Phil 2:5-8). Stated simply, that means the

emphasis was placed upon His humanity, not His Deity--although He remained Divine.

Scripture also affirms, "For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one" (1 John 5:7). John defines "the Word" as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself (John 1:1,14; 1 John 1:1). While the word "trinity" is not in Scripture, the fact of three distinct Divine Persons is. Often they are all mentioned in the same verse--each doing something different (1 Pet 1:2; Matt 28:19; Gal 4:6; Matt 3:16-17; 2 Cor 13:14).

The term "Son of God" declares equality with the Father--it is not a term that makes Jesus less than God. Even His enemies knew this was the case. In fact, that is the official reason why they crucified Him (John 5:18). When you proclaim Jesus as the Son of God, you are declaring Him as He should be presented. This is how the Father revealed Jesus to Peter--as the Son of God (Matt 16:16-18).

This is the very thing Satan challenged in his temptation of Christ (Matt 4:3,6). This is what the demons recognized Him to be (Mark 3:11). The angel told Mary this is what Jesus would be called (Lk 1:35). You are always on safe ground, so to speak, declaring Him in this manner. Also know, He is "the Great God and Savior" also (Tit 2:13).

"It would appear that just as in Adam all "will be dying", "in Christ" all (ALL MANKIND) will be made alive at the Second Coming! Christ bought resurrection life for ALL MEN at his return. Is this so?"

You are precisely correct--and that is the point of the passage in

Romans 5. In this regard, the purpose of salvation is to make us compatible with the resurrection body, thereby orienting us for glory. The unsaved, on the other hand, will not be compatible with the resurrection body. They will still possess all of the lusts they have preferred and cultured, yet have no means to gratify them. The unspeakable torment of this circumstance is involved in our Lord's stirring words about the condition of the damned: "where THEIR (not the) worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44,46,48).

Believers experience incompatibility with the body now. This is described in Paul's words in Romans 7:14-25, and Galatians 5:16-17. For us, the resurrection will be a glorious liberation. For the lost, it will begin a time of dreadful confinement and frustration.

Good to hear from you, and to learn of your labors in the Kingdom. be strong and of good courage.

How can the dead be baptized? Is he referring to those who are dead because they do not have Christ in their hearts? If not who is he referring to and what is the difference between this "baptism of the dead" and "baptism of repentance".

The "baptism" of 1 Corinthians is the baptism of suffering--or being overcome by suffering: dying for Jesus'. It is the same baptism to which Jesus alluded in Luke 12:50. Mark 10:38-39, and Matthew 20:22-23. The question of the passage is, Why would we submit to be overcome by suffering, dying for Jesus sake, if there were no resurrection of the dead? The subject of 1 Corinthians 15 is the bodily resurrection, not our initial entrance into Christ. The baptism referred to in this passage relates to jeopardy, and such things as fighting with beasts after the manner of men (verses 30-32). Voluntary submission to such dangers makes no sense at all if

the dead are not raised. I do not believe baptism in water is ever related to suffering, jeopardy, or other imminent dangers. The baptism of First Corinthians 15 is.

What do you think about these verses concerning reigning with Jesus?

Salvation is infinitely larger than the small circumference of systematic theology. What we have in Christ Jesus is very real, but it is only the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23), a pledge of the full harvest, which is to come. Our present experience is much like the grapes of Eschol to Israel. Those were very real grapes, from a very real vine. But they were not the whole of it, and neither is our present affiliation with Jesus the whole of what God has prepared for those who love Him. Like Paul, we have not yet apprehended that for which we have been apprehended. The following observations are made within this context of thought.

1 Cor. 4:8. Does not Paul indicate that he was not yet reigning with Christ?

This is a bit of Apostolic sarcasm, yet it is said with the whole of truth in mind. Paul had been granted authority to "open" men eyes, turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18), yet had difficulty with the carnal Corinthians. They were a contradiction to his experiential reign, like the beatings, shipwrecks, and perils he mentioned in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Paul was reigning then with Jesus, but only to the extent of his immediate involvement in Divine purpose. Like Jesus, he could only do what he saw the Father doing (John 8:38). Too, like Jesus, he was "straitened" by the body (Lk 12:50).

2 Tim. 2:12. Does not the statement, "If we suffer with him we will also reign with him," indicate that reigning with Christ was

still future?

This "present evil world" is not the ultimate place in which we are "with Christ." There is, as you know, a sense in which, while we are present in the body, we are absent from the Lord. The suffering to which he refers is a "present in the body" view, while the "reign with Him" is an "absent from the body" one. The reign in "the world to come" will be an elaboration of the one to which we were introduced here. But while we are in the world, the suffering is the most apparent thing.

Zech. 14:4, 16-17. Will not the feet of Jesus stand on the mount of Olives and will he not reign over all the earth from Jerusalem?

Zechariah's prophecy is certainly to be taken seriously. It is also to be considered within the context of the Gospel, which makes known the purpose of God as realized in Christ Jesus. The dividing of the Mount of Olives appears to be speaking more of a Divinely created way of escape than a topographical phenomenon. I base this upon verse five, which mentions a valley through which escape is realized. If this referred to an actual dividing of Mount Olivet, I find it difficult to understand why Christ or the Apostles made no reference to it.

Verses 16-17 refer to a quest of the nations for the knowledge of the Lord, a remarkable occurrence mentioned frequently by the prophets (Isa 2:3; 52:10; 61:11; Jer 3:17; 33:9; Zech 8:23, etc.). This does not appear to be the result of evangelistic efforts, which makes it so remarkable. It seems to be an awakening much like that which occurred in the ministry of John the Baptist. The people came to him.

Rev. 5:10. Will not the place we are to reign be "upon the earth"?

This was written after considerable progress had been made in the spread of the Gospel. Paul, you will recall, said the Gospel had

already been "proclaimed in all creation under heaven" (Col 1:23, NASB). If the rapid and effective spread of the Gospel is what is meant by reigning with Jesus (in this text), then it would say "are reigning" instead of "shall reign." There are at least two ways in which this ("shall reign") is true. First, the prophets did speak of a time when "the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). Paul alludes to this extensive awakening in his reasoning about Israel being grafted back into its own tree (Rom 11:12,15). Secondly, our ultimate reign will be in the new heavens and the new earth -- "the world to come." Scripture indicates the saints are being presently groomed for that rule (Heb 2:5-12). That, of course, will be a renovated earth. It has already been baptized with water in the flood. It will yet be purified by fire, which will utterly consume it as it presently exists.

Dan. 7:27. Will not the kingdoms under the whole heaven to be given to the saints?

Three times in this chapter, Daniel states the kingdom will be given to the saints (18, 22, and 27). The manner in which it is stated is arresting. "the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One." This is to be equated with being given "the world to come." -- being co-regents, as it were, with the Lord Jesus. This is the promise Jesus made to those who overcome. "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev 3:21).

Rev. 11:15; 17. Will the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord?

This is another way of saying the Lord's enemies will become His footstool. Lest we adopt a simplistic view of the text, the "last enemy" that shall be destroyed is said to be death. After that, the Kingdom revert back to the Father, and Jesus Himself will be

subject to Him--a most remarkable consideration (1 Cor 15:25-28). It is not that Christ's enemies are not under Him now -- all power and authority has already been placed under Him (1 Pet 3:22). However, He is presently ruling "in the midst of His enemies" (Psa 110:2), orchestrating the affairs of the world in the favor of His people. His present reign, however, is only apparent to faith. The texts in reference speak of the grand consummation of God's eternal purpose, when the King and His reign will become apparent. This is what Paul referred to when he wrote, "the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:14-15).

Rev. 20:4-6. Will not the faithful be resurrected to sit on thrones, reigning with Christ for a thousand years?

The personalities mentioned are not merely the faithful, but "the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God." I gather these are the same ones mentioned previously as being "under the altar," asking about the avenging of their blood (Rev 6:9-11). These left the world appearing as though they were defeated. But their cause will live again, much like the spirit and power of Elijah was found in John the Baptist (Lk 1:17). In this regard, it may very well be that James, the brother of John, reigned in this sense when the Gospel spread rapidly and effectively in those early days. You will recall he was martyred early in the course of things. Just a thought.

One final thought. One of the initial aspects of our coming reign will be the judgment of the world and angels (1 Cor 6:1-2). At that time, we will be well suited for the occasion. Until then, we exercise judgment in the lesser things related to this world. However, in those preliminary judgments, we are tuned up for something far greater.

What about future rewards? Is it really right to think one believer can receive more rewards than another?

Rewards are, indeed, being accrued for the saints. This is because men have actually entered into the labor and work of the Lord. In fact, we are called "workers together with God" (1 Cor 3:9). This is significantly different than working "for God," which is the institutional emphasis. The distribution of the spoils of victory, in this case, will be according to our degree of participation. This differs from the distribution of the spoils administered by David, who gave the same portion to those who stayed by 'the stuff' as those who went down to battle (2 Sam 20:34). That, in my judgment, was a prefigurement of salvation by grace and the full access to God experienced by all believers -- much like the distribution of the pounds, where every person received the same measure -- or the laborers in the vineyard, where the workers all received the same wage.

There is, however, another dimension to the Kingdom where rewards are proportionate to labor. As it is written, "but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor 3:8). What a marvelous consideration--the extent of our labor, as well as the results of it, will be a basis upon which rewards are distributed! A talented and influential, but slothful, laborer will not receive more than the hearty laborer who lacked these things. This is the personal aspect of the Kingdom, allowing for the first to be last, and the last to be first. I do not know how that could be fulfilled if there were no difference in reward and position in the world to come.

It is glorious to contemplate this. Right now, we are determining the extent of our reign with Jesus throughout the ages to come. Just as the land of Canaan was apportioned to Israel, so "the world to come" will be apportioned to the saints of the most high God. It will be given to them in all of its splendor and glory (Dan

8:18,22,27). But it will be according to their involvement in the work of that kingdom while they tabernacled in the flesh.

The punishment of the wicked will also be on this basis--accrued reprisals. Jesus said of the rejecting generation He faced, "in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation" (Lk 11:50-51). A most dreadful consideration, indeed!

I would expand the idea developed by your friend in this manner. The winning of souls is a most noble enterprise -- but the nurture of them is even greater. The thrust of Scripture is consistently placed upon growth in Christ, not our induction into Him. All of the spiritual gifts were given for the edifying of the body (Eph 4:11-16). The Apostles saw the departure of their converts as a most critical thing, voiding their labors, and causing them to lose reward (Gal 4:11; 2 John 8). This being the case, the winning of souls is not the solitary means of accruing reward (I realize your friend did not mean this. yet, that is the conclusion too often left by the institutional emphasis on recruitment). Jesus spoke of approval in the day of judgment being based on our response to His people and their need (Matt 25:32-46). A reward is promised to those receiving His disciples, and His prophets (Matt 10:41-42). That certainly opens wide the door of possibility. Overcoming the world (an intensely personal matter) is also offered a great reward (Rev 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). The faithful labor of elders is promised Divine recognition (1 Pet 5:1-5). Think of the rewards that have accrued for faithful mothers like Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:4). Rewards are offered for being persecuted for righteousness sake (Matt 5:12). Even in our financial sowing to the work of the Kingdom, we reap rewards (2 Cor 9:6). Prayers uttered in the secrecy of our closet will be rewarded (Matt 6:6). Even private fasting is promised public recognition by our Father (Matt 6:18).

Think of such practical matters as doing good to our enemies, doing good, and lending--they are all promised a reward that is "great" (Lk 6:35). If those brought to Christ through our endeavors pass the fire of Divine judgment, we will receive a reward (1 Cor 3:14). Laboring willingly for the Lord, sometimes under great distress, will be honored with a reward (1 Cor 9:17). Even lowly slaves, subject often to harsh taskmasters, were promised a reward for heartily doing to the Lord whatever they did (Col 3:22-24).

Well, brother Ron, I have said more than I intended to say. This subject thrills my soul. It has opened for me the door of hope which was closed by the institution--even after I gave her my best. Our labor is not vain in the Lord, as you know. Does not this shed even more light on that glorious promise concerning our experience of suffering? "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor 4:17).

<< Do you know why God forgives sins only after the shedding of blood of a pure sacrificial lamb and given as a burned offering to God? >>

The burnt offerings were only under the Law, and were symbolic of something being given completely to God, with no usefulness left for anything else. It was a picture of being totally committed--being consumed with the zeal of the Lord, as seen in Christ's total commitment to dying for the sins of the world. Christ's body, of course, was not burned, or consumed with fire. He was rather raised from the dead.

The shedding of blood is necessary because life must be given to save life. God taught this even under the Law, which was the means He used to introduce the idea to us. Leviticus 17:11 is a key

text in this regard. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." God created us so our blood is what carries life to us. Requiring blood was like requiring one life for another. It had to be the blood of a spotless lamb, because a defiled person cannot be offered for another defiled person. This is the point developed in Hebrews 9:14 and 1 Peter 1:19. In other words, Jesus could take our sins upon Himself because He had none of His own. He could offer His life to God as a substitute for ours. Our lives were not acceptable as an offering for sin.

To put it another way, the offerings under the Law introduced the idea of a Substitute--of one accepting the responsibility for the sins of the world, then absorbing the punishment due because of them. The entire sacrificial system developed in Leviticus was a picture of this.

Another Bible word that shows the idea of substitution is "impute" (some more recent versions use "credit to." In the case of Christ's death (the shedding of His blood, or giving up of His life), our sins were imputed, or credited to Him. Then, His righteousness is imputed, or credited to, us. Scriptures that develop this truth are Romans 4:6-24, 1 Peter 2:24, and Isaiah 53:4-6.

Our sin was put upon Jesus, and He became a curse (Gal 3:10-13), even being "made sin for us" (2 Cor 5:21). God expended His indignation with sin on Jesus, Who had no sin of His own. The nature of God demanded that sin be dealt with, but none of us could have recovered from His curse. Jesus, however, did, being raised from the dead to die no more. That is a general view of substitution--and a wonderful view it is!

<< What is so "good" about the Good News if I have to hold on? I thought God held on to me. >>

God DOES hold on to you, but not without your involvement in the process. When He saved Noah, Noah DID have to build an ark--but God enabled him to do it, giving him wisdom and strength to complete the task. When Israel came out of Egyptian bondage, they had to DO something--and quite a bit at that. They had to kill a Passover lamb, sprinkle its blood upon their door posts, eat it, get themselves clothed and ready to travel, have their families ready, and come out of the land at midnight. In all of this, God strengthened them to do what He told them. When David killed Goliath, he took a sling and a rock, and used his skill. God empowered his efforts, causing them to be effective. Jesus told a lame man to pick up his bed and walk. He commanded a man with a withered hand to stretch it out. He told a blind man to wash in the pool of Siloam, and he would see. This type of account can be multiplied many times.

In all of them, the power was of God, not of man--yet, none of the deliverances would have been accomplished without the effort of those involved. It is absurd to think Noah would have been saved if he did not build the ark. There is no need to comment on what would have happened to Israel if they did not put the blood on their door, or chose to wait until the next day to get out of Egypt. If the man with the withered hand did not stretch it out, it would have remained withered. If the lame man did not take up his bed and walk, he would have remained lame.

The good news is that our "labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor 15:58). He underwrites our feeble efforts, making the effective. He is "able to keep us from falling" (Jude 24), and will surely do so. However, He has not promised, and He will not do it, without our

involvement. Faith, after all, constrains us to do what God has required of us--and God makes sure our effort is effective. That is good news. What honest soul wants to go to heaven without doing anything? Without obeying, without fighting, without resisting the devil, or without perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord? What is there about the Gospel that would cause a person to think they could not respond to God, and do everything He commanded them, including coming out of a grave like Lazarus! Every place the Gospel was believed, people asked what they should do. "What shall we do?" "What must I do to be saved?" "Here is water, what doth hinder me from being baptized." "What wilt Thou have me to do?" On and on we could go citing similar references. Why did people respond like that? And why did the Gospel preacher give them something to do? It was because the Good News announced things that, with God, were doable. The people sensed something did have to be done, but that in Christ Jesus, they could do it.

When Jesus bid Peter to walk on the water, he did. When Peter took his eyes off Jesus, he sank. Jesus saved him, but not until he cried out for salvation. Peter would tell you it is impossible to walk on water without Jesus telling you to do so. He would also tell you it is impossible to keep on top of the water if you do not keep your eyes on Jesus. Additionally, he would tell you an earnest cry to the Lord will put you on the water again.

The very text which affirms God works in us "to will and do of His own good pleasure" presumes that we are exerting ourselves in the good fight of faith. You surely remember the text. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13). His point is that it is not possible to expend your energies to maintain the faith and fail.

A word of caution is in order. We must be careful not to allow

ourselves to be uncomfortable with the expressions of the Holy Spirit. If He tells us to "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim 6:12,19), we had better not try and harmonize that with some preconceived theological notion. If we are going to feel uncomfortable with anything, let it be with the expressions of men -- not those of the Lord.

The following texts speak for themselves. They all mention "holding" on to something. They are to be taken seriously. They are also to be embraced in a full persuasion that God will ensure the effectiveness of such holding.

"but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end . . . For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end . . . Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession . . . that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us . . . Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (Heb 3:6,14; 4:14; 6:18; 10:23).

We are told the Gospel saves us if we "keep it in memory" (1 Cor 15:2). Paul, a seasoned Apostle, spoke of laying hold on that on which Christ laid hold on him (Phil 3:12). Believers are admonished to "hold fast that which is good" (1 These 5:21). If that appears to say God does not hold us, or that we will live in fear of Him letting us go, we simply have not seen the matter correctly. The good news is that we CAN hold on, and that Jesus will see to it that we stand. But He has made no commitment to bring us to heaven without us fighting, keeping seeking, running, holding, and believing.

My question concerns 2Chron.34:22-28. The prophetess Huldah told Josiah that he "shall be gathered to his fathers and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace. However Josiah ends up dying in a battle. So 1 was Huldah a false prophet, it doesn't seem to indicate that she was. or 2 does the passage mean that Josiah would die during the peace that the nation was enjoying at the time. The I believe that it is the latter.

Huldah was, indeed, a prophetess. Josiah, as you may recall, refused to hearken unto the words of Necho, who said he was a prophet of God. Disguising himself, he went out to resist Necho, king of Egypt, who sought to take his land. Some students of Scripture have concluded Necho was not really a prophet. I do not believe that can be substantiated. It seems to me God would have pointed out if he was an imposter if that was the case. At any rate, Josiah did not actually initiate war, but went out to defend his territory against the encroachments of what he conceived to be an enemy.

Josiah did not actually die in a battle, but was "severely wounded " when shot at by enemy archers. He then told his servants to take him away. Placing him in another chariot, they brought him to Jerusalem, where he died and was buried (2 Chron 35:23-24). He was, then, brought to his grave in peace, even though wounded severely in battle, and ultimately dying from those wounds. He died and was buried away from the battle arena. The particular peace of which Huldah prophesied was not seeing the land ravaged by the an enemy in punishment for its transgression (2 Chron 34:28). That took place after Josiah's death.

You show the Catholic Churches in your church listings. Why do you do this?

The listing of the churches by no means constitutes an approval of them. This is a service provided by another company. Perhaps I should point out on my site that the listing does not constitute an endorsement of each congregation. It is intended to be like an electronic telephone book. Also, there are clusters of Catholic churches with whom I am familiar that do not subscribe to the traditional Catholic theology. Thank you for your response.

Will you be commenting later on this thought? That male and female working together are more in alignment with God and His likeness than male and female at odds with one another? I would certainly like to hear your comments.

In these devotions, I will not dwell on this aspect of creation, although there is much that could be said. In speaking of the creation of man, the Spirit says, "So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female HE CREATED THEM" (Gen 1:27). Again, Genesis 5:2 says, "Male and female created He THEM; and blessed THEM, and called THEIR name Adam ("Mankind," NKJV; "Man," NASB, NIV, "Humankind," NRSV) , in the day when they were created." In both texts, the latter clause is an elaboration of the first one (i.e., "So God created man.")

Peter accentuates the differing qualities of man and woman in his word to husbands. "Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered" (1 Pet 3:7). "Weaker," in this case, does not mean inferior. Nor, indeed, does it refer to physical constitution. The word "sensitive" would probably be more meaningful to us. The idea is that the woman bears Divine traits that make her sensitive, and easy to be affected. Peter's reference to

husband and wife being "heirs together of the grace of life" shows that he is not speaking of a hierarchical relationship.

As you might imagine, there is by no means unanimity in the Christian community on this matter. There are many that will take exception to this explanation. Notwithstanding, I hold to it, convinced the scriptures support the thought.

In reference to your daily email devotionals, particularly of the date 11-27-98 titling "Made to Have Dominion" are you suggesting that the passage in Hebrews 2:7,8 is referring to mankind? If so, would you please elaborate a bit more on this passage for me.

Yes, the passage is referring to mankind. The passage is a quotation of Psalm 2:7-8, which is David's contemplation of the smallness of humanity, when compared with the vastness of the universe. The point of the Hebrews passage is that the universe was made for mankind, not mankind for the universe. The Spirit points us to the new heavens and the new earth, or "the world to come," as it is often called (Heb 2:5; Matt 12:32; Heb 6:5). That world will be given to redeemed humanity. Jesus spoke of this when He said, But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (Lk 20:35).

The passage in question affirms that although man was made for this intent, we do not yet see everything under him. Sin brought man down, and caused the grip of mortality to affect the entire creation. Paul elsewhere calls it the "bondage of corruption" (Rom 8:21-15). However, while we do not see everything under man at this point, we do see Jesus. He is the glorified "Man Christ Jesus: (1 Tim 2:5). he is also the pledge of all those in Him, who will

"inherit all things" (Rev 21:7). He is the "first fruits" from the dead, and is a pledge of those whom He will raise from the dead in His own likeness (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:23).

There are other references to this matter, but this should suffice. Man was made for dominion, but does not possess it now. The Lord Jesus, however, Who is our representative at God's right hand, does possess all power in heaven and earth, without everything under his feet. We are to see in Him the pledge of what we ourselves will be (Col 3:4; 1 John 3:1-3). We will not, of course, be coequal with our blessed Lord, but we are "joint heirs" with Him (Rom 8:17).

Where does the soul go after bodily death? Jesus said to the thief on the cross. Surly this day you will be with me in paradise. Yet the Bible also says the when the Lord returns, the dead in Christ will rise first. Where is the soul before all this takes place in the mean time?

The "dead in Christ" refers to the bodies of the saints. That is the "mortal" part of man that will be made "immortal" at the resurrection. Scripture puts it this way, "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Cor 15:54-56).

The soul of the believer is "present with the Lord" when it is "absent from the body" (2 Cor 5:8). At death, the unseen part of us "departs" from the body. frequently the Word of God speaks of death as "departing" (Gen 35:18; 2 Tim 4:6; Phil 1:23). The extent

of being "present with the Lord" is not fully explained in Scripture, nor is a precise place defined. the book of Revelation speaks of martyred souls "under the altar" (Rev 6:9-12). Jesus spoke of Lazarus being "in Abraham's bosom" (Lk 16:22). Some Old Testament saints were said to have been "gathered unto their people" (Gen 25:8; 25:17; 36:29; 49:29.33).

Not only will Jesus the dead bodies when he comes, summoning them from the grave (John 5:28-29), He will also "bring with Him" those who have departed (1 Thess 4:14). Then the souls, which have been with Jesus, will enter the resurrected bodies.

The Spirit teaches us that our resurrection bodies are to be inhabited by us. They will be like a temple compared to our present bodies, which are like a tent (2 Cor 5:1-5). All of this confirms we are more than a body. In death, our souls go to be with the Lord. As I understand it, that experience will not be as great as our final joining to the Lord as complete persons- redeemed spirit, soul, and body. Then we shall be totally like Him- when we see Him as He is (1 John 3:1-2). In the interim, between our dead and His return, our state will be much exalted over our present state, but not as great as it will be in the end.

I believe that the Bible teaches a pre-tribulation rapture. I was listening to Dr. Gene Scotts tapes on the subject and he said that the verse in II Thess.2:3 should be read a "catching away" and says that this verse also teaches a pre-trib rapture. I like the way it fits but am not sure if this can be included with the other verses concerning the rapture. His argument being that there have been many falling away in the last 2 thousand years. Do you think this verse fits and do you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. Thank you

The Word of God does not teach a secret "rapture," or a "pre-

tribulation rapture." These are terms students of the Bible have developed and assigned to a body of theology. The term "rapture" is a corruption of the phrase "caught up to together with them" from 1 Thessalonians 4:17. The point of reference there is all the people of God joining together to meet the Lord when He appears. The Thessalonians supposed those who had died would miss the glorious appearing of Christ (1 Thess 4:13). The text in reference was written to assure believers this was not the case at all.

What is more, there is nothing about the Thessalonian text that contributes to the ideas of being secretly removed from the earth, or delivered from a tribulation prior to the end of the world. The text declares the Lord shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:16-17). That is anything but secret.

In developing this theme in the fifth chapter, the Spirit affirms the coming of the Lord as a "thief in the night" will mean the destruction of the wicked, not the induction of an earthly tribulation. "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape" (1 Thess 5:2-3). Lest someone think this is a separate coming, and not the one for the saints, the Lord adds, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thess 5:4).

Paul continues the illumination of this subject in Second Thessalonians. There he pointedly affirms that the wicked will be destroyed **WHEN** the Lord comes to be glorified in His saints. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming

fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (2 Thess 1:7-10).

These very things are affirmed elsewhere in Scripture, and with such remarkable clarity, one wonders how such confusion could have been arisen over this matter. Our glorification, for example, is connected with the appearing of Jesus (Col 3:4; Phil 3:20-21). It is then that we shall be changed "in a moment" to forever be like the Lord (1 Cor 15:52-56; 1 John 3:1-2). Jesus proclaimed He would empty the graves of both the good and the evil with His triumphant shout (John 5:28-29). The Second Thessalonians text states that this time of glorification for saints is precisely the same time the wicked will be destroyed.

On a matter as vital as the coming of the Lord, it is on the part of wisdom to speak in the words of Scripture, and not contrived theological jargon. Whatever may be said for or against the many tribulation-centered dogmas, they have all had their origin with men. Those men have then taken the liberty to bend the rest of Scripture around these ideas, which is a transgression of monumental proportions.

There is not a single clear and doubtless text in Scripture that teaches pre or post or any other tribulation-focused rapture. If this doctrine reflected the mind of the Lord, it would have been stated clearly and concisely by he Lord. As a word of caution, any doctrine that requires an elaborate combination of texts not so assembled by the Holy Spirit, must be viewed with extreme caution, to say the least.

In the final analysis, each one of us is responsible for our own faith

and apprehension of the truth. In this reply, I do not intend to challenge or question your own faith. I can see you do have a keen interest in the Lord and His glorious appearing. This is precious in His sight. You will always be safe and right if you speak in the language of Scripture. That, of course, is something enjoined upon us by the Lord (1 Cor 2:13).

How do I approach a diverse audience with the word of God?

The Gospel of Christ is Divinely designed to reach a diverse audience. Make your focus the Lord Jesus Christ. By that, I mean who He is, and what He has done. The appeal to your audience is that the only reason for Jesus is humanity. The Word would never have become flesh if God were not interested in mankind. That makes Jesus relevant.

The remission of sin, access to God, and abundant grace are all matters that are for both the believer and the unbeliever, the weak and the strong, the beginner and the mature. As you develop such grand themes, the Spirit will apply them to your readers and hearers.

When you know some of the individuals that are in your audience, you can show the application of Christ and His work to their case (like spiritual leaders, the backslidden, or those who are caught in deep sin, and have never come to Jesus).

In my judgment, we should avoid getting caught up in contemporary issues, allowing them to obscure the Lord Jesus.

Above all, remember that God is with you as you speak for Him. he is able to give you wisdom to deal with an audience of extreme diversity.

Is there anything in the Bible that excludes women from being Pastors? A church I'm planning to visit has a female Pastor and I'm a bit confused about this. Thanks!

The Word of God speaks to this subject, but not with as much clarity as some desire. The primary text on this matter is found in 1 Timothy 2:12. "And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence." A "pastor," or "shepherd" has certain qualifications that indicate women were not included; i.e., "husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6).

Having said that, it is possible for extenuating circumstances to exist. There may, for example, be a congregation of only women (Miriam, Moses' sister, led the woman--Ex 15:20). Also, there may be one in which there are no men with spiritual knowledge or understanding. In either case, God will not allow the sheep to become malnourished because there is no competent man to teach. The thing that is forbidden is the usurpation of power--a domination over men, or seizing the power.

One further consideration is prompted by the rare appearance of women leaders during old times. Deborah, for example, was a judge. In fact, she was the ONLY woman judge, and was also a prophetess (Judges 4:4). She was no ordinary lady, but an extraordinary one. Another woman of this caliber was Huldah, a prophetess of old time with whom even priests conferred (2 Kings 22:14). In both cases (Deborah and Huldah) the name of their husband is also stated. This confirms they were not unduly assertive, but functioned in strict accord with Divine gifts, or abilities.

Here is my opinion--and it is precisely that, an opinion. You should exercise caution in attending a congregation that has a

woman pastor. Such a condition is right ONLY if the lady has unusual spiritual insights, possessing an extraordinary understanding of the things of God that is not possessed by men in the congregation. If this is not the case, she should subject herself to those with equal or superior knowledge, and not insist on the leading position. Should others request her insights, competent spiritual leaders sanction her teaching, that would also be acceptable.

We have no examples of women pastors in the Bible, though there are examples of prophetesses (Ex 15:20; Neh 6:14; Isa 8:3; Lk 2:36; Acts 21:9). Armed with these Scriptural presentations, you must ask the Lord to give you the wisdom to do what is right. He will faithfully direct you.

What is the Holy spirit?

The Holy Spirit is a Person. He is the unobtrusive member of the Godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By "unobtrusive," I mean He operates in the background, not drawing attention to Himself. He is called "the Spirit of God" (1 Corinthians 2:11), because He comes from God and makes the things of God understandable. He is the One who moved men to write the Scriptures (2 Peter 1:21). The Holy Spirit is given to those who receive Christ, and dwells within them. In this sense, their bodies are called "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 6:19). The Holy Spirit comes to make us spiritually strong, so Christ Himself can dwell, or live, within us (Ephesians 3:16-17). Having the Holy Spirit is the way in which "seals," or marks, us as His own (Ephesians 4:30). In other words, we belong to Him in a special way.

The Holy Spirit is also referred to as "the Spirit of Christ" (Romans 8:9; 1 Peter 1:11), and "the Spirit of His (God's) Son" (Galatians

4:6). He is called this because He comes to make Jesus real to our hearts and minds. He (the Holy Spirit) comes to help us to see, or understand, Christ's death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement at the right hand of God. It is only as we see these things that we become able to live for the Lord (Ephesians 3:15-20).

The Holy spirit also comes to change us--to make us like the Lord. The Word of God calls this being changed "from glory to glory" by the Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 3:18). He assists us in obtaining Divine qualities in our lives. These are called "the fruit of the Spirit" (Galatians 5:22-25).

How could I tell the Holy spirit is with me?

We know we have the Holy Spirit by evidence. It is something like the wind. We cannot actually see the wind, but we see the evidence of its presence, whether in the gentle moving of the leaves of the tree, or the destructive force brought on by a tornado or hurricane. Jesus referred to this kind of evidence in John 3:8).

The Word of God tells us of the "fruit of the Spirit," or what He produces in us. When we see these evidences, that is our proof that we have the Holy Spirit. Mind you, it is possible to have the Holy Spirit, yet not know it because of a weak understanding. When, however, you have faith in Christ, and confess Him as Lord, you have evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit. He is also promised to all who repent and are baptized (Acts 2:38). When, for example, you see your love for Jesus growing, it is because the Holy Spirit is working within you. He sheds abroad, or fills your heart, with the love of God (Romans 5:5). He also causes you to "abound in hope," looking forward to Christ's return and your consequent presence with Him (Romans 15:13). Also, when you

are able to subdue sinful tendencies within, successfully resisting the devil, you have evidence you possess the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures put it in these words, "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14).

What do you consider to be the heart of the Restoration Movement's plea? Is there just one plea or are there more?

That the Lord Jesus Christ is the focus of our faith, faith in Him is the means of realizing reconciliation with God and unity with fellow believers, and the Word of God is the exclusive means through which truth is appropriated and disseminated. These thoughts are reflected in the axioms, "No creed but Christ," and "No book but the Bible."

Having said this, I must also admit this is not what the contemporary Resoration Movement is noted for. There has been a serious departure from these noble objectives that is of much concern to many of us.

How would you go about trying to get people interested in learning more about the history of the Restoration Movement? That is, how would you make it alive and exciting rather than dry as dust?

The answer is to be found in the constituents of the movement--the people who make it up. Uncovering the history of the Restoration Movement is of no value unless it is supported by godly evidence among those who profess to have embraced it. Having preached in hundreds of Restoration Churches, I can tell you they are generally

weak--very weak--in the faith. They are plagued with Scriptural illiteracy and disinterest. Generally speaking, the preaching to which these people are regularly subjected is deplorable, lacking both substance and power. These conditions negate any profession of having any form of organizational or spiritual purity. This is a source of great heartache to me.

In my judgment, our presentation must NOT be of the Movement itself, but of the principles upon which it was established. Somehow, the Lord Jesus, His great salvation, and the unfathomable power of His Word must again be powerfully declared and effectually embraced. This is not taking place--at least, not on any noticeable scale. The great sermons of Campbell, Scott, etc., were not about a movement, but the Lord Jesus Christ, His great salvation, and its accessibility and relevance to their generation. That kind of preaching made the Movement live then, and it will do it again.

There must be a return to great Christ-centered preaching. That is the appointed means of opening up the Gospel, and people being saved. As long as we are noted for our programs and highly organized and structured institutions, God will not honor our efforts.

To put it another way, those within the Restoration Movement will be spiritually sterile until they SEE what the Restoration fathers saw, proclaim it without shame, and build upon it.

I recently heard a prophecy of martial law coming on the earth. It was very troubling to me. I don't want the world to end the way it is, unless He takes me first. Can you help me?

First of all, your faith is your strength. The purpose of all valid communication from God to the people of God is to edify, strengthen, and build them up. Those who point to the future with

the finger of fright are either speaking to the unregenerate, or have not received a message from the Lord.

Scripture affirms our times are in the hand of the Lord (Psalm 31:15). This is particularly gratifying, because the Lord "cares" for us. He urges us to cast our care upon Him (like the concerns you have expressed), knowing this is the truth (1 Peter 5:7). Add to that a commitment He has made to His children, i.e., that He will not allow them to be tempted or tested above their ability (1 Corinthians 10:13). Satan, for that matter, does not have free access to the people of God. He can only move within the constraints of God's will--and that glorious will is to bring His people through this world to Himself. Nothing shall be able to separate the people of God from the love of God--absolutely nothing (Romans 8:35-39).

But that is not all. Every believer has reason to maintain confidence and full assurance in the Lord, and His concern for and protection of, them. Remember, Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). That involves supplying us with grace to help in the time of need, spiritual strength, the subduing of our enemies, peace of mind, joy in the Spirit . . . and so forth. In other words, as our constant Intercessor, Jesus is making sure we are never deficient, never found short of what we need, and never at the mercy of the devil. We can trust Him to do that work, and to do it well.

Contrary to the claims of many, the Lord has not provided us a list of details as to what will occur on the earth in our time. He has not promised to relieve us of all calamity, but He has promised to be with us and against our enemies. We have a choice in this matter, and the Lord will help us to make the right one. We can focus on events that might possibly occur in our lifetime. Or, we can focus on the Lord, and leave the government of the world in His hands (which it is anyway).

Candidly, it is not always easy to make that choice. But the Lord will help us as we rely upon Him. Remember one occasion when a man came to Jesus, asking Him to have mercy on his oppressed child. When Jesus told him "all things" were possible to the one believing, the man cried out, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). That is precisely the posture we must assume.

All of us must confess to our personal inadequacy in matters like this. There are reports being given by everyone from economists to purported prophets from God that are troubling. Whether or not they are true is not the question. Rather, the question is whether anything can arise to which our blessed Lord is not equal. Is it possible for circumstances to overtake us in which the Lord cannot protect and sustain us? He sustained a widow in famine (1 Kings 17), Israel in the wilderness (Psalm 78:23-25), and 7,000 prophets from the ravages of a wicked Jezebel (1 Kings 19:18; Romans 11:4). He will do no less for you, dear sister.

I am persuaded that you already know these things. However, as your pure mind is stirred up (2 Peter 3:1), the recollection of them will strengthen your heart, and assure you that your times are in the Lord's hands, not those of a tyrant instituting martial law.

Being a father of ten children, and grandfather of ten--as well as having a beloved wife--I know what it is like to want protection and care for my family. After 63 years, I have also learned the futility of trying to work these things out in my mind. I also have learned that not all who speak in the name of the Lord profit my soul or strengthen my faith. When I come across purported prophets that agitate my soul, push faith from me, and bring the spirit of fear upon me, I simply reject them, and refuse to hear them. Such a response can only occur, of course, if I am living by faith, and relying consistently upon my Lord. God has told His prophets to "comfort" His people (Isaiah 40:1). Those who choose to agitate the people of God with troubling prophecies about hard

times in this world have only betrayed their personal alienation from God. They are not God's spokesmen, and they are not to be received as such. It is difficult enough to live by faith, without having pretenders agitate the waters of our soul with declarations of doom.

To those unduly concerned about the future, Jesus said, "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble" (Matthew 6:34). That is another way of saying, the only trouble you really know is coming is the trouble you are currently experiencing--and it is, candidly, all you are able to handle. Time spent speculating about hard times tomorrow is wasted time. Remember, your times are in Christ's hands -- and everything is under Him. What is more, He loves you, cares for you, and is determined to bring you all the way home, safely and in joy.

May the Lord, according to Romans 15:13, "fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13). You are going to be all right.

I think my job is a total waste of time. I want to dedicate my life to Jesus. Serve Him. I want to study Scripture and preach. I don't want to be a doctor Fluffyhead or an Rev. Ernest Eartickler or a Mr. Formaldehyde. Where do I start?

Like everyone who labors for the Lord, you must start where you are, and with what you have in your hand. That is how Moses, David, Gideon . . . started. Your desires to study and preach are noble, and will be honored by God. He is looking for someone whose heart is thoroughly devoted to Him--someone, so to speak, He can trust (2 Chron 16:9).

Start by devoting yourself to obtaining a working knowledge of the

Word of God. At this point, the important thing is to know what the Word says more than what it means. It is the Seed of the kingdom, and will consistently produce fruit in ones life. Devour the Word first. Ingest it, or get it into your heart and mind. Along with this, devote yourself to moral and spiritual purity. Determine to rid yourself of anything and everything that is not pleasing to God, or experientially productive. In these two pursuits (ingesting the Word, and purity of heart and mind) you become useable to the Lord. This is what is referred to in Second Timothy 2:20-21.

I commend you on the desire to separate yourself from the mediocrity that has plagued the pulpits of the land. We do not need any more fluffyheads, earticklers, or embalmers. What is more, God will not receive the service of such individuals.

Although there is no regimented way to become a preacher, here are three things I have observed must come together for the individual. When these three things happen, in my judgment, they constitute a call to the ministry.

1. **HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.** No one can effectively serve the Lord who does not have something to say. Have a message-- something that can be proclaimed, announced, and reported. You may remember Ahimaaz, a young man who wanted to bring a message to King David. He did not, however, have anything of importance to say. He simply said, "I saw a great tumult, but I did not know what it was about" (2 Sam 18:29). Many a preacher is in a similar condition. They know something has happened, but do not know what it was. A message is not merely reporting what has happened, but announcing its effects. Such a message is understood, and is clear in the mind of the proclaimer. Have something to say -- something of eternal relevance. Make sure your message is the **FOCUS** of what God has and is doing in Christ Jesus. Have something to say that will call the work of the Holy Spirit into play -- that will solicit the aid of angels, and the

intercession of Jesus. Have something to say that will cause rejoicing in heaven, and bring hope to men.

2. A FERVENT DESIRE TO DECLARE THE MESSAGE. It is possible to have something to say, but not want to say it. Some, because they love the praises of men more than the praises of God, will not say what they know is true. Examples of this are found in John 9:22; 12:42-43). Having something to say is of no value to the preacher who does not want to say it. That desire must be so strong it cannot be suppressed. If a person can be satisfied doing anything but preaching, they should not preach. The desire of Jeremiah is to be experienced by every would-be preacher. "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire Shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not" (Jer 20:9). The Word of God, when believed and comprehended, will have this effect upon the preacher.

3. HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO DECLARE THE MESSAGE. There is such a thing as having something to say, wanting to say it, but having no opportunity to do so. There comes a time, however, when the Lord of glory opens a door of opportunity to the person who has a message and wants to deliver it. Paul referred to such occasions in these words. "For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor 16:9). Again he said, "Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord" (2 Cor 2:12). Not satisfied, Paul also asked believers to pray "that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ" (Col 4:3). Such prayers are not in vain. Jesus said of himself, "These things says He who is holy, He who is true, He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens" (Rev 3:7).

When these three things come together -- (1) You have something to say, (2) You want to say it, and (3) You have an opportunity to

say it -- God is calling you into His work. In other words, He uses you when you are ready.

Some practical things for you to consider include,

1. Make close friends of those who are conversant with Scripture.
2. Identify yourself with a local congregation where the Word is emphasized, and opportunities are provided for you to express yourself.
3. Do not consider what you are doing to be a total waste of time. God called great men when they were busy doing something else (i.e., Moses when tending sheep, David when tending sheep, Elisha when plowing, Amos when a herdsman and gatherer of sycamore fruit . . . etc. Do your job for God, and God will bring you up higher. On this point, I can speak with some degree of authority. 41 years ago, I too started as a programmer/analyst for Lever Brother's Company. After 10 years, I became the Director of Technical Services and Engineering for company, remaining in that position for nearly 30 years. At the same time, I was a full time preacher, the editor of an international magazine, and a radio speaker. I retired from my position in industry, and am now serving the Lord without any distractions.
4. Look for opportunities to do what you desire for the Lord. An opportunity may be given to you by Jesus that will allow for you to leave your present job. He may also open one to you where you will have to stay. That is up to Him. You be alert enough to tell when He is calling you. It may be to witness to a single person, hold meetings in your home, fill in preaching/teaching, etc. The possibilities are endless.
5. Seek to always be filled with "all joy and peace in believing"-- that is something God Himself can do for you (Rom 15:13). When you are in that condition, you are more spiritually alert and able to recognize the call of the Lord.
6. Should you desire to pursue a theological education, do so with discernment. Select a school that has no doubts about the validity

of Scripture or the effectiveness and availability of Christ's atonement. Remember that scholarship is always second to faith.

What is the meaning of "Now we who have believed enter that rest" in Hebrews chapter 4? What is "entering his rest"? And if this has anything to do with salvation, then why the present tense of the verbs?

"The rest" in reference does have to do with salvation. It is described in verse 10: "For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His." We enter into this condition by faith, and thus cease to rely upon our own works as a basis for salvation. We who "have believed," Hebrews 4:3 says, "do enter into rest."

In relation to the first question, perhaps to explain how I come up with the first question: Why do people say they are saved - right now - when we are obviously still living on earth?

This "rest" of faith begins in this world, but will be culminated when we are with the Lord in glory. We are "saved right now," being "received" by Christ (Rom 15:7), our sins forgiven (Col 2:13), given the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6), and having become 'the sons of God' (1 John 3:1-2). This, however, is the "firstfruits" of salvation, and not the whole of it. What we have is real, and it is from heaven. It makes of citizens of heaven now (Phil 4:20-21), sons of God now, and having eternal life now (1 John 5:13). We "are saved" (1 Cor 1:18), and yet we "shall be saved" (Rom 5:10). Both are true.

The difference is the same as a child versus an adult. When an heir is a child, Scripture tells us, there appears to be no difference

between the child and a slave--both are under tutors and rulers. However, when the child becomes aman, he actually inherits what belongs to him (Galatians 4:1-7).

In the above scenario, the child was really an heir, even though he did not have the fulness of the inheritance yet. It is in that sense that we are presently "saved." We are legitimate sons, and have a very real inheritance reserved for us.

This does not mean that a legitimate son can't forfeit his reserved inheritance does it?

Not at all. We hold this inheritance by faith, and faith must be kept. Although there are numerous warnings about being cast off, rejected, and thrust away from the Lord because of unbelief, all teaching about salvation does not include such warnings. There are promises held out to those who are going backward -- promises to encourage them to come back to the Lord (like the church at Laodicea, Revelation 3:14-22). If those people did not heed the word of the Lord, they would be spewed out of His mouth--a phrase that means condemnation.

Other texts are written to believers who were under severe persecution, and were keeping the faith -- as well as other saints who were faithful. The promises, in these cases, were not always attended by warnings, lest saints under oppression imagine their faith might be in vain.

There are many professed preachers and teachers who mix up these approaches. Some speak to unfaithful people as though they were safe in Jesus. Others speak to faithful brethren as though they were living in unbelief. Both approaches are wrong.

A good friend of our family passed away last week. We will miss him and so will his family. When I think about death I often think of my aging parents. They were never baptized yet they believe in Jesus. They even say to me that "Jesus is our hope now". How do I talk to them about salvation and how do I approach the subject of baptism with them?

First, the final decision on whether people are saved or lost is not within our jurisdiction. We do not have all of the facts, nor can we perceive the heart of a person. In the end, every person will be judged according to the knowledge available to them. This is what Jesus referred to in His parable about different kinds of servants. The one who knew what should be done, yet did not do it, would be beaten with many stripes. On the other hand, the servant who did not know, and did not do, will be beaten with few stripes (Luke 12:48).

When a person dies, he passes beyond our domain. God does not ask us to speak on the state of the dead -- that is something He reserves for Himself. If anyone is ultimately saved that was NOT baptized, it will be an exception to the rule. What is more, we are never to hold out exceptions (like the thief on the cross) as the rule. Those who know of baptism, and have refused to be baptized, must not be made to feel safe. Rather, we must do our best to acquaint them with the truth.

We must be willing leave matters like that, without undue worry about the state of pious people who did not know about baptism -- or wicked people who did. Think of it this way, would you feel comfortable with saying a person who died was saved because they were baptized, yet who had apparently lived in sin? Certainly not. My point is that we do not have to answer either dilemma--and both are in the same category. For a person to hear the Gospel and NOT be baptized is in conflict with Scripture. Also, for a person to be baptized and NOT live for the Lord is in conflict with Scripture.

When it comes to the matter of baptism, the Lord has made it too clear for any to question it. The Savior of the world was , according to God's will, introduced by a Baptizer. In fact, the Lord Himself was baptized to fulfill all righteousness. If those were the only two things we knew about baptism, they would constrain the honest heart to want to be baptized. In dealing with those who are either ignorant about baptism, or have some misconception about it, I would begin with those two Gospel facts—a baptizer prepared the way for Jesus, and Jesus was baptized. That is how Mark approached the Gospel (Mark 1:1-8). It would be in order to ask, then, what the people thought of those circumstances. Were they ordained by God? And why are they part of the Gospel?

But, as you know, there is much more on baptism. Instead of arguing with people about the necessity of baptism (and it is a necessity), we can approach it in a more indirect manner. It is profitable, for instance, to note that no one ever questioned baptism, or the necessity of it, in the Bible (unless it be the Pharisees and lawyers who rejected John's baptism to their own condemnation (Luke 7:30). Too, it was always assumed believers were baptized.

I have found it profitable to simply take the Scriptures and show things with which the Holy Spirit has associated baptism. The objective in such an approach is NOT to convince the person they ought to be baptized, but to enable the Holy Spirit to work through the truth to bring the person to obedience. If they will simply believe what the Spirit says about baptism, it will take away all of their excuses. I am sure you already know these things, but here is a partial listing of things with which the Holy Spirit associates baptism.

1. Repentance (Acts 2:38).
2. The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

3. The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
4. Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).
5. Salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
6. Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
7. Being raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
8. Being identified with Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
9. Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
10. Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
11. The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
12. Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
13. Coming into Christ (Gal 3:27).
14. Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
15. A commandment (Acts 10:48).
16. The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
17. Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
18. Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
19. Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

These are Divine associations -- and they all have to do with salvation. They are so weighty that a person must be unbelieving and hard-hearted to consistently reject them. If we faithfully present baptism in this manner, the Holy Spirit Himself will work upon the hearts of the people. One further thing, ask the Lord to give you wisdom and effectiveness as you reason with people on these things. He will help you.

What is the meaning of " . . . was vindicated by the Spirit . . ." from 1 Timothy 3:16? I immediately thought this had to do with Jesus' resurrection. What is the Spirit doing concerning His resurrection?

This text is contrasting Christ's relationship to the world with His

identity with heaven. To the world, He (1) appeared in a body, (2) was preached among the nations, and (3) believed on in the world.

From heaven's point of view, He was (1) vindicated by the Spirit, (2) seen by angels, and (3) received up into glory.

The phrase "vindicated by the Spirit" does refer to His resurrection. Speaking in this same type of language, Peter wrote, "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" (1 Pet 3:18). Paul also referred to this in Romans 1:4. "and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul also reasons with us on this matter in Romans 8:11. "And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

There are three different views of Christ's resurrection -- all of them, of course, are true. The first is that Jesus raised Himself from the dead, taking His life back, so to speak. Jesus refers to this in John 10:17-18: "The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life--only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

The second is that the Father raised Jesus from the dead. Galatians 1:1 refers to this. "Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Romans 6:4 also alludes to this. "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too

may live a new life."

The third is that the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead, as previous Scriptures declared.

The point is that the entire Godhead was involved in Christ's resurrection. The Father planning and approving it, the Son submitting to and carrying it out, and the Spirit empowering and implementing it. If you want to go even further, the angels of God were also involved (Matt 28:2; John 20:12).

LOOK AT IT THIS WAY: THE WORLD JUDGED JESUS UNWORTHY OF LIFE, AND THEREFORE PUT HIM TO DEATH. BUT THEY WERE WRONG, HE WAS NOT WORTHY OF DEATH. THEREFORE HE WAS VINDICATED BY THE SPIRIT, OR SHOWN TO BE WORTHY OF LIFE.

Another contrast to be seen here is this: just as the powers of darkness united together against Christ (Luke 22:53), so the powers of heaven united in His resurrection.

What is the meaning of the Aaronic Priesthood in Hebrews 5? "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was" 5:4 . . . "So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him," What is God trying to tell me or us in this chapter? Are we not all priests under Christ?

The subject of this chapter is not our priesthood but Christ's High Priesthood. This is the capacity in which He intercedes for us and presently administers salvation. The Spirit contrasts Christ's High priesthood with that of Aaron, under the law. That was the priesthood carried out in the tabernacle worship while Israel was in the wilderness. It also continued through Aaron's progeny until the

appearing of Christ.

Aaron did not volunteer to be a priest, or train to be one then take the office--that is what is meant by "No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was." God appointed him to be the High Priest (Exodus 28:1; Leviticus 8:2).

The text is affirming that Jesus has been appointed by God to be our High Priest--to intercede for us and bring us home to heaven. This is not something Jesus aspired to do when He was in the earth, but something appointed from all eternity. Just as God "sent" Jesus into the world (1 John 4:9), directed everything He did while here (John 8:28), delivered Him up to die (Rom 8:32), and raised him from the dead (Gal 1:1) -- so the Father has appointed that He sit at His right hand to "finish" the work He has begun in us (Heb 12:2; Phil 1:6).

From a practical point of view, God places the members of Christ where He wants them. The Bible says it this way, "But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Corinthians 12:18). None of us took the honor on ourselves. God saved us and placed us, making us what he wanted us to be. Our role is to live close enough to the Lord that we will know our assignment.

We are all "priests to God" under Christ (1 Peter 2:5,9) -- but that is not the subject of Hebrews. The Lord Jesus Himself is the subject, and the thoroughness of our salvation the teaching. Christ's High Priesthood proves we need Jesus just as much after we are saved as we did before we were saved. His High Priesthood has to do with His ministry to the saved--and that is a ministry assigned to Him by God. I might add, Jesus does it willingly and effectively, praise be to Him.

I said I believed songs, poetry etc. expressed from the mouths and pens of true believers are gifts that are given today--test them by scripture to see if it is man's wisdom or in line with God's, as He has given us. Is that correct?

Yes--God does do this. Insights and expressions are granted to those in the Son. It all centers in Christ, of course, and is subject to testing, bringing it along side of the Scriptures. This involvement with God is spoken of by Jesus in John 14:21,23. John also speaks of it in 1 John 2:20,27, with an emphasis on being able to identify false prophets. We are even told by Peter that when we speak, we are to do so "as the oracles of God," or as a mouthpiece for God. (2 Pet 4:11). Paul spoke of God beseeching people through his words (2 Cor 5:20).

In another place, Paul told why he had cast everything that was gain to him away, seeking to know Christ. He confessed that he was pressing toward the mark, acknowledging he had not yet laid hold of that for which Christ had laid hold of him (Phil 3:8-15). Then, knowing that everyone to whom he wrote was not at that same place, he said the following. "Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Phil 3:15). Along the same line, the Ephesians, who had never heard Jesus when He was upon earth, were told, "But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4:20-21). There still is direct involvement between the Lord and His people.

While it certainly true that God shows things to His people, also giving them the ability to express it, their role is not to affirm God gave it to them--even though that is true. They are to submit their insight to the spiritually minded (not the bigoted Pharisee). Even Paul did this (1 Cor 14:37). Scripture speaks to legitimate prophets in this manner. "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others

judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets" (1 Cor 14:29-32).

No one can say God did NOT reveal to and speak through an individual unless it conflicts with God's word, or the one judging is omniscient (which certainly is not likely, to say the least). For my own part, I believe it is in the part of wisdom not to shine the light on the fact that God made it known. It should rather be shined on the truth that was made known. Godly people will be able to distinguish the truth, and some controversy from fleshly people avoided. That part is just my opinion.

I have a Christian e-mail 'pen pal' that I met at a Christian chat site. Basically, he doesn't believe in gathering or fellowshiping in a church building--says that Jesus didn't say anything about a building and that it becomes an organization instead of an organism of the church of our Lord.

The Word of God knows nothing of followers of God who do NOT gather together. Under the Law, such gatherings were mandated, even though sensitive souls did it willingly. During a decadent period of Jewish history (the days of Malachi the Prophet), it is written that those who feared the Lord spoke often with one another. What is more, God took note of their gatherings. His assessment of them is notable. "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the LORD And who meditate on His name. 'They shall be Mine,' says the LORD of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man

sparing his own son who serves him." (Mal 3:16-17, NKJV).

Whatever a person may think about buildings, Jesus DID call the temple (built by Herod, not by saints) "My Father's house" (John 2:16). One centurion who required help from Jesus was recommended because he loved the Jewish nation, and built them a synagogue (Lk 7:4-6). For that matter, when Jesus was among us, it was His manner to be in the synagogue (which was a building) on the Sabbath day (Lk 4:16). Paul spoke of saints coming together, and having an order in their assemblies (1 Cor 11:17-43). He even spoke of the Corinthians coming together "in one place," and an unbeliever coming into the gathering (1 Cor 4:23-26). Nothing about the Corinthian assembly suggests they met in a home. In fact, Paul reminded the Corinthians they had homes to eat in, and were not to defile the Lord's table as though it were a common meal (1 Cor 11:22).

Early believers not only met in the temple (Acts 2:46) and houses (Acts 2:46; 20:20), but in synagogues (Acts 13:14-15; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,26). In Ephesus, Paul spoke boldly in the synagogue for three straight months (Acts 19:8).

When describing his earlier life as a persecutor of believers, Paul said he found them meeting in the synagogues, and persecuted them (Acts 22:19; 26:11). Early Christians, then, knew nothing about not meeting in buildings.

The Holy Spirit solemnly admonishes us, "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is" (Heb 10:25). If your friend does not meet with believers, it is his manner that we are to avoid.

I would call the position that looks unfavorably upon meeting in a building as straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. Even at that, it is an exceedingly small gnat, and an unusually large camel.

What does the bible say about divorce? What reasons, if any, are acceptable in His sight? How do you know when the Lord is speaking to you instead of your conscience or is He your conscience?

The Word of God has considerable to say about divorce. Most of the teaching is intended to discourage divorce. Scripture informs us, for example, that God "hates" divorce (Mal 2:16). He does, however, allow for it under certain conditions. The primary reason is fornication, or unfaithfulness. That is the single exception Jesus allowed for in His teaching in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.

Although there is some question about the extent of the provisions mentioned in 1 Corinthians 7, there the Spirit deals with a condition where a Christian is married to a non-Christian. If the non-Christian does not want to stay with the person, the Word says, "A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances" (1 Cor 7:15).

Additional instruction is given to those in less-than-ideal circumstances. They are encouraged to work matters out as much as possible. If, in the case of a wife, the situation is intolerable, the Spirit instructs, "But if she does [depart], she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife" (1 Cor 7:11).

To confirm that divorce is sometimes justified, God Himself divorced Israel because she was unfaithful to him (Jeremiah 3:8).

The seriousness of divorce is underscored by the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 19. there He says, "I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery" (Matt 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke

16:18). No serious person, after reading that, can fail to see how serious a matter divorce is.

Those who have been caught in divorce in the past, are not to consider it unforgivable. I understand there is grace for those who desire to recover. An example of such mercy is found in Christ's dealings with a woman who had several husbands, and was living with a man who was not her husband. Jesus offered her salvation (John 4:8-31). Settling such matters before God is personal, and procedures cannot be dictated by another person. Recovery is a personal matter between the person and the Lord--and He will direct them to do what is right.

Does the Lord continue to forgive you when you ask forgiveness for the same sin over and over again and are not sincere ?

God never forgives a person who is not sincere. It is possible, however, for us to assume people are not sincere. Jesus told Peter we should forgive the same person who sinned against him 490 times, or 70 X 7 (Matt 18:21-22). There is an additional stipulation--if the person "repents" (Luke 17:3).

At some point, the person who is genuinely sincere will receive grace to overcome sin. I understand Christ's words about 70 X 7 to be of small offenses -- certainly murder, adultery, theft, or the likes, for which men will be condemned (Colossians 3:5-6; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

It will help us in judging such matters to remember that just as Eve did not eat of the forbidden fruit until she wanted to, so no one sins unless they want to. At some point, it is imperative that they NOT

want to sin. God will then strengthen them to refrain from transgressing.

If you constantly pray for a friend or relative who is an alcoholic & keeps destroying his mind & body, does it do any good if that person doesn't care & keeps on doing it? Does that person also have to pray for help?

Eventually, the person for whom you are praying has to get involved himself. It is possible, however, that such involvement will be provoked by your prayers and admonitions. 1 John 5:16 and James 5:20 deal with this matter. It is challenging to consider, but is a most promising contemplation in view of Ephesians 3:20.

Moses made an image of snake for the Israelites to look up. My question is: Why can't people of today look up at the Image of Jesus Christ made by men to show that they worship Jesus through His image. somebody asked me this question but I can't answer it.

There are several reasons.

1. God commanded Moses to make this image.
2. The image Moses created was not to stimulate remembrance, or to show people worshiped God. It was a means through which God healed the disobedient people who had been bitten by poisonous serpents, sent among the people because they murmured (Num 21:6).
3. The image was for only a single occasion, and was not intended to become a relic. Years later, when Israel had made an idol out of the brazen serpent (like people who maintain statutes of Jesus),

Hezekiah took the image and destroyed it, for Israel had been burning incense to it (2 Kings 18:4).

4. The image Moses made by the commandment of the Lord was like the serpents that bit the Israelites. We have no authentic likeness of Jesus, either in Scripture, art, or other forms of antiquity. This is because God did not want us to remember Him in that way.

5. Jesus is not to be known or remembered "according to the flesh," or as a Man (2 Corinthians 5:16).

6. Jesus instituted a Supper to be used as a remembrance of Him, not an image of Himself (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

7. God has not commanded us to make an image of Christ -- He did command Moses to make one, and that is the ONLY reason Moses did make one. Apart from that special commandment, the Word of the Lord is, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:4-5).

8. We worship God "in the Spirit," not through an image (Phil 3:3).

9. It is faith in Christ that honors God and reveals our worship of Jesus, not an external action (Rom 1:17; Rom 5:1-2).

In keeping with the soul-sleeping doctrine, a friend of mine said Enoch died, and is in the grave awaiting the resurrection in the last day. He says Enoch did not go bodily to heaven, and he did suffer death, believing that would violate Scriptures like 1Co

15:22 ("in Adam all die"); Heb 9:27 ("it is appointed unto men once to die"); etc. What do you think?

When it comes to pronouncements concerning truth, it is best to let God make them. The Holy Spirit said Enoch "did not see death" – Your friend says "Enoch suffered death." The Holy Spirit said Enoch was "taken away" and "was not found" – your friend said "Enoch is in the grave awaiting the resurrection of the last day." This is a most peculiar way to, as your friend would say, "interpret the phrase." What is there about "did NOT see death" that would lead one to conclude Enoch died? And what is there in the expression "God took him away" that would provoke us to say Enoch was in the grave?

There is nothing in the grammar of this text that remotely suggests Enoch died, or that he is "in the grave." If those things are assumed, it seems to me something in the text should at least suggest that possibility. The phrase "see death" is a very vivid one. Of the 38 times the word translated "see" (idein) is used, human experience is the point. The word carries the meaning of experientially coming to realize something. The word rendered "taken away" (NKJV), "translated" (KJV, ASV, RWB, Darbys, YLT), "taken up" (RSV, NASB), "taken from" (NRSV), and "taken up to heaven" (BBE) is metetetha, the first aorist passive indicative of met-at-ith'-ay-mee, which means to transpose, transfer, or change. Of all the times this word is used in its varied forms, it always indicates a change, and is never used to describe the experience of death (Heb 7:12; Jude 4; Gal 1:6). It simply is not possible to take this Divine affirmation concerning Enoch and conclude he died and is in the grave.

Is it true, there are no exceptions to the general rule "in Adam all die," and "it is appointed unto men once to die?" Do not the Scriptures teach there will be an entire generation that will not die? "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor 15:51).

These people will not be raised from the dead, but will be "changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," to join "the dead," who will be "raised incorruptible" (1 Cor 15:51). Do not the Scriptures speak of those who are "alive and remain until the coming of the Lord" who will be "caught up together" with "the dead in Christ" who will be 'raised?" (1 Thess 4:4:15-17). The Apostle affirms this teaching to be "by the word of the Lord" (1 Thess 4:15). It makes little difference whether or not these expressions can be stuffed into a preconceived view of death and resurrection. And what of those graves that were "opened" when our blessed Lord died? Of them it is written, "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many" (Matt 27:52-53). How does that fit into your friend's view?

Note this marvelous text again. "By faith Enoch was taken away ("translated," KJV) so that he did not see death" (NKJV). Concerning this event, two Divine observations are made. I find it most interesting to compare them with the post to which I am replying. FIRST, Enoch "was not found, BECAUSE God had taken him." SECOND, it was a line of demarcation. Of it Scripture affirms, "before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God." The event in question, therefore, is a most significant one. Of it, Genesis says, "he was not," and "God took him" (Gen 5:24). Enoch's removal from life is not here said to be by death, but because "God took him." This phrase, "God took him," is said of no other individual: it is said of Enoch alone. Yet, your friend would have us view the conclusion of Enoch's life on earth as though it were the common lot of all men. If this were the case, where did God take Enoch? According to Genesis, before Enoch "was not," he "walked with God." According to Hebrews, before he was "translated," he had this testimony, that he "pleased God." Was his walk with God terminated by death? Or did he cease walking with God for a while before he died? Did the testimony

that he "pleased God" refer to Enoch's life before he died? Or did he stop pleasing God prior to experiencing death?

If Enoch's "translation" is not really a translation, then what is it? What is this singular event affirmed in Genesis and confirmed in Hebrews. I suggest there is no valid rule of reason or Divine utterance that would constrain one to conclude from these statements (Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5) that Enoch died and is in the grave.

In regards to John the Baptist and in reference to Matthew 11:11, why did the Lord Jesus Christ say right after He complimented John (of being the greatest among those born of women) insult him by saying that John the Baptist is less than the least person in the kingdom of heaven. Also, when Jesus said that John the Baptist is the greatest among those born of women, was Jesus excluding Himself (since He was also born of woman, Mary)?

Jesus was speaking of those UP TO John the Baptist. Jesus Himself was born AFTER John. Of course, our blessed Lord is the greatest, regardless when He was born.

The phrase regarding the least in the Kingdom being greater than John the Baptist is best explained this way. Person to person (or those "born of woman"), we are nothing to compare with that mighty prophet of old. But in Christ Jesus, no matter of our level of attainment, we are "greater." The reason -- John was like a giant standing in a valley. But after Christ, we may, by comparison, be like midgets, but we are standing on a mountain. It is WHERE we are that makes us greater, not WHO we are.

When Christ was dying on the cross why did He give his mother in the care of John? Wouldn't it have been the custom for Mary to be with her other sons, or daughters?

I understand Christ's actions to be dictated by the closeness of John the Jesus. John was there at the cross, and His brothers and sisters were not. We know that two of His brothers, James and Jude, did come around. You may recall His brothers and sisters did not believe on Him at the first (John 7:3-5). Jesus did not go by custom, as you know, but by the will of His Father.

In Leviticus 11:20, the NIV seems to be saying that insects have only four legs. The KJV says 'fowls,' which seems to mean birds. But don't birds have only two legs? I'm confused.

The answer is found in the phrase "All fowls THAT CREEP" (KJV). Other versions read, "flying insects," or "winged insects." This section of Leviticus views "fowls" as anything that flies. It also mentions "the bat" (verse 19), which does fly, but is not classified, as a "bird."

The text is not saying that ALL insects have four legs, but speaks of a CATEGORY of insects that fly and have four legs. Verses 21-22 specify the only creatures from this category that could be eaten under the Law--locusts, beetles, and grasshoppers. Later, other creeping things that go upon their belly are mentioned, which were also forbidden. In that section, three classes of "creeping things" are mentioned: "Whatever crawls on its belly, whatever goes on all fours, or whatever has many feet among all creeping things that creep on the earth" (Verse 42). Your question concerned only the second category.

Are we showing a lack of faith or impatience by repeating the same pray for the same people and/or requests week after week?

The Lord taught us about importunity, or continuing asking in prayer, even when an answer is not given. The parables of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-8), and the friend seeking loaves for a visitor (Luke 11:5-10) give us a heavenly view of repeated requests. Each of these parables assumes two things: (1) The urgency of the situation, and (2) The faith of the ones asking. Given those two conditions, our Lord makes the following observations.

1. Men should always (or continually) pray, and not give up (Lk 18:1).
2. God will avenge His people, intervening in their difficult situations.
3. He may "bear long," or delay for a long time in answering the request.(Lk 18:7-8)
4. The kind of faith He desires is reflected in the continued petitions (Lk 18:8).
5. Prayers are often answered because of importunity, or persistence (Lk 11:8).
6. Continued asking, knocking, and seeking will be honored by God (Lk 11:9-10).

This type of prayer is what Paul referred to when he said, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). It is the kind of supplicating Paul did when he prayed concerning his "thorn in the flesh." He prayed until he received an answer (2 Cor 12:8-9).

Having made those observations, I do realize some repetitions are vain (Matt 6:7). These are prayers that are not motivated by faith, but are the mere mechanics of prayer--or a sort of simulation of the real thing.

If you have requests that have been listed for a long time, yet have remained substantially the same, I would do the following.

1. Ask the Lord for wisdom to discern the nature and urgency of the request.
2. Ask for wisdom to pray about the matter.
3. Plead your cause with the Lord. Among yourselves, consider WHY the pray is being offered, and what glory God will get out of the matter. Once you are convinced of the validity of the reasons, present them to the Lord. This is what Job would call laying his "cause" before the Lord (Job 5:8). It is like being a spiritual lawyer. Take Moses' prayer for Israel in Exodus 32:11-14 as an example. When the Lord threatened to destroy the Israelites, Moses pleaded the case. He did so in perfect harmony with the will and glory of God in mind. God answered His prayer, and did not destroy the people.

As you can see, offering prayer once is not always enough. Think of the Syrophenician woman who persisted in seeking the Lord's mercy, even though it seemed she was being refused (Matt 15:22-28 Mark 7:26-30). Also consider Bartimaeus, who continued calling out to the Lord in spite of being at first neglected (Mark 10:46-52).

One further consideration. Make every attempt to involve your own heart in the petitions you offer. If you are married, pray as though you had just been told your wife were terminally ill. If you are a father, pray with the sort of involvement you would have if you had been told your son or daughter was stricken with a serious disease. I can tell you that when you throw yourself into the prayer, the Lord will strengthen you with His power, share His wisdom with you, and give you His ear. I have experienced both of the circumstances I have mentioned, and know this is the case.

Take heart, and be courageous as an intercessor. God can change circumstances because of your prayers.

What is the difference between praying to the Lord and calling on the name of the Lord?

From one perspective, there is no difference. When praying is supplication, intercession, or other forms of entreaty (as compared with praise or thanksgiving), such prayer is calling upon the name of the Lord.

Calling upon the name of the Lord is asking God to do what He has promised to do, and respond as He has represented Himself as responding. In other words, calling upon the name of the Lord is asking God to be God toward us; to direct His Divine power and character toward us personally. In the matter of salvation, it is asking God to be our Savior through Jesus Christ--something He has represented Himself as doing.

In using the phrase as a description of believers, "calling upon the name of the Lord" is the depiction of a life that depends upon Divine activity rather than that of men.

The term "name of the Lord" is a Scriptural way of referring to the Person or character of the Lord. It is not meant to connote an appellation or title. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, the Lord passed before Him and declared "the name of the Lord." That declaration was simply a proclamation of His Person, Who He is, and what He is like (Exodus 34:5-7). Calling upon the name of the Lord, therefore, is asking the Lord to fulfill those revealed qualities toward us and in our behalf.

Are there prophets today?

God has placed the gift of prophecy in the church, and there is no indication He has removed it. This is something that is in the hands of the Lord, and we must be willing to leave it there. The Spirit did elaborate on the nature of the gift of prophecy, affirming that the prophet speaks to "edification, exhortation, and comfort" (1 Cor 14:3). He further admonishes that this gift be pursued by God's people (1 Cor 14:1).

Are there any scriptures relating to women wearing pants?

There are no direct prohibitions of women wearing pants. Some feel as though the forbidding of women to wear men's clothing, as affirmed under the law of Moses (Deuteronomy 22:5), can be taken to mean this. I do not agree with this, but do feel it is a matter of conscience. A woman who sees this scripture as meaning this, should honor her conscience, and we should honor it also. I do not believe the Word allows for that personal conclusion to be bound on a person not so persuaded. The ordinary rule for women's apparel is that it is to be "modest" (1 Tim 2:9).

What does the perfect refer to in I Cor 13:8ff

This passage is stating a principle rather than identifying a specific event or point in time. The idea is that spiritual maturity, or perfection, is a time which childish or rudimentary things are put away (verse 11). In a firstfruit, or initial, sense, this occurs when we "grow up into Christ" in all things (Eph 4:15). Peter calls this experience the day dawning, and the day star rising in our hearts (2 Pet 1:19). At that time, a juvenile approach to spiritual life (of which Corinth was guilty) will be abandoned.

The ultimate sense in which this text is fulfilled is when the Lord

comes, and the natural, or temporal, order is done away (2 Pet 3:10-12). At that time, our knowledge will no more be partial or fragmentary. The present condition of partiality requires a multiplicity of spiritual gifts, each one supplying a part, rather than the whole (verse 8). Spiritual gifts, by their very nature, address the matter of our imperfection.

Our ultimate destiny in Christ, however, involves a thorough knowledge--one that is complete, requiring no input from a multiplicity of sources. We will know as we are known--thoroughly and accurately. Then, we will no more see with a lack of clarity (in a glass darkly). That is, presently we see but the mere outline of ultimate reality. The reality itself is not flawed, but our vision of it is because we have this treasure in a jar of clay.

When the perfect comes, this condition will cease to exist. We will see things clearly--and that includes God, Christ, salvation, and the wise and beneficent way in which the Lord has brought us to glory.

I realize that some take the position the "perfect" is the completed Scriptural canon. In my judgment, it requires a prolific imagination to take such a view. It is one that virtually removes the necessity of Divine involvement in obtaining spiritual understanding (Eph 1:17-20; Col 1:9-11). It also leaves the church with partial knowledge of the Gospel until the fourth century. As well, it has Peter, Paul, John, and Luke presenting fragments of truth. I cannot accept such a view. It is not big enough to cover all of the aspects of the First Corinthians text.

What do you think about the "available light theory", which states that the unevangelized may enter the kingdom of Heaven if they live up to the "light" they have. This also means that they don't have to come into contact with Jesus or the Gospel to be saved.

This principle applies to all men, even to those who are in Christ Jesus. The principle is stated by the Lord in one of His matchless parables (Luke 12:42-48). In it He said, "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more" (Lk 12:48). Paul also alludes to this principle in Romans 2:12. "For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law." Jesus also spoke of the principle when He referred to the day of judgment finding things more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah and Tyre and Sidon than for the generation that rejected Him (Lk 10:12-15).

It is not good to pursue this line of reasoning so aggressively that a whole body of theology is developed around it. As you mention, there are some difficulties associated with the view. We must be content to believe the Scriptures that address this point, realizing there is an element of ambiguity to them. In the end, God will adjudicate the matter well. He is not looking for a reason to condemn people, nor will He act in contradiction of His holy nature.

Where in the Bible does it explicitly say that single persons should not have sexual relations?

Fornication involves single people. That is why Scripture says, "Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband" (1 Cor 7:9). Also, the "bed" is undefiled, or it is proper to sleep with one, only within marriage. It is written, "Marriage is honorable among all,

and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb 13:4). Also, it is better to marry than to burn with passion, or a desire to have relations (1 Cor 7:9). Even younger widows were told to marry rather than "wax wanton against Christ"--or indulge their sexual appetite outside of marriage (1 Tim 5:11). In the Bible, singleness for a woman is counted as her virginity (Lev 21:13; Luke 2:36).

Also, Paul expounded on marriage, sin, etc., but it is very evident he was biased against women Do we get much of our interpretation from him?

Paul was not biased against women. He spoke as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, and not as a prejudiced person. His writings on marriage in First Corinthians were not the expression of a private opinion. Rather he wrote in view of some crisis that existed in Corinth, probably a persecution of some sort. That is why his instruction was predicated by the words, "I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress; that it is good for a man to remain as he is" (1 Cor 7:26). Even in that situation, he states that under no conditions is marriage to be considered a sin (1 Cor 7:28). His instruction about a man caring for his wife instead of the Lord (1 Cor 7:33-34) are to be understood in view of the "distress" they were facing. It would be like compromising your faith because your wife/husband was being abused by some persecutor. It is much like Jesus telling the people of His day that it would be a disadvantage for a woman to be pregnant when Jerusalem would later be destroyed (Matt 24:19). His words do not mean it was wrong to have children, but that it would be a disadvantage when Jerusalem was destroyed. So with Paul, he does not mean marriage is not good, but that it is a handicap during times of grievous persecution. But under no conditions are sexual relations sanctioned outside of marriage.

Do you feel that foot washing is an ordinance of the church?

I do not. This is an area of conscience. Those who wash one another's feet do not sin, but it is not compulsory. In Scriptural times, the washing of feet was an act of hospitality, and not a mere ceremony or ritual. When Jesus washed His disciples feet, He performed a servile duty, showing His humility and meekness. His words to the disciples on that occasion confirm He was not establishing a ritual. He said, "DO YOU KNOW WHAT I HAVE DONE UNTO YOU? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do AS (not "what") I have done to you." (John 13:12-15).

What is your view of having to have "authority" to perform certain "ordinances" (i.e., baptism, communion, etc.) in order to have done them correctly with God?

There is no indication in Scripture that only certain people can perform the ordinances you mention. Paul, for example, said he was NOT sent to baptize (1 Cor 1:17). Yet, he did baptize on occasions (1 Cor 1:14-16). Our involvement in the ordinances is sanctified by our faith, not the one performing them.

If a man is saved by the grace of God, and yet he commits a sin and dies. Will he spend eternity in heaven or hell? I know some people say, "well if he was truly saved he would not have committed a sin", but all men have sinned and fall short of the Glory Of God. Even people that I believe to be Christians, sin everyday, not because they want to, but because they are human. I do the same, I believe my salvation rest with Jesus Christ My

Lord, but I still slip everyday. God always lets us be tested, so that when we triumph over evil, the Glory goes to him, so others may see and have a chance to come to know him. I believe that the apostles also had trials everyday, just like us and I believe some of the trials they passed and some they did not, but I believe they are in heaven. So, I guess my question is, can a person be "Once saved, Always saved"?

Going to hell is not a matter of committing A sin, but of living IN sin -- and there is a big difference. In His chastening, God has actually taken some Christian's lives. That does not necessarily mean they went to hell. In fact, Scripture tells us that in such cases, the chastening was so they would NOT be condemned. In the Corinthians church, for example, some had so defiled the Lord's table that God caused them to die, and some became sick. Here is how Scripture reads. "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor 11:29-32).

It goes without saying that we cannot depend on such a procedure keeping us from being condemned. God makes no allowance for His people becoming loose in our living, and sinning willfully. Sin has a way of hardening the heart. We do not know the point at which God will close the door on His mercy.

That is why we are to run to the throne of grace when we sin. No conscientious believer wants to sin. However, as you state, none of us are sinless. God has made gracious provision for forgiveness, and urges us to appropriate it. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I

write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 1:9-2:1).

Being saved is not a matter of being in the Lord one day, and out of the Lord the next day. Nor, indeed, is it being forever secure without any involvement on our part. God keeps those who abide in Christ (John 15:1-7). That takes considerable effort, but the effort is guaranteed by our Advocate. God has not, however, promised salvation to anyone that becomes lukewarm, indifferent, and insensitive to sin.

What is the difference between purgatory and hell?

Purgatory is an invention of men. Hell is something revealed by God. The idea in purgatory is that the soul is purged from sin AFTER death in an area of punishment. As soon as the soul has suffered enough, it is thought that worthiness for salvation is realized. This is not true however. When the individual dies, the condition in which he died is fixed, with no change being possible. There is NO evidence that our character can be altered after we die. This is reflected in the Scripture, "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be" (Rev 22:11). Purgatory is a myth.

Hell, on the other hand, is very real. It is a place where those who remained unreconciled to God are consigned. Jesus spoke of it in Mark 9:44-48. It is a place where recovery is not possible, and is eternal. The reason for it is that the people sent there are unchangeable, and are incompatible with heaven -- they simply do not fit in. You may remember the account Jesus gave of the rich man and Lazarus. when the rich man died, he woke up in hell. He

saw Lazarus with Abraham, and asked if he could be sent to touch his tongue with some water. One significant thing about the account. The rich man never did ask to be where Lazarus was. Why not? That place of comfort was just as repulsive to him as hell. He did not have a capacity to appreciate the blessing of God, and even he knew it (Luke 16:20-31).

How do you explain 9 ft. tall people in the Bible? It seems to be scientifically impossible, of course I could be wrong. I appreciate your services.

Even in the Bible such people were unusual. The very word "giant" indicates an unusual situation--not common at all. Famous giants in Scripture include the Anakims (Num 13:33; Deut 9:2), the Emims (Deut 2:10-11), Goliath (1 Sam 17:4), Ishbibenob (2 Sam 21:16), King Og of Bashan (Deut 3:11; Josh 12:4), and the Zamzummims (Deut 2:20). In each of these cases, the existence of people of great height was extraordinary, provoking special comments about them. Also, even today there are tribal people among whom people eight feet tall are still found.

The fact, of course, that God specifies the unusual height of Goliath (around nine feet tall) is sufficient not to doubt the matter. However, remember his unusual size caused great fear among the seasoned warriors of Israel. There was nothing usual about Goliath, and only a person with strong faith in God could overcome him.

People nine feet tall are possible scientifically -- but that is not the acid test of truth. Scientifically, it is not possible for a child to be born to a virgin -- yet Jesus was. It is not scientifically possible to part the Red Sea by raising a rod over it -- but Moses did.

Scientifically, it is impossible to be thrown into a furnace of fire and not be harmed in any way -- yet that is what happened to three Hebrew children in Daniel. Science is not the ultimate test of what is true. Jesus coming from heaven, raising from the dead, and going back to heaven is not possible scientifically -- but it is true. Science is subordinate to the truth of God. It is just that simple.

If there is such a thing as predestination, it seems almost impossible to go out of God's will, that is to sin against Him. Is there such a thing as predestination?

There is such a thing as predestination -- but only with God Almighty. To predestinate something is to predetermine it will be accomplished, with nothing able to stop it from occurring. The Word of God declares God has predestinated those in Christ will become like Christ (Rom 8:29-30). He also predestinated that we would become adopted, or become His sons, through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:5). Additionally, God has predetermined those in Christ will receive an eternal inheritance (Eph 1:11).

Elsewhere God is said to have determined things "before the foundation of the world," or before the world was planned and brought into existence (Matt 25:34; Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:20). Thus, the fact of predestination cannot be questioned. It is a matter of revelation.

In the Lord's presentation of His predestination, or predetermination, He never suggests it is impossible to get out of His will. Some men have concluded that, but that is their conclusion, not God's declaration. His predetermination is always within the context of Jesus Christ. It is only as we are "in Christ" that nothing is able to sever us from God's purpose. Anywhere and

everywhere the Lord comments on predestination, it is always to those who ARE believing, and always centers in the Lord Jesus Christ. No person who is slothful about his relationship to God is ever told they are predestinated to eternal life – never.

In view of this, those who are trusting in Jesus have every reason to be confident. But when their faith wavers, or they cease to live for Christ, they are outside of God's will. God has never determined people who did not want to go to heaven would go anyway, or those who started the race would finish it even if they quit running.

Why did God "send" an evil Spirit on Saul in the Old Testament, rather than allowing an evil Spirit to descend On Saul?

It was an act of judgment. The verse that reveals this judgment first says the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. This occurred after God had rejected Saul as king due to his disobedience (1 Sam 16:13-14). God "sent" the evil spirit because that is the only way the evil spirit could go. Theologians have used the word "allow," or the phrase "permissive will" to describe such actions. However, that kind of terminology is not used in Scripture to describe the sending of evil spirits.

God is over all, and nothing occurs without His word. You may remember that Satan confessed this to be the case when he sought to attack righteous Job. He said to God, "But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!" And the LORD said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person. So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD . . . "But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse

You to Your face! And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life" (Job 1:11-12; 2:5-6). In fact, Satan did not initiate the conversation about Job -- God did. Behind that occasion, of course, God had gracious designs to comfort succeeding generations with the recollection of how a person can remain faithful under oppression (James 5:11).

The sending of an evil spirit by God is simply a way of affirming the government belongs to the Lord. In the case of Saul, it was Divine judgment.

Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart, rather than allowing Pharaoh's heart to be hardened?

God has access to men's hearts to harden them or "open" them (Acts 16:14). He can give men a new heart (Ezek 36:26), purify their hearts (Acts 15:9), or harden them, as He did with Pharaoh (Ex 7:13; 9:12; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:8). The Lord also hardened the spirit of king Sihon, and made his heart obstinate (Deut 2:30). In all of these cases, the hardening was a judgment from God because of their obstinance. In Pharaoh's case, Pharaoh himself first hardened his heart (Ex 8:15,32; 9:34). Because of this, God ratified Pharaoh's decision, making the hardening irreversible.

As you can see, it is best to yield to the Lord, allowing Him to open the eyes of our heart, open our hearts, and make them new. To resist the Lord puts people in a most precarious situation.

Let me ask you the question that was asked of me: Is God a male?

God is a spirit, and a spirit is not defined by gender (John 4:24).

Angels, who are also "spirits" are not comprised as male and female. In glory, when we are divested of the flesh we, like them, will no longer be male or female (Matt 22:30).

God is our "Father," yet that does not mean He is a "male," as ordinarily perceived. His fatherhood cannot be thoroughly defined within the term "male." Nor, for that matter, can the Lord Jesus, Who is a glorified Man (2 Tim 2:5). Isaiah referred to the Christ as "Everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6-7). Yet, who would dare to define the glorified Christ, Who has fathered an entire spiritual generation, as a "male." The term simply is not broad enough to contain God or Christ Jesus. Both male and female bear the Divine likeness, but God does not have human likeness. In fact, He rebukes people for thinking so (Psa 50:21).

The difficulty you are confronting is found in thinking of God with humanity in view, rather than thinking of humanity with God in view. God does not have male or female attributes -- both male and female were created by Him (Gen :27), deriving their likeness from Him, and not vice versa. Stated another way, humanity bears the likeness of God, God does not bear the likeness of humanity.

When God created male and female, His likeness was projected in them both. Each one bears Divine qualities, but God bears no human qualities. This is a vital distinction. The sensitivity and tenderness of the woman, for example, are projections of Divine qualities. Strength, and leadership, and determination are traits found in men that project Divine qualities. In both cases, the attributes are but a likeness, and not the fulness of the qualities themselves. God alone possesses the fulness of them. Were God to have male or female traits, He would have fragmentary and defiled qualities, for that is how they are in humanity.

Man is to be considered in view of God, but God is never to be considered in view of man. That is too low of a consideration, and

will deprive us of the lofty view of God required to love and worship Him.

If you want to peruse the qualities of God that were created in male and female, START with God. His traits are pure and holy, those found in humanity are not. If we define the quality being considered by how it is projected in humanity, we will have a flawed view of the matter. If, for example, we think of the love of Christ for the church from the viewpoint of how husbands love and care for their wives, we will come up with some very faulty conclusions. If, however, we consider men's love and care for their wives in view of Christ's love for the church, it will have a holy impact upon us. The former consideration will be interesting, but lack spiritual power.

It would be an interesting discussion to consider what Divine qualities can be found in both male and female. You will at once find they are all partial, and many of them are not found in humanity at all; i.e., omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, etc.

I believe the fulness of God can dwell in us--but only to the degree we fully comprehend the extent of His love. Is this what you believe.

I do understand the text in Ephesians 3 as meaning the comprehension of the largeness of salvation is a requisite to being filled with all the fulness of God. I also know this is denied in some circles--which denial is inexcusable; particularly since the Lord went out of His way to say it so clearly. I would try and state it a little more accurately, however. You said, "I mean that we FULLY COMPREHEND the EXTENT of His Love to ultimately reach and fill ALL OF HIS CREATION!" The text does not say "fully comprehend," but "comprehend with all saints." The extent

of the comprehension we can realize cannot be fathomed. It extends far beyond what men imagine. As long as we are in the body, it is my understanding we will never get beyond saying, "I have not yet apprehended that for which I have been apprehended." That does not mean there are aspects of Divine love are unlawful for us to comprehend. It does mean that the frailty of the vessel in which the treasure resides limits us. I am quick to point out, no soul will ever be able to say, "I have seen all that I am capable of seeing." There is not only more to be comprehended, there is grace to enable us to comprehend more. God can enlarge our heart (Psa 119:32).

You are absolutely correct in stating the Divine nature must become our nature. Again, the way we state this is important. Peter said it this way, "by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). Hebrews 3:14 says, "For we have become partakers of Christ." This is an aspect of salvation (in fact the fundamental aspect) that is rarely heard in our time. God's predetermined purpose is to "conform us to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). In the end, "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-2). While the resurrection will bring the realization of that in our bodies (Phil 3:20-21), the transformation of our persons into His likeness begins now—in "the day of salvation."

One other thing about this marvelous Ephesian text. In order for us to comprehend "with all saints" the largeness of "the love of Christ," we must be "rooted and grounded in love." For that to happen, Christ must "dwell in our hearts by faith." For that to happen, we must be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." For that to happen, it must be granted to us by God "according to the riches of His glory" (Eph 3:16-18). What a wonderful affirmation of Divine objective! All of the required means are in place. God is ready. The Spirit is ready. The Lord

Jesus is ready. It but remains for the people of God to be ready. That will only happen as their hearts are convinced of the truth of these things.

The people with whom I fellowship all see this, have no trouble with it, and find it a source of great delight and challenge. To me, nothing else really matters. If we are "filled with all the fulness of God," we will be adequate to do all God requires of us. We will also be able to enjoy the Divine fellowship and utility into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9; 3:9).

Do you think the world will end in the year 2000?

I do not know. I am convinced we are near something most unusual. it may be the coming of Christ, during which the end of the world will occur. It may also be an unusual judgment from God, or even an unusual blessing. But we are nearing something. This is time to live close to the Lord.

SOME QUESTIONS ON PRAYER

When some people confront the sick, immediately start praying for a miracle. Do we have a scriptural precedent for this?

Prayer is not regulated by a procedure or formula. We are encouraged to let our "requests" be made known to God (Phil 4:6). They ARE "requests," not demands. Nor are such prayers asking the Lord to fulfill what He has promised. I know of no place where God has guaranteed health to His people. Some are fond of quoting John's desire for Gaius: "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers" (III John 2). The key in that text is "as your soul prospers." That would mean the sure death of many I know. Too, it was a deep seated desire of John, not a condition promised by God. Were it something God

promised, John would have exhorted Gaius, not prayed for him.

If the people who pray for your sister really desire what they are requesting, I would not discourage them from making their request known to God. It does not have to be in your sister's presence to be effective. God invites them to let their request be known to Him. Like He did with Paul and his thorn, He may not answer as they desire, and they should be resolved to accept His answer. If, on the other hand, they are praying mechanically, imagining that it is God's will to keep His people in a state of perfect health, they are not praying from their heart but from their head (and a confused one at that). Such prayers bounce off the ceiling, so to speak, and are reprehensible because they are not driven by faith.

You may recall Jesus often asked questions of people who came to Him. He asked the mother of James and John, "What do you wish?" (Matt 20:21). In that case, He denied the request because it was off-center. The mother did not realize what she was asking, but was evidently sincere in asking it.

On the other hand, Jesus asked the two blind men on the road to Jericho, "What do you want Me to do for you?" When they said they wanted their sight, He had compassion on them and healed them. In Mark's account of the healing of Bartimaeus, Jesus said, "Go your way; your faith has made you well" (Mark 10:52).

I understand these cases to reflect the Divine manner. It is like saying "Let your request be made known." However, that is not to be equated with a guarantee of an affirmative answer. Philippians 4:6-7, after admonishing us to make our requests known, promises that God's peace will keep our hearts and minds – not that the request will be answered as we desire.

People who pray for miracles should have a faith that corresponds with their request. There is nothing in Scripture that indicates such

prayers are out of order—but if they are to be answered, they must be motivated by faith, not feeling. Repeating the prayer often and loud does not obviate the need for faith.

My understanding of miracles is that they were performed to authenticate a new revelation or the bearer of the new message.

I was brought up under this teaching. It is not, however, a statement or concept affirmed in Scripture. It is a human conclusion, not a Divine affirmation. I believe it was developed largely to counteract false claims of miracles. While it is true miracles often authenticated the messenger, or validated a new revelation, that was not always the case. Sometimes sheer compassion motivated the Lord. The feeding of the 5,000, healing the Nobleman's son, the Gadarene demoniac, the daughter of the Syrophonecian woman, Peter's mother-in-law, raising the son of the widow of Nain, and the healing of the woman with the issue of blood are cases in point.

Some have developed special classifications of Divine workings, choosing to call some "providential works," and others "miracles." I personally think they have been too aggressive to make a distinction where none is really required. James (who was not an Apostle) spoke of the sick calling for the elders, who were to pray over the sick person, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The promise is, "the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (James 5:16). To me, it is evident this is not a mere procedure—and it should never be approached as though it is. The thing that makes the prayer effective is faith—it is "the prayer of faith" that brought the results. I can tell you this prayer cannot be prayed at will. Nor is any other kind of prayer guaranteed an answer. This is not for people who live at a distance from the Lord.

It is possible, however to live close enough to the Lord to have prayer answered. I know of no revealed limitation on how close we can come to God in Christ Jesus. He is still able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that works in us (Eph 3:20). Receiving benefit from Divine ability, however, is in strict accordance with the power working through us—not in spite of us. All of that postulates that the individual is in close communion with the Lord. Even then, the prayer is circumscribed by the will of God, as shown in the case of Paul's thorn.

I believe that "with God, nothing is impossible"; but we should be understanding about how to pray within God's will, shouldn't we?

God's will is the foundation upon which all answers to prayer are granted. Often that will is hidden from the holiest of people. Recall the mighty prophet Elisha. Ordinarily, he had insights that transcended that of ordinary men. On one occasion, however, he confronted a widow whose son had been born miraculously through the prophet's word. He asked the widow how the boy was, not knowing he had actually died. When he detected by the widows action that something was wrong, he said to his servant Gehazi, "the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not told me" (2 Kgs 4:27). The prophet then proceeded to find out what was hidden—or to know the will of the Lord. He knew he could not operate independently of that will. Neither can we.

The promise is, "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15). The Spirit continues by promising life will be give to a wayward soul

because of the prayer of a faithful one (verse 16). Even in that case, however, the will of the Lord dominated, for "the sin unto death" (or a sin that was in order to death, like Ananias and Saphirra, and Judas) could not be corrected by prayer–faith or not.

At no point does the human will ultimately supersede the Divine will. However, I have heard many speak as though this were the case. They deride asking things according to the Lord's will. They are ignorant of the fact that our Lord Himself prayed in strict accord with the will of His Father, choosing to forfeit His own in preference of God's (Lk 22:42). James reminded us we should say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (James 4:15).

One further consideration on this. It is essential that believers settle it in their minds to know the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and never to seek things contrary to it – determined to always pray in strict accord with the Divine will. Remember, God did not want Israel to have a king, yet they asked for one anyway. God granted their request, considering they had rejected Him (1 Sam 8:7). The Lord fed Israel with manna, food appropriate for their wilderness journey. However, they desired meat, and asked for the same. The Lord answered their request, giving them meat in abundance. Then, "while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the LORD was aroused against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague" (Num 11:33). The time came for Hezekiah to die. He turned his face to the wall and asked for an extension of life. God reciprocated by adding 15 years to his life (2 Kgs 20:2-6). That merciful extension, however, became the occasion during which the nation was cursed (2 Kgs 20;12-19).

His blood covers sin, but do we pray for it to cover physical infirmities.

Associating the blood of Christ with illness is a human innovation. I know of no such connection in Scripture. Jesus' blood is associated with eternal life (John 6:54), remission (Matt 26:28), being brought close to God (Eph 2:13), peace (Col 1:20), cleansing the conscience (Heb 9:14), entering the holiest (Heb 10:19), the new covenant (Heb 10:29), cleansing (1 John 1:9), redemption (1 Pet 1:18-19), propitiation (Rom 3:25), justification (Rom 5:9), the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7), and sanctification (Heb 10:29) – BUT NEVER HEALTH! That is an association men have made.

The death of Christ was necessary because of our alienation from God. The blood of Christ resolves that separation, being the means through which we are brought into fellowship with the Lord. If Christ's death, or the shedding of His blood is the basis for healing—or if healing is in the atonement, as some claim—then sickness alienates us from God. I see no way to avoid this conclusion. A vicarious atonement is not required by sickness. Bodily infirmity does not alienate men from God, and thus does not require the blood of Christ. The Spirit reminds us, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission" (Heb 9:22). He NEVER says, however, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no healing."

Pleading the blood over flesh and blood is an absurdity. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, having been cursed by God. Christ's blood has to do with eternal life, and its sole efficacy is in that arena. Bodily healing has to do with faith and the Divine will. No Divine guarantees are offered in regards to health.

If you accept that God is truly calling you home, then you can rest on his promises and find peace and even joy in a terminal situation. Any rejoinder?

At the close of his life, Paul said, "I am ready to be offered" (2 Tim 4:6). From an earthly point of view, if anyone had a reason to live, it was Paul. He was a "chosen vessel," and the ONLY Apostle of the Gentiles. Yet, he sensed the time of transition had come, and he was ready to go. Peter also knew he would "shortly" put off his earthly tabernacle (2 Pet 1:14). Our blessed Lord Himself yielded up His relatively young life, knowing He had finished His work. Some of the patriarchs would "gather" their feet into their bed, breathe their last, and be gathered to their people (Gen 49:33) – indicating they were reconciled to their death.

Death, as you know, is by appointment (Heb 9:27). Our times are "in His hand" (Psa 31:15). There does come a time when we "finish" our course (2 Tim 4:7) and complete the race (Heb 12:1). When that time comes, it is a blessing to realize it, and look forward to gaining the prize. It seems to me that those who have an inordinate desire to remain in the body have only confessed their lack of faith. It is possible for Christ to be our life, and for dying to be gain (Phil 1:21). For the faithful, that means there are really no disadvantages in death. Death belongs to us—it is ours, even though it is an enemy (1 Cor 3:21-23). It cannot separate us from the love of God, and in it, we are more than conquerors (Rom 8:35-39).

What about "prayer walks." Where does this come from? Am I missing a scriptural reference on this? Whole groups of people will spend rather large amounts of money to travel over to India or other far country, just to walk around city streets or idol temples and "pray down strongholds."

Again, this represents a human conclusion. I suppose it is based on the account of Israel marching around the walls of Jericho. Of course, God had given Jericho to Israel, else their marching would have been an exercise in futility. I am fully sympathetic with those

who have a strong desire to see the bastions of idolatry and false religion overthrown. It is not my understanding, however, that this cannot be done procedurally. The whole approach smacks of Old Covenant religion. That covenant was procedural because the people themselves were alienated. Although we have numerous accounts in the book of Acts of the actions of holy people, there are no accounts of "prayer walks." Scripture does not tell us strongholds are "prayed" down, but that they are "cast down" (2 Cor 10:3-5). The utilization of powerful spiritual weaponry is not associated with praying, but with "walking by faith." I do not question that prayer is involved in such overthrows. However, the dissemination of light comes primarily through godly influence. While that can be assisted by fervent and effectual prayer, it is the individual's association with God that makes it meaningful.

If marching around a city is the means God uses to subdue it, it seems to me Jesus would have gathered His disciples and marched around Jerusalem. He did have a heart for that city. Too, when the whole city of Samaria believed and turned to the Lord, it was not the result of a "walk," but of the preaching of Philip. God did not tell Jonah to walk around the city of Nineveh, but to walk through it, preaching as he went. There simply is too much in God's Word on this subject for men to go about creating their own means.

If people want to walk around cities, people, etc., they have done no wrong. But a tree is known by its fruit, not its looks. If their action yields results because of their faith, I will be the first in line to give thanks for them and their work. But I will not adopt such a procedure as though it were the Divinely appointed and revealed means of overthrowing the wicked one.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INTEGRITY OF SCRIPTURE

The thing is, I am really looking for something in my life right now, and I'm not really sure where to turn to.

First, this is what God's word calls "seeking." It is really wanting to find the Lord and His will. Seeking, or searching, is good, and is so regarded by the Lord. For example, He says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matthew 7:7-8). It is understood that you are seeking, or looking for, these answers from the Lord Himself. This is called reaching out to find Him (Acts 17:27). The idea is that God will help us in this search. It is not just doing some research, but asking the Lord to help us find the real answers. He promises that such a search will bring the answers. He means that He Himself will be sure we receive them – and you will know it when you have them. You will be convinced in your heart, and have no doubts about the matter.

I really want to believe in God and I want to believe that Jesus died and rose for me and that I am forgiven, but it's very difficult for me to believe it.

The biggest part of believing these things is WANTING to do so. I want to emphasize this. God nowhere suggests that believing is easy – and it certainly is not. In fact, even after we believe, we have to fight to keep believing. The Bible calls this fighting the good fight of faith (1 Timothy 6:12). This involves resisting the temptation to NOT believe. That means you insist on still making an effort to believe, even when it is hard. One time a man with a very difficult circumstance came to Jesus, asking for help—something like you are doing. He had a very sick son, and wondered if Jesus could help him. Jesus said to the man, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." The man knew he believed, but had trouble believing Jesus could really help

him. How does a person respond when he feels that way. Here is what the man said. "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" (Mark 9:23-24). That is exactly what you must do. No amount of arguments and proofs can convince a person to believe. Faith is something God gives to us. The Bible says we "obtain" or receive it (2 Peter 1:3). What is necessary for this to happen is a strong desire to believe—really wanting to believe. You have that desire, and you must keep it. The Lord will help you to overcome the difficulty you are experiencing in believing. Be determined to believe that.

How do I know that The Bible is telling The Truth? Have there been any things predicted in The Bible that happened that I actually probably witnessed myself (in modern times)?

This is something that comes through believing, not through convincing proofs. There are a great number of Scriptural prophecies that have been fulfilled. I have on my website a series of over 200 links that deal with this subject. It can be accessed by the following: <http://givenb/wotruthcom/007.htm>

Having said that, this is NOT the way to be convinced the Bible is telling the truth. The Word of God again deals with this subject. First, the Holy Spirit tells us that what is declared is really the truth. The Gospel, for example, is the message of prophecy that has been fulfilled—a Savior for the world that has done everything God wanted done. God knows people will have a difficult time seeing this, so He tells us how it can become clear to us. "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Peter 1:19). What He means is this: What God has declared is true, whether we see it or not. But, if we will pay attention to His Word, filling our minds with it, and reading it with zeal, something will happen. The

Word of God is like a large light, shining into the heart. That is another way of saying, it is what God uses to make things plain to us, so we can understand. As that Word works in our hearts the day will dawn. That is, everything will become plain, and will fall into place. The Morning Star that rises in our hearts is the Lord Jesus Himself (He calls himself the Morning Star in Revelation 22;16). He is the One who convinces us of the truth of the Bible.

Notice what He said. We are to concentrate on the Word, not what men have said about the Word. That does not mean we never read what men have said, or that we never investigate the writings of other men. It does mean that is not the main thing we do. Our main point of reference becomes the Bible itself. As we read and think upon it, the Lord Himself assists us to see its meaning and become convinced of its truth. He will do that for you also.

Someone else told me that geologists and historians and archaeologists have found proof that The Bible is telling The Truth. Do you know anything of this?

The Bible links I provided in the previous section will give you a lot of information on this. I am careful to remind you that no man can prove the Bible is true. The Bible IS true because God gave it. Honest investigation will confirm that truth. In the end, it is your faith that is the real proof (Hebrews 11:1).

For example, it says that God is a jealous God, then it says love is not jealous, then it says God is Love.

God is, indeed, a jealous God. In fact, He says His "name is JEALOUS" (Exodus 34:14). The text that states love is "not jealous" is found in 1 Corinthians 13:4. This, however, is not the same thing God is talking about when He says He is jealous. In the

case First Corinthians, the word "jealous" refers to envy, and is so translated in most versions. The idea of envy is having strong feelings AGAINST someone. Such jealousy is filled with resentment against the person. It makes a person want what the other person has.

In the case of God, He is not envying people. Rather He strongly desires their affection, their heart, and their allegiance. For anyone else to desire this is wrong, because we are not deserving of such attention. God, however, IS deserving of it. The reason is because He made us. He also purchased us in Christ Jesus. It is simply wrong for those God made and bought to give their hearts to anyone else. God really does want us. He really desires to have our hearts and to bless us. That is what He means by being jealous. With Him, it is something righteous. For us, it is unrighteous, because we have no right to want all of the attention.

Also, how do we know that someone didn't just add parts to the Bible that aren't real? For example, the New Testament...how do we know that's not just an addition on to the Old Testament that isn't really True? Or what about the extra books in Catholic Bibles? How do we know if those really belong there or not? Is there any evidence of what is True and what is not?

Again, the final evidence is your faith. There are a variety of materials that deal with this question. The website reference I gave you also contains things on this matter. There is, however, a higher and more effective way to approach the subject.

During the early days of the church, believers faced the same sort of dilemma. With them, it was a little different, but substantially the same. They were confronted with preachers and who were not telling the truth. Yet, some of these people claimed to have walked

with the Lord's own Apostles. They were not Apostles themselves, but had actually companied with them. How were the people to know what was right? How could they tell the difference between true Apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:42), and the false teachings of men.

The Apostle of John dealt with this very situation. First, he told the people these false prophets did, in fact, once walk among the Apostles, but had left their company. "Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us" (1 John 2:18-19). Now comes the real test. How will people be able to tell what part, if any, of their message was true?

John reminds them this is something the Holy Spirit will help them with. "But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth . . . As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit--just as it has taught you, remain in him" (1 John 2:20,27). When he says, "you know the truth," he means they are able to detect or sense the truth. It is something like knowing how to swim. You may not be able to fully explain it, but you know how to swim anyway. Down deep in the heart of every person who is born again, they know the truth. That is, they are able to recognize it. It is like having an appetite for the truth, and being able to tell you have it when it comes your way—even if you never heard it before.

The real test of the truth is not what it says, but how it works! Here is a most wonderful thing. John says we do not need any man to teach us. He does not mean we need no teaching at all, for John himself is teaching us. He is speaking about applying the truth—

how to adapt it to life. When we hear the real truth, the Holy Spirit shows us how to adapt it to life—how to apply it. In that case, we are able to do what is right without having a list of rules in front of us.

The truth of Scripture can be converted into right and effective living. That is your ultimate proof that it is true.

The Bible seems to totally contradict itself. It says that He will never leave or forsake Believers, but then it says that if they disown Him, He will disown them.

I am glad you said "SEEMS to totally contradict itself." That shows you suspect this is not the case—and it certainly is NOT the case. The promises of the Bible are ALWAYS made to believers—and believers are people who ARE believing, not who at one time believed. Such are told, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). It is God's nature to do this, and He cannot act contrary to His nature.

However, God also speaks to those who do NOT believe—who do NOT hold on to Him. 'If we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself" (2 Tim 2:12-13). God has NEVER promised to save someone who is not trusting in Him, or does not want to be saved. God's nature will not allow Him to save those who no longer trust in Him. That is why this passage reads as it does. He is saying, Men are fickle. They can change – in fact some of them begin believing, and then quit believing. Some start out being faithful, then become unfaithful. But God is not like that. He does not change! He cannot act contrary to His nature, or "disown" Himself. Therefore, when someone becomes faithless—even though they were once faithful—

God must disown them. He must do so because that is the way He is. He has said over and over the unbeliever will be condemned. It makes little difference that the person may once have believed.

Think of it this way. Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden by God. As long as they did what the Lord said, they were free to remain there. But when they sinned, they left God no recourse but to cast them out. He told them when they ate of the forbidden fruit, they would die. For God to have allowed them to remain in the garden would have required Him to change His nature—and God cannot do that.

The Church I go to says that you can't lose your Salvation, even if you completely turn away from God and became backslidden, but this verse seems to me to be saying something else.

Nowhere does the Bible say you cannot lose your salvation. That might be comforting to a wayward Christian, but it is foolish to someone trusting in the Lord. It is like saying Satan could never be cast out of heaven, even though he really was (Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:9). It is like saying Judas could not lose his apostleship, even though he did (Acts 1:25). It is like saying disobedient angels could not lose what they once had, even though they did (Jude 6).

God has already spoken to this issue, so we really do not need the opinions of men. Hebrews 10:38-19b reads, "But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed." He goes on to speak of those who continue believing, and are therefore not destroyed. A person who thinks a believer cannot quit believing has not thought the matter out. Jesus clearly spoke of those who only believed "for a while" (Luke 8:13). He did not

promise salvation to such people, and woe be to the person who represents Him as saying that.

We are solemnly told, "Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim 6:12). Such people will surely be saved. God will underwrite their efforts. But those who choose to quit fighting, and no longer make a heart effort to take hold of eternal life are not promised salvation—any where or in any sense.

Another example of this is when it says that all you need to be Saved is to believe and confess and have faith, but then somewhere else is says "Faith without works is dead".

Faith is the foundation of our salvation. By that I mean believing and resting in what Jesus has done is the basis for us being saved. We can contribute nothing to that foundation. God saves us because of what Jesus has done, and because we are trusting in that.

The text that states "faith without works is dead, being alone" is found in James 2:17 and 26. James is not speaking of the REASON for being saved, but of the EVIDENCE of being saved. When he says "faith without works is dead," he means such a faith is only pretension—it is not faith at all. It is like a dead body—that body is not a person, because the spirit of the person has left it. So a person who lacks the "works" faith produces, really has no faith at all. He only says he does. The acid test of real faith is being able to do what God commands. It is like Israel passing through the Red Sea (Hebrews 11:29), Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:29), and Abraham offering up Isaac (Hebrews 11:17-19; James 2:21; Genesis 22:1-13).

Being saved without any activity on our part would be like Israel coming out of Egypt without observing the Passover, putting the blood over their doors, eating the Passover meal, putting on their clothes, and being ready to move out (Exodus 12).

Also, I thought that God forgave all sins. But I read that there is an unforgivable or unpardonable sin (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit - Mark 3:20-30). First of all, why does the Bible say that all sins are forgiven in some places, and then in other places it says that a sin is not forgivable?

The forgiveness of "all sins" is offered only to believers, or those responding to the Gospel of Christ (Colossians 2:13). That does not mean every kind of sin will be forgiven, but all the sins of the individual will be forgiven. Forgiveness presumes repentance and faith. Where those are not found, forgiveness is not possible.

In the text you mentioned, our Lord tells of one sin that cannot and will not be forgiven. It is not a single act, but a KIND of sin. The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit occurs when a person becomes so hard and calloused that all tenderness of heart is gone. The Lord does not tell us when this occurs, but that it CAN occur. The idea is that when we resist the Holy Spirit, or grieve Him, or quench Him, we gradually become hardened against Him. Just as we can become more sensitive to the Lord by believing, so we become more insensitive to Him when we do not believe. Unless unbelief is stopped, we finally reach a point where the Holy Spirit's influence is ridiculous to us. Again, we do not know at what point that condition is reached—and it really would be pointless for God to tell us. The point is that we are to work on being sensitive, not insensitive.

Also, what exactly is blasphemy? I think that I may have committed that sin, although I sure hope not . . . They say that to go to hell for it, it has to be repeated over and over again and intentional, but according to the way the verse reads, it seems like you only have to do it once.

You have NOT committed this sin. The very fact that you are concerned about it proves that. This is a sin that CANNOT be committed accidentally, or by those who really do not want to commit it. Again, this is not a particular act, but a KIND of sin that is committed. It is a state that is reached rather than a deed that is done—like going over the edge.

How do we know if we are interpreting the Bible correctly? . . . How do we find out what it really means, instead of just giving it our own interpretation?

You must think of this in a different manner. The Bible is not to be interpreted, but believed. When we believe it, God will help us understand it. That is another way of saying we are convinced it is the truth, even if we do not yet understand it. David believed the Bible, then asked for God to help him understand it (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). The Ephesians believed the Gospel (Eph 1:13), then Paul prayed God would give them understanding (Ephesians 1:17-20; 3:18-20). Timothy believed what Paul wrote to him, then Paul prayed the Lord would give Timothy understanding in all things (2 Tim 2:7). Ask the Lord for understanding. He will give it to you. It is really just that simple.

Can we expect suffering to be something we experience throughout life ? and if so, what is 1 Peter 5:10 referring to when it says: And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal

glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. Does "a little while" refer to our entire lives ?

The suffering of question is detailed in the verses following the Romans 8:17 affirmation (8:19-25). It is the suffering of travail, or the expectancy of being delivered from the bondage corruption. It comes because our faith has put us at variance with the whole world. Our inward man is advancing, while our outward man is deteriorating (2 Cor 4:16). Because we are "strangers and pilgrims" in this world, the desires it fosters "war against" our soul, creating suffering (1 Pet 2:11). We are also misfits in this world, because God has taken us "out of the world" for His own Self (Acts 15:14). Now we are taken out of the in our hearts. This produces opposition and persecution. Soon, we will be removed from the world altogether. Until then, our sufferings -- all of them -- are caused because we are no longer citizens here, but our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20-21). This creates friction between ourselves and nature, as well as those who are not born again, and the entire world order.

Peter's reference to suffering for a "little while" applies generally to life, but more specifically to particular difficulties through which we are being conformed to the image of God's Son. The term "little while" emphasizes the temporary nature of suffering. In First Peter it refers primarily to persecutions, and the oppositions of men (2:21; 4:1,13,14). He begins the book by referring to these sufferings. There Peter says they are not always present, but are special occasions through which God is perfecting us. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, IF NEED BE, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (1:6). The NIV reads, "for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."

In this suffering, our faith is being refined and strengthened -- put

to the test -- so it will glorify God when the Lord Jesus comes to receive us unto Himself (1 Pet 1:7).

How do you feel about all the interest that is being placed on the Prayer of Jabez ? Have you read Bruce Wilkinson's book ?

In my opinion, he has made some good remarks, but has adapted it too much for the person of the world. The prayer of Jabez was superior in his time, but is not to be compared with the insightful prayers one in Christ Jesus. Jabez prayer did not extend one millimeter beyond this present world. Compare it the prayers of Paul (Eph 1:15-20; 3:15-20; Col 1:9-11, etc).

With all of the things going on in the world today, many speak of the rapture of the church but indicate that the unsaved will be left on earth and go through great tribulation. Although I have heard teachings on this all of my life, I have never thought that life would continue on earth after Christ's return.

You are absolutely correct. We are not left to the finely spun theologies of men in determining this. The Spirit has spoken with such precision, that one wonders how there can be any confusion on the subject. Peter says that when the Lord comes "as a thief," the entire universe will go up in flames. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!" (2 Pet 3:10-12, NASB).

Paul; affirms that the wicked will be destroyed by the Lord "when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed" (2 Thess 1:10, NASB).

Jesus said He would return in all of His glory, the glory of the Father, and the glory of the holy angels -- something no flesh will be able to survive (Luke 9:26).

When John saw a vast multitude in the glory, an angel asked him who they were. He did not know, so passed the question back to the angel He was told, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14, NASB). In fact, early believers were told, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

The "rapture" doctrine is a myth created by men. The word "rapture" is not even found in the Word of God. Therefore, to found a large body of teaching upon it is something less than wise. The basic tenets of the doctrine -- a seven year tribulation, a fleshly reign of Jesus in Jerusalem, and a bloody war between the forces of heaven and those of earth, have no clear basis in Scripture. They are based upon human analysis, and the putting together of an array of Scriptural texts that were never joined by an inspired man.

When Jesus comes, the very text upon which this doctrine is founded, explodes the notion of a secret rapture of the church. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thess 4:16). Anyone who imagines all of that can go undetected not only needs to pray for wisdom, they need to confess to foolishness.

Have you researched any other details around the date and historical circumstances of the record of the "star" over Bethlehem that winter evening of 5ad?

I am familiar with some of the writings of men on this, but it has been many years since I read them. As Paul would say, "they added nothing to me." If all Scripture has come through the inspiration of God, and holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, then this is an inspired view of things. That also means there is very much to be seen in this record -- much of which you are beholding.

When I lived near Chicago, the Planetarium had a special program every Christmas in which they tracked the star of reference. It was a fascinating program to see. They still hold it every year.

It is generally conceded that the wise men had some affiliation with astronomy. The term "wise men" comes from the word "magi," which is thought to mean Oriental scientists, or those familiar with the heavens. We are not told precisely how they knew about this star. It is my opinion that they received a special revelation about it. They had some familiarity with God, being warned by Him later in a dream not to return to Herod.

I have often pondered what you mentioned about these scientists being among the first to know of the Holy Child who was born King. In them, the wisdom of this world properly bowed to Jesus -- and that when He was under two years of age. Lowly shepherds in Israel, wise men in the East. Both received a revelation, although the shepherds had a fuller one. Thus the first became last, and the last first. There is surely more in this account than most have been given to see.

Amen, brother Blakely. And on that note, I wonder if you'd have any comment (short and/or general is fine) on "post-millennialism"?

Christ's return will definitely be "post" to anything transpiring on the earth. There are several Scriptures that indicate the truth will pervade the world in an unusual way, thereby vindicating the God of all truth. The earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14). All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God (Isa 52:10). The Lord shall be king over all the earth, and there will be one Lord, and His name one (Zech 14:9). Paul relates an explosion of the knowledge of the Lord with the turning of Israel to the Lord (Rom 11:12,15). If these things were said by mere men, I would not consider them weighty. However, they are the mind of the Lord.

I do not presume to limit the holy one of Israel, or to assign a lifeless meaning to these words. Whatever is involved in their fulfillment, they are not meant to induce sleep among the saints, as though Christ's coming was a long way off. Stereotyped theology, like post-millennialism, can lead to that erroneous conclusion, even though it contradicts the spirit and content of Apostolic doctrine. God can get a lot done in a short time, like a nation being born in a single day (Isa 66:8).

There are some remnants of truth in all three of the traditional views of Christ's return (pre-post-A). But there is one thing they all three have in common. The return of Jesus is not the fundamental thing in any of them. The pre-millennialists emphasize the mythical rapture, and specifically the great tribulation -- so much so that their adherents are more afraid of a mark in their head than of being cast into hell. The Post-millennialists emphasize the reign of the truth upon the earth. The A-millennialists emphasize the here and the now, as well as do the Preterists. However, the emphasis of Scripture is the Lord's return itself. Those who believe

are said to have turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:9-10).

Any teaching, therefore, that does not lead to that posture cannot be right, whatever it is.

2 Peter 3:10 As I understand it the Day of the Lord is when Jesus sets his feet on this earth again. If at this time all is burned up, what about the 1000 year reign and then evil again being loosed upon the earth? Or is the Day of the Lord referring to Revelation 20:7 thru chapter 21?

The "day of the Lord" is when He will be revealed from heaven (2 Thess 1:7). It is when the Father will make His Son known to all (1 Tim 6:15). It is His day because all will bow before Him and confess His name. His glory will overshadow everything else. As Peter affirmed, when He comes as a thief, the whole universe will have to go, for there will be no further need of it in its present form. I understand this to be the time to which Revelation 20:11 refers. "And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them."

The thousand year reign, as you probably know already, is one of the most controversial subjects within the church -- even though it is only mentioned six times in the entire Bible, and that in the most figurative book of the Bible -- a book in which John wrote what he "saw," a vision. The only texts we have on this subject say the following. (1 Satan is to be bound a thousand years (Rev 20:2). (2 During these thousand years, Satan will deceive the nations no more (Rev 20:3). (3 The saints who were beheaded because of their testimony reigned a thousand years with Christ (Rev 20:4). (4 The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were

finished (Rev 20:5). (5 Those who have part in the first resurrection will reign with Christ for a thousand years (Rev 20:6). (6 when the thousand years are expired, Satan will be loosed for a little season (Rev 20:7). That is the sum total of what the Holy Spirit has said about "the thousand years." Of course, books without number have been written on the subject -- but that is all God said about it.

You will note the text has to do with people reigning with Christ, not the initiation of a new reign by Christ. I gather this means they will join Him in a reign He has had all along. It is my understanding that this refers to a period of time when the truth, for which the martyrs died, will gloriously triumph throughout the world. Romans 11:12,15 relate it to the conversion of Israel, not the return of the Lord. I do not know if this will be a thousand years as men reckon time. It is possible for something normally requiring generations to happen in a single day -- like a nation being born in a day (Isa 66:8). At any rate, something very large is ahead, and it will all conclude with the appearing of the Lord.

Some choose to view the rest of the Bible through the text in Revelation. I think it is wiser to read this apocalyptic book in view of what Jesus and His said. Whatever our view of these things, it must leave us longing for the return of our Lord, and preparing to meet Him. I know you are in that number, and thankfully rejoice because of it.

... Just wondering where the Thousand Years Reign comes into picture:

The Scriptures nowhere use the phrase "the Thousand Year reign." The single passage that deals with a specific "thousand years" is Revelation 20:2-7. It is a passage that is not conducive to the

development of a finely tuned theology. In my understanding, it does refer to a period when the truth, for which the martyrs were slain, will gloriously triumph in the earth. Then, the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:9; Hab 2:14) -- not because of a coercive rule, but because of the truth. Romans 11:12 and 15 relate the kind of global awakening to the conversion of Israel.

The prominence of the truth, or, as some call it, "the thousand year reign," must precede the return of the Lord. We know this is the case because Peter affirmed Jesus must remain in heaven until everything promised by the prophets has been fulfilled (Acts 3:20-21) -- and they promised a time when the knowledge of the Lord would cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

When Jesus comes "as a thief," there will be no further use for this world. It will go up in flames. That is a matter of revelation (2 Pet 3:10-12).

In studying the Shunnamite Woman....Was it culture that keeps her at arms length from Elisha? She is found to speak thru Gehazi the slave in most of scripture and Elisha as well does not speak directly to her. I can only guess that being a Holy man...she did not approach him face to face but I cant find anything on the culture of that time to lead me either way.

First, our introduction to this woman confirms she was a "great," or prominent woman. Seeing the prophet Elisha pass by her home., she personally constrained him to come in and eat bread in her home (2 Kings 4:8). Although she was married, she personally urged to eat in her home. She did not make the request og Gehazi. Later, when she perceived Elisha was a "holy man of God." she told her husband she felt they should make a special room for him

with a bed, table, chair, and lampstand (2 Kings 4:10).

Second, when Elisha had spent some time in this special room, he told Gehazi to call for the Shunammite woman. He did call for her, and she came and stood before the prophet Elisha. At that time, Elisha did hold a dialog with the woman through Gehazi his servant (2 Kings 4:10-14). Later, however, when Elisha promised she would have a son, he spoke directly to her as she stood before him. The woman also replkeid personally to him (2 Kings 4:15-16).

Third, following the death of her son, and when meeting the prophet again, she took hold of his feet. When the servant Gehazi sought to push her away, Elisha told him to let her alone, for the Lord had hidden what was troubling her from him. The woman then reasoned with the prophet concerning the death of her son (2 Kings 4:25-28). After elisha had raised her son from the dead, he told Gehazi to call the woman into the room where he remained with the raised boy. When she came into the room, Elisha told her to pick up the boy. The woman fell down at his feet, bowing to the ground, then arose and picked up her restored son.

Therefore, I do not see this woman as standing back from the prophet Elisha. On the occasion when Elisha spoke to her through Gehazi

When you say "Israel were sons collectively", do you mean that Israel is saved "en masse" and not on an individual basis?

Israel is collectively called "son," NOT "sons (Ex 4:22-23; Hos 11:1). The people were collectively called God's children, not on an individual basis (Deut 14:1). That status is NOT the same as being "saved" as declared in Christ Jesus. As a nation they were

begotten and delivered by God, but none of them were "born again" as those who are in Christ Jesus. Such salvation did not exist prior to Christ's exaltation. This is a salvation in Christ Jesus that comes "with eternal glory" (2 Tim 2:10) -- something that was not even mentioned under the Law, much less promised. In Jesus, God begets us to a living hope "BY the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:3). That is something altogether new. There could be no such begetting in the redemptive sense prior to the resurrection of Christ Jesus. The Prophets spoke of this salvation, even inquiring and searching diligently concerning its truth. They were prophesying "of the grace that should come" to those in Christ Jesus (1 Pet 1:10). That salvation was related to the sufferings and glory of Christ. God even revealed to the prophets that their message "was not unto themselves" (1 Pet 1:12).

This condition is precisely why Jesus said the following of John the Baptist. "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" (Matt 11:11). It is certainly not that the greatness of the "least in the kingdom" is found in a person-to-person comparison to John the Baptist. It is what we have become in Christ that accounts for a "greater" condition. You might say John was a giant standing in a valley, while those in Christ are like midgets standing on a mountain.

As you well point out, those prior to Christ who were accepted by God had faith. Their faith in God, however, while of the same order as those who believe on the Son, was vastly inferior to it. Through it, they obtained a "good report" while they sojourned in this world -- but they did NOT receive the promised salvation until after Jesus took sin away and was exalted to the right hand of God (Heb 11:39; 9:15).

If Jesus had not come, removing the barrier of sin, destroying the devil, spoiling principalities and powers, and removing the

handwriting of ordinances that was against us, no one would have been saved -- eternal life would never have been realized by anyone.

Faith had nothing whatsoever to do with the Old Covenant. Faith was strictly on an individual basis, and was not a covenantal issue. This is specifically stated in Galatians 3:12: "The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, 'The man who does these things will live by them.'" The Law did not require men to believe, but to "DO." There was no commandment under the Law to believe. The entire matter of life was placed in the hands of man, and was based upon strict conformity to the Law in every sense, and at all times.

If you do not have a proper understanding of the distinction between the Old and New covenants, you must set yourself to obtain it. The New Covenant is precisely that -- "new." It bears no resemblance to the Old Covenant, and is said to be "not according" to that covenant (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-13). It is a different kind of covenant -- of another order.

Faith has always been recognized by God, whether before the Law in Abel, Enoch, or Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Job, or after the Law in Moses, David, and the Holy Prophets. That faith, however, rested in the promise of a coming Seed, and that is precisely why it was honored by God. However, it depended upon the coming of that Seed.

We give honor to, and receive, believers who lived prior to Christ's redemption. But they "received not the promise," and could not be "made perfect apart from us" (Heb 11:39). That is a matter of record.

There is such an abundance of revelation on this in the Apostles' doctrine that I am alarmed by the kind of dialog that is going on over this issue. It is a fundamental issue, specifically addressed in

Scripture. It is the business of every believer to know what the Scriptures say about a matter before they engage in endless discussions about it. Such discussions bring no honor to Christ, tend toward confusion, and provoke all manner of foolish talking.

Solomon was spoken of as God's "son."

My response did not cover the Lord's word concerning Solomon being His son. I dealt largely with Israel as a nation, and how God referred to them collectively as His son, but did not do so on an individual basis. Solomon, of course, is an exception to that. However, the uniqueness that attended the Lord's reference to Solomon sets him in a category by himself.

I believe there are four references to Solomon in this regard. 2 Samuel 7:13-14, 1 Chronicles 17:12-13, 1 Chronicles 22:9-10, and 1 Chronicles 28:5-6. The language used in these references is most unique. (1. He would build a house for God's name. (2 God would establish His throne and His kingdom forever. (3 God would not remove His mercy from him. (4 David's house and kingdom would thus be established forever. (5 God would settle him in His house and kingdom forever. and (6 He would sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the Lord. 1 Chronicles 28:7 says God would establish His kingdom forever, conditioned upon doing His commandments and judgments. The other texts did not make this association.

It is my understanding that in these promises, Solomon was an introduction to coming Messiah, even as Israel (as a son) was, as declared in Hosea 11:1, and confirmed in Matthew 2:15. The prophecies of David's seed sitting upon his throne forever were applied to Jesus Christ by the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:31-33).

Zechariah alluded to the promises in His statement about the Messiah building the temple of the Lord (Zech 6:12-13). Peter unequivocally refers the ultimate fulfillment of these prophecies of Jesus, and specifically to His resurrection (Acts 2:20-31).

I know of no prophecies to David that specifically mentioned that the Messiah would come from him. The prophecies all sounded as though Solomon was their focus. But that was only in a preliminary sense. The Spirit consistently applies those prophecies to the Lord Jesus Himself.

I know you are fully aware of all of this. I only mention it to confirm that the references to Solomon being "son" were by no means the Divine standard for referring to men prior to the Old Covenant, or under the Old Covenant. In fact all such references to Solomon are carefully put in the future tense: "he shall be my son," and "for I have chosen him to be my son" (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 7:13; 1 Chron 22:10; 1 Chron 28:6). That appears to be by Divine intention.

Wasn't the reason Joseph had his bones interred in the promised land because God had promised the land, not because there was anything special about having them buried? In other words, his decision was based on the promise of God, not on an intrinsically valuable form of disposal.

That is precisely correct. And the burial of the body is done in hope of the resurrection, as depicted in 1 Corinthians 15:42-45. I suppose that one could imagine cremation as the "sowing" of the body, but to me it requires a fanciful imagination to do so. This is not, as some have well pointed out, a matter of salvation -- at least it is not so represented in God's Word. It does, however, serve as an occasion when "the thoughts of many hearts" are revealed.

I do not know what the philosophical language "an intrinsically valuable form of disposal" means to you. But whatever it means, we are told our bodies "are the members of Christ" (1 Cor 6:15), and will thus be redeemed (Rom 8:23). If you are suggesting that such a marvelous hope is reflected in the act of cremation, I disagree with you. I believe Joseph would have disagreed with you, as well as Abraham, those who buried John the Baptist, and those who buried Stephen. But, that is, I admit, my opinion, and I am willing to leave it at that.

I have spent time responding to this issue because of the seeming confidence that was evinced by those upholding cremation, while speaking accommodatingly to those who have no gear for it. I do not believe their position can be supported by any form of spiritual reasoning, whether it be Scriptural precedence or inference. It is groundless human opinion, and ought to be so acknowledged. There is not a syllable of Scripture that would lead an honest and good heart to justify the cremation of the body.

Three girls in our congregation have been found pregnant. It does not seem like they have repented. my heart goes out to them, yet I think there has been too much of an emphasis on grace among the church members. Where is the balance? I'm afraid we condone their sin by not confronting it, and yet we are all sinners.

I certainly appreciate your sensitivity concerning those who have fallen into sin. Jesus is sensitive about it to. When fornication involves outside of the body of Christ, our reaction is quite different from when it is toward those professing the name of Christ. The Word of God does speak to this matter, and quite candidly.

First, immortality is not to be found among God's people.

Solemnly the Scriptures affirm, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (Eph 5:3-4, NIV). The Spirit then tells us why such things are forbidden in the household of faith. "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient" (verses 5-6). No amount of explanation of excuse-making can erase the seriousness of immorality being found among the people of God. When it comes to the matter of grace, immorality requires the believer to stifle and ignore grace--otherwise it cannot be committed.

Whether it is young people or old people, it takes thought to commit immorality. It simply cannot be done inadvertently, or by accident. Satan tempts a person to WANT to commit such deeds. Additionally, the person must quench the Holy Spirit, resisting His influence, and deliberately blotting the Word of God from the mind. The young ladies you mentioned did not arm themselves against sin. They did not resist the devil, or seek grace to help in the time of need. It is essential that this be acknowledged.

There is, praise the Lord, forgiveness with the Lord, "that He may be feared" (Psa 130:4). That forgiveness, however, is not obtained by glossing over the sin. The Spirit again gives instruction on this matter, and it is quite stern. "But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat" (1 Cor 5:11, NIV). I realize that is too difficult for some to receive, but that is the mind of Christ and must be received any way.

The purpose of this reaction is to induce repentance in the offending party. In the case at Corinth, a man was living with his father's wife. The sin was so reprehensible, the church was admonished to expel the individual immediately. Here is what the Lord said to them. "When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Cor 5:5-6). Notice, the purpose for the decisive action was the salvation of the individual. Incidentally, we are told that person did repent, and came back to the Lord. When the person repented, Paul admonished the Corinthians to forgive him and receive him back. "The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him" (2 Cor 2:6-8).

The reason for the severity of the judgment was not found in the offending party alone--although that certainly was involved. Additionally, however, sin has a way of spreading within the congregation. That is its nature. The corrupting influence, therefore, was to be removed. Here is how the Spirit said it. ". . . hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast--as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth. I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people" (1 Cor 5:5-9, NIV).

The person giving these instructions, Paul, was a strong advocate

of grace. In fact, nearly everything in the Word of God about grace was written by him. Yet, under the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he spoke as he did. Any contrary views are simply wrong, and are in sharp conflict with the King Himself. When Jesus forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery, He solemnly warned her to avoid such involvements. "Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11, NIV). To a blind man He had healed, Jesus said, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14, NIV).

As you can see, our Savior has spoken to this issue, and with a lot of clarity. There is recovery available for these girls, but they must take both their sin and their Savior seriously. Those who deal with them must do so gently, in hopes God will give them repentance (if He has not already done so (2 Tim 2:24-26)).

You are on the right track, dear sister, and the Lord will reward you for it. Sin alienated our race from God, brought death into the world, and required the death of Christ. It is never innocent, and is never to be viewed casually.

Where in the new testament does God requires an individual to give ten percent of their income. I've seen it in the old testament, but understand that we are now in the period of grace and we do not necessarily follow the old testament. Please if you would, explain this.

The tithe is something taken for granted during all dispensations. Both Abraham and Jacob tithed hundreds of years before the Law (Gen 14:20; Gen 28:22). Under the Law, tithes were demanded because of the hardness of the people, and for the support of the Levitical priesthood (Lev 27:30; Mal 3:10). When confronting the

hypocritical Pharisees, Jesus mentioned they tithed. He told them they should have done this, and not omitted the weightier matters of judgment, mercy, and faith (Matt 23:23). Paul declared the support of those laboring the Gospel was precisely the same as the priests under the law, who lived from the tithes of the people (1 Cor 9:13-14). Hebrews 7:8 affirms that tithes are now being received by the One Who lives on.

There is not a solitary word in all of Scripture that suggests tithing is now out of order, or that it is not proper. It is something that is assumed. Because the Lord loves a "cheerful giver," and not one that gives under compulsion (2 Cor 9:7), giving in Christ is motivated by love, not law. That is why there is no text that commands those in Christ to tithe. In my understanding, tithing is the base of our giving.

Equally true, there is no commandment to Christians that tells them to love God either. That command is found in the Law alone. That does not mean, of course, that we are not to love God. It does mean that loving God is something those in Christ do, without having to be told to do so.

If the whole human race got created by 2 people. How come we have 100% pure Mexicans? 100% Whites. Etc. Like Chinese of them weird eyes. All that can't happen from just 2 people. Doesn't seem like it anyway.

First, there is no question about the origin of the human race. It is something that has been revealed, not the result of scientific investigation or human opinion. The Word of God declares, "From one man (Adam) He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26, NIV).

Not only were nations "made" by God, their native habitat was also established, as well as the time of history they came into being. It should not be difficult to believe that the God Who made the universe could do this. God also said of Eve, "Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). We have, then, Adam as the source of all humanity--that is, the first one. All others were made like him in their basic constitution, even though they differed in appearance. They all have bodies, souls, and spirits. They are all in the image of God with a capacity to think, purpose, decide, respond, etc. Eve is the "mother of all living" because everyone came from the children born to her. Our faith must rest in these declarations. It is not on the part of wisdom to compare what God said with what we think is possible.

Later in Scripture, the nations of the world are traced back to the three sons of Noah after the flood. "These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth" (Gen 9:19, NIV). Details of the ultimate formation of the nations are provided in Genesis 10:5-32.

As the difference in appearance of various people, this should not be strange to us. First of all, God Himself is the Author of human life, even though He uses the means of a father and mother. Every person with understanding confesses with David, "Your hands made me and formed me; give me understanding to learn your commands" (Psa 119:73). All groups of people can also say, "Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his" (Psa 100:3).

I have ten children. Some of them are quite different in appearance to the other children. I look considerably different from my sister. Yet, some of my children look very much alike, and I look a great deal like my brother.

This is not the result of a mere biological process. God Almighty is behind what men call "nature." He works with it like a carpenter would work with wood, or an iron smith would work with metal. A wood worker can take a single piece of wood and make several different things from it that do not look alike at all--a lamp, a window, and a chair. No one doubts all of those items came from the same piece of wood, and neither should we doubt that different looking people all came from Adam and Eve. God made them from Adam and Eve just like the carpenter made different articles from a common piece of wood.

One further word on this. You mentioned that Chinese people have "weird eyes." I am sure you did not mean anything insulting in that. There are approximately 5,900,000,000 people in the world. Of that number around 2,000,000,000 are in Asiatic countries, and have different appearing eyes. That is about one-third of the population of the world. That would make our eyes "weird," from your point of view. Just a thought.

When people get saved, how come some people don't feel anything?? And their life isn't any different. etc. Besides the changes they make alone.

You have used several words that need to be defined. They are "get saved," "feel" and "life." First let me define these words as they are represented in the Word of God.

"SAVED" is not a church-type experience. It is something that God does. There are two sides to it--What we are saved FROM, and what we are saved TO. Saved means "delivered," or "freed from." We are "delivered FROM the power of darkness," or from Satan and his grip upon us. We are saved TO the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus, or into His care and ministry. That is affirmed in

Colossians 1:13. We are also saved FROM the guilt and power of sin. By that, the Word of God means our sins are no longer held against us, and we know it. It also means we can say "NO" to temptation. But we are also saved TO access to God. By that, I mean we can come to the Lord in prayer knowing He will receive us and give us what we need.

"FEEL ANYTHING." First, there are two ways something can be felt. One is in our body, or physical. The other is in our souls, or the unseen and spiritual part of us. Salvation is not primarily "felt" in our body--like in a fleshly sensation of some sort. The feelings it brings are in the soul, or unseen part of us. That feeling includes peace, joy, hope, etc. (Romans 5:1; 14:17;15:13). This is the type of feeling I will speak of.

"LIFE IS NOT ANY DIFFERENT." In God's Word, life also has two sides. First, it has to do with our unseen part--we become alive to God (Romans 6:11). By that, I mean we become sensitive to the Lord--we think about Him, want to please Him, and know He sees us. The other side of "life" has to do with expression--how we think, speak, and act.

It simply is not possible for a person to be saved and NOT feel something in their soul. They will sense they are forgiven. They will know their sins are gone. They will see God differently. They see themselves and the world differently. The Bible even looks different to them. Those are all feelings. They may not feel something in their bodies, but they WILL know something has happened to them. If this were not the case, they could not give thanks or be joyful.

I am afraid there are many people who say they have been "saved" who really have not been. Perhaps they have gone through some sort of religious ritual, but have really not believed in Christ or

received Him.

It is not our job to go about judging people in this regard, but I will tell you that where there has been no change, there has been no conversion. I know what you mean when you say some people make changes alone, or without God. It really does not take Jesus to STOP doing certain things. It DOES take Him, however to START doing certain things. The real test of the Christian is not so much what they do NOT do, as what they DO practice. You can be an atheist, a Buddhist, or a Moslem, and be good morally.

There are things, however, you cannot DO without being born again. To name a few of them. -1- Loving the truth (2 Thess 2:10). That means we want more of God's truth, and cannot do without it. -2- Seeking after the things of God (Col 3:1-3). That means we live to receive what God gives us through Christ Jesus. -3- Not loving the world (1 John 2:15-17). A person who is born again develops a distaste for the things of this world--things we cannot take into heaven. By that, I mean, they will not allow such things to be the main things in their lives, whether it is money, pleasure, or fame.

There will be differences in the degree a person changes. Some people are especially zealous in these matters. Other people, because they are trying to please men and God at the same time, are not so zealous about it. I am sure this is the condition you are speaking of. People who do not throw themselves into living for Christ will eventually leave Him altogether.

There is, then, a difference in the response of people because there is a difference in their degree of commitment to the Lord. We must be careful, however, to let God's standards be the basis of our assessment, and not merely what we think people would do.

PLEASE EXPLAIN WITH THE SCRIPTURE, WHAT DEFINES AS THE WRATH TO COME? (YOU KNOW LIKE EVENTS AND THINGS) I KNOW AS A CHILD OF GOD (BORN AGAIN, BAPTIZED) THAT WE WILL NOT SUFFER THE WRATH TO COME.

The "wrath to come" is the final destruction of the wicked. This is the wrath from which Jesus has delivered ALL believers, whether in the first century, or the final one. John the Baptist spoke of this wrath (Matt 3:7). It is again mentioned in First Thessalones, where our deliverance from it is mentioned. "For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come" (1:9-10). All of these are common to every believer in every age. (1) Turning from idols, (2) Serving the true and living God, (3) Waiting for His Son from heaven, and (4) deliverance from the wrath to come.

I realize some teach we have been excluded from unusual difficulties that either have or will occur upon the earth. The Lord does know how to deliver the godly out of temptation, and is fully able to deliver us from suffering. All believers, however, have not experienced such deliverances. Aside from millions of historic records of believers who have been martyred for their faith, Hebrews 11:35-38 speaks of a category of people who did NOT accept deliverance. "Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; 38 of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in

dens and caves of the earth."

After giving this awesome account, the Spirit adds, "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise" (Verse 39). What is more, their experience was not God's "wrath," but that of men.

The phrase "wrath to come" is a unique one, found only one place in scripture. It refers to the same thing mentioned in Hebrews 10:22-27. "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries."

WILL PEOPLE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO BE SAVED AFTER CHRIST HAS COME AND GOD'S WRATH IS HAPPENING?

There will no opportunity to be saved after Jesus leaves heaven. We are told He will remain in heaven "until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). Note, the "restoration" is not of Israel, or a certain government or economy, but "all things." The idea is that everything promised will be fulfilled before Jesus returns. Until that time, He is seated at the Father's right hand, reigning over all until He has brought the sons of God safely home.

The Scripture states it this way, "For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor 15:25). That reign began when He sat down on the right hand of God. As it is written, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool" (Heb 1:13).

AND WHAT IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST, CAN IT BE TAKEN LITERALLY OR FIGURATIVELY

The proper words are not "literal" and "figurative," but "fleshly or spiritual." The "mark of the beast": is very literal, but it is also spiritual. It speaks of being willing to be aligned with the one and ones who oppose Christ. Just as Jesus works through the church, his body, Satan works through an institution. In history it has taken the form of political government and false religion.

The mark of the beast is said to be received one of two places--the forehead or the hand. The "forehead" denotes thinking like the devil--accepting his view of things--like Eve did. The "hand" speaks of doing things his way, even though the person may not actually agree with everything the devil promotes. Satan will settle for either allegiance.

You must remember that the book of Revelation is a vision. In it pictures of truth are used, as opposed to a doctrinal presentation. Thus the reigning Christ is pictured as a Lamb, the devil as a dragon, the people of God as an oppressed woman, the false church as a harlot, and institutions inspired by Satan as beasts. The "mark of the beast" is to be seen as a picture of being willing to serve the devil's enterprise, even when it opposes Jesus.

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The "fire" of Matthew 3:11-12 refers to the destruction of the wicked. This vivid description portrays the world as God's threshing floor. In it, there are people denoted as "chaff," or waste material, and those aptly termed "wheat." In "thoroughly," or

completely, purging His floor, the Lord will eliminate the need for the world as we know it. The wicked will be burned up with "unquenchable fire."

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There are not a lot of examples in Scripture that precisely state who did the actual baptizing. John the Baptist baptized people (Mark 1:5). Although Jesus is said to have baptized more people than John, it is also said He did not personally do the baptizing (John 4:1-2). Philip was not an Apostle, but a deacon. He baptized the treasurer of the Queen of Candace (John 8:38). Paul baptized a few people, but did not make a common practice of personally baptizing the people converted under his preaching (1 Cor 1:14-17).

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Is it wrong to pray to the Holy spirit like we do the Father and Jesus? If so why and what scripture. This question of course includes the problem of inviting the holy spirit to come and baptize oneself

Jesus Himself taught us to pray. He said our prayers were to be addressed to the Father: "Our Father, who are in heaven . . ." (Matt 6:9). Praying to Jesus, strictly speaking, is not the ordinary way of praying. Jesus said, "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23). That does not mean it is a sin to pray to Jesus. Stephen did say as he was being stoned to death, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). That is the only such reference in Scripture, which confirms it was not a normal situation. The Word of God teaches us we have access to the Father through Christ and by the Spirit (Eph 2:18). What is more, the Spirit moves us to cry "Abba Father" (Gal 4:6), a term referring to heartfelt prayer.

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Lord's Supper in disrespect of Jesus (1 Cor 11:30), Achan (Joshua 7:1-24), and Herod (Acts 12:22-23). In each case, the judgment of death was imposed on them by God because of a particular sin. There are also numerous other examples of those dying because of sin.

I have encountered some homosexuals who say they are Christians. They even say God does miracles in their assemblies, and blesses them. What will it take for these folks, who really want to love God, but cannot free themselves from sin, or believe that God will deliver them from it?

The love of God is defined in His Word: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:3-5).

There simply is no such thing as believing, yet being overcome by sin. I understand this does not mean God's people never sin -- but they certainly abhor it when they do. They beat a path straight to the throne to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.

Professed believers must settle it in their minds that those guilty of immorality will not inherit the Kingdom of God; i.e., they will not dwell forever in the house of the Lord (1 Cor 6:9-10). The next verse shows the effectiveness of salvation. "And such WERE some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

The sin of sodomy is especially reprehensible because it is against nature as well as against God (Rom 1:26-27). I understand those

given to this sin will sometimes experience difficulty in extricating themselves from it--but it can be done. Those who deal with such individuals must do so in hope "God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:25-26).

Those given to such perversion are simply not telling the truth when they say God moves mightily in their services. God does not bless those He has pledged to curse. Those who do not seek deliverance from sin will not be delivered from it.

It is not possible to serve two masters--those who say they do are deceived. A sodomite is a servant of sin--that is what makes them what they are. They may concoct psychological explanations for their conduct (which God summarily condemns. But when they have given their explanations, it is still true, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34).

Our role is to seek to persuade such people that it is true: "They who call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Too, if they make a profession of faith, they must acknowledge their sin to the Lord. the promise is, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). If people are not willing to believe this, we have nothing more to offer.

We must take care in our dealings with people not to confuse a profession of faith with faith itself. The consistent characteristic of faith is its overcoming power. "And this is the victory that has overcome the world; our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5). If there is no overcoming, there is no faith.

Does scripture specify a certain time that the Lord's Supper should be served? Does it have to be served in the evening?

There are no specifications concerning when to take the Lord's Supper. We do read of believers who gathered on the first day of the week "to break bread" (Acts 20:7), but there is no commandment to do so. Their example, however, is a good one to follow. It reveals how those early believers thought—and they were taught by the Apostles of the Lamb.

There is a reason for the Lord not giving us a specified time for partaking of His table. This is a feast of remembrance for those to whom Jesus is "precious" (1 Pet 2:7). To attempt to regulate remembrance by rules and commandments is counterproductive. Jesus assumed it would be taken "often" by those who loved Him (1 Cor 11:26). We are also reminded that those who fail to take it in remembrance of Him defile the table, and will bring judgment upon themselves (1 Cor 11:29-31).

Some have concluded there is such a danger in taking the Lord's Supper, they are afraid to do so -- or to do it frequently. The Scriptures, however, make no allowance for refusing to eat at the Lord's table. We are told, "Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Cor 11:28, NRSV).

The Scriptures suggest early believers partook of the Lord's supper every day (Acts 2:46). It was not a law for them to do so, but Jesus was so precious to them, and deliverance from sin so real, that it was simply what their hearts wanted to do.

I cannot conceive of any believer taking the Lord's supper with less frequency than weekly. Notwithstanding, to their own master they stand or fall.

Why is it that the gospel, or more specifically the verses needed to fully witness to someone are not found in the same book and chapter. That is, why do I have to find Romans 3:23 and then flip to Romans 6:26 and John 3:3 etc. in order to give a person all the information he needs to understand God's plan for salvation.

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The appropriation of salvation is never a mere procedure--a series of steps, as it were. Some have endeavored to approach salvation in this way, but they must piece Scriptures together to come up with their procedure--something the Author of salvation has not done.

What may appear different answers to the question of how to be saved, are not different at all. The appropriation of salvation is seen from different perspectives. From the standpoint of a foundation, we are 'saved by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8-10). That is not given to those coming into Christ, but to those who are already there. It is given to assist them in understanding why God received them.

In another place, salvation is traced back to confessing Jesus is Lord with the mouth, and believing in the heart that God has raised Him from the dead (Rom 10:9-10). This is not meant to cover all of the basis. Also, it was spoken to Christians, not sinners. The point of the text is that salvation requires a response within people. They must take hold of the Word of God with their whole heart, and acknowledge the truth of Christ before men.

Those inquiring about salvation were told by Peter, "repent and be baptized . . . for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). He made no mention of believing, because they already evidenced belief. He did not tell to confess Christ, because he knew their obedience would constrain them to do so. Peter's emphasis was that their terrible sin of killing Christ could be completely remitted by turning away from that renunciation, repudiating it, and being

baptized into Christ.

The Philippian jailor, when asking what to do to be saved, was told "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). Here there was not mention of repentance, confession, or baptism--yet all three followed. The jailor evidenced repentance and contrition, and later was baptized the same hour of the night without any argument.

In a nutshell, salvation is not a procedure. You must take people from where they are to where they should be. In that ministry, all of the things required for salvation will be gladly obeyed by the recipient.

... why is it that in scripture "He" speaking of God is sometimes capitalized where sometimes it is not.

It depends on what translation you are using. Some of them consistently capitalize the pronouns referring to Deity, and some do not. The ones which do not consistently capitalize them, as I understand, are not attempting to deny the Deity of Jesus. They seem to capitalize the pronouns when Deity is the express subject of the statement.

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Must one be baptized to be "saved" Your thought's please.

In a way, that is the wrong question. Jesus said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). That really settles the matter. he did NOT say, "He who believes and is saved shall be baptized" -- although that is what some people teach.

In fact, everything the Bible says about baptism is related to the matter of salvation.

Here are some things with which God has associated baptism. They are all associated with salvation.

1. Repentance (Acts 2:38).
2. The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
3. The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
4. Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).
5. Salvation (mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
6. Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
7. Being raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
8. Being identified with Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
9. Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
10. Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
11. The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
12. Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
13. Coming into Christ (Gal 3:27).
14. Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).

15. A commandment (Acts 10:48).
16. The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
17. Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
18. Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
19. Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

In exceptional cases, where the person was not able to be baptized due to some unfortunate circumstance, or because they simply did not know, God alone is the judge. But when the person knows what God has said, the question is, what is there about the Gospel that would lead one to want to be saved without being baptized.

I like to think of it this way. Jesus was baptized (Matt 3:16-17), and God spoke out of heaven in response to it. Too, Jesus will judge the world (Acts 17:31). What will be the explanation offered to Jesus by those who were NOT baptized, when Jesus was baptized even though John tried to talk Him out of it. Believe me, it will not go well with them.

I also asked a question about apparitions. What answer can I give those that ask me about certain "visions" and "miracles" such as those at Lourdes.

Any claim to miracles is to be tested by the Word of God and by the results they produce. There are no pat answers--like assuming "Miracles never happen," or "If you say it is a miracle I believe it." First John 4:1-2 exhorts us to test the claims of people who say or do something in the name of the Lord. If a genuine miracle has been done, something great for God will be done for someone, or some great truth of God made clear to the hearts of the people.

I personally believe much of what they say happened at Lourdes has not produced the kind of results miracles in the Bible

produced. That, of course, does not mean they were not supernatural.

Deuteronomy 13:1-3 also tells of those declaring something was going to come to pass--something that really did come to pass. However, if that person asks the people follow another god, he was a false prophet and is not to be heard. In the New Testament, we are also warned of those work who signs and wonders, but are not from God (Matthew 24:24; Second Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13). All of this means there are two categories of miracles, or signs and wonders: those that are from God, and those that are from the devil. Both are real from an external point of view, but both are not to be followed.

It ought to be clear from this why we are to test those who claim to work miracles.

I have looked in the concordance book on the definition of the word agape and I found that it means "brotherly love." What that is am not sure and was going to delve into it today, but I heard it was "unconditional love" which makes sense with the scripture verse, Rom 8:39, I am presenting on Sunday night. Could you please help me on this word agape and its true definition. Thank you.

Brother Isaac,

First, I commend you for your diligence in study, and your quest to know the things of God. That kind of spirit is about 90% of learning the things of God, and will be honored by Him.

In Scripture, there are two Greek words used for "love." One is "agape" (pronounced "a-gop-a), and the other "phileo" (pronounced "fil-e-o").

"Agape" love is the kind of love that DOES something beneficial for another. It involves a preference for, but accents the desire to do good -- or to EXPRESS that love toward the one loved.

"Phileo" love is a brotherly love. It also does good, but the accent is on AFFECTION, preference, or closeness of relationship. The word "Philadelphia" (city of brotherly love) comes from this word.

Love is a big concept, and it took these two words to really open up what it means. Some have said that "agape" love is God's kind of love, and "phileo" love is man's kind of love. This is NOT true. God is said to "love" (phileo) the Son (John 5:20). Jesus also said the Father loved (phileo) the disciples because they loved (phileo) Him. When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him (John 21:15-17), he used "agape" the first two times (verses 15-16), and "phileo" the third time (verse 17). Jesus also said the world "loved" (phileo) its own (John 15:19), and that he who "loved" (phileo) his life would lose it (John 12:25). In all of these case, "love" referred to a personal preference for what or who was loved. The emphasis in such a love is preference, affection, a desire to be with, or wanting to be around. In some cases, such a love is good, and in some it is bad. With God and Christ, it is always good.

The same kind of use is found for the word "agape." Jesus said the Father "loved" (agape) Him, and that He "loved" His disciples (John 15:9). He said they ought to "love" (agape) one another as He "loved" (agape) them (John 15:12). The Gospels also tell us that there some who "loved" (agape) the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43). When Jesus said no man can love two masters, declaring he would "love" one and "hate" the other, he used the word "agape" (Matt 6:24). When Peter spoke of those who "loved" the wages of unrighteousness, he used the word "agape" (2 Pet 2:15). John said "LOVE not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man LOVE the world,

the LOVE of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). He used "agape" all three times. In all of these cases, "love" had to do with EXPRESSING or showing itself. On the part of God and Christ, that expression is always good. On the part of man, it is sometimes wrong -- like trying to please men rather than God, or loving self more than God.

The phrase "unconditional love" has become quite popular in the past 10-15 years. However, it is nowhere found or suggested in Scripture. It is actually a term borrowed from psychology, and has been aggressively pushed by Christian psychologists. In the strict meaning of the word, God's love IS conditional, and is so declared.

"He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and HE THAT LOVETH ME shall be LOVED OF MY FATHER, and I WILL LOVE HIM, and will manifest Myself to him" (John 14:21). All four times "love" it used, it is "agape." Notice that love is conditional: IF a person loves Jesus. If the person "loves" Jesus, the Father will love that person, and Jesus will as well.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, IF A MAN LOVE ME, he will keep my words: and MY FATHER WILL LOVE HIM, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23). "Agape" is used for a man loving Jesus and God loving that man. Notice, God's love was conditional: "IF a man love me."

"IF YE KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS, ye shall ABIDE IN MY LOVE; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Again, "agape" is used. Again, there is a condition: "IF ye keep my commandments." To "remain" in Christ's love is to continue to have His love directed, or focused, upon you.

We can also conclude that God's love is conditional by sound

doctrine. For example, the Scriptures say, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb 12:6). On the other hand, we are told there are some who are NOT chastened: "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb 12:8). In this case, the "condition" is being a son.

Also, because of Israel's sin and stubbornness, God said to them, "I will love them no more" (Hos 9:15). His love was conditional.

There is a sense in which God "love the world" (past tense) is provisional -- it did something for the world. That love was exhibited in providing salvation for the world through the Son (John 3:16). But nowhere does the Word say God "LOVES" (present tense) the world. His love is seen in His provision of salvation through Christ. That is why the word "loved" (past tense) is used (Rom 8:37; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:4; 5:2,25; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 John 4:11, 19). That is, love is seen in what He DID, not how He felt.

Romans 8:39 is confirming that no outside influence can remove those in Christ from the experience of God's love. That word is given to explain why we are "more than conquerors through Him that loved us" (Rom 8:37). The word applies to those who are justified and are walking in the Spirit (Rom 8:13-16). IF, however, a person chooses to walk in the flesh, he will "die" (Rom 8:13). Such a person will not be united to God's love. In that case, it was not an enemy that drove a wedge between the person and God, but a preference for the flesh, which alienates a person from God (Rom 8:6-7)

What would you say is the biblical meaning and purpose of communion?

Communion, or the Lord's table, is an appointed way of remembering the Lord Jesus--particularly in His redemptive

capacity. It commemorates Him delivering us from both the power and guilt of sin. More, however, is involved than the recollection of our Savior. There is a very real participation in His life around this table. It is referred to as "the communion of the blood of Christ" and "the communion of the body of Christ" (1 Cor 10:16). This means that we experience the effectiveness of His vicarious, or substitutionary sacrifice. It is another way of saying we come into close fellowship with the Lord. This occurs because of the high value the Father Himself places on Christ's atoning death. Isaiah said He saw the travail of His soul and was "satisfied" (Isa 53:11). As we ponder that death, giving thanks for it, we come close to the very heart of God. In that rich fellowship benefits are ministered than can only be comprehended by the word "communion."

Another thing about this feast of remembrance--by partaking of it, we are affirming our acceptance of His sacrifice, and our anxious awaiting for His appearing. Scripture states it this way: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor 11:26).

It is also a place where we confess our total allegiance to the Lord. As it is written, "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21). You can sense the absolute seriousness of this occasion. The Corinthians were severely judged by God for being sloppy about their participation at this table. Of that judgment Paul says, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor 11:28-30).

Are there people in hell now???

In the strictest sense of the word, "No." Hell is ultimately "the lake of fire," which is the second death (Rev 20:14). This was made "for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41). However, all who align themselves with the devil by rejecting Jesus Christ "shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev 21:8). They will be consigned to that dreadful place following the resurrection of the dead and the day of judgment (Rev 10:15).

Jesus gave us some information about the state of the dead now. It is provided in His account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). Some choose to view this as a parable, but only because it impinges on their view of the dead. Jesus did not use names in any other parable. He refers to three individuals: Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man. The rich man, as you know, was in torment and flame, while Lazarus was comforted. It is my understanding that this was not the final destination of the wicked, but a temporary residence where they are held until the final day. Both Peter and Jude tells us wicked angels are also being reserved for the day of judgment (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6).

In answer to your question, the wicked who have died are presently being punished in some sense, but not as fully as they will be in the end.

Will we be judged [bema] for not using our gifts

All believers will give a strict account of their stewardship. Jesus taught this in the parables of the unjust steward (Lk 16:2-4), the talents (Matt 15:25-28), and the pounds (Lk 19:13-25). He also reminded us that faithful stewards would be rewarded and unfaithful ones punished. Again, this conflicts with some people's

view of Scripture, but fully knows the truth, and speaks in perfect harmony with it.

Each believer will give an account of himself to God (Rom 14:12). Those who have been given charge over the people of God will give an account of their work to the Lord (Heb 13:17). Both the good and evil we have done will be accounted for before the Lord (2 Cor 5:10-11). All of this is involved in being a steward of the manifold grace of God (1 Pet 4:10).

As to the concept of the "bema" judgment, this distinction has been made by men, not God. The Greek word "bema" is used 22 times in Scripture (Matt 27:19; John 19:13; Acts 7:5; 12:21; 18:12,16,17; 25:6,10,17; Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:20). It is used to describe Pilate's throne of judgement, a place for Abraham to set his foot, Herod's throne, a Roman seat of judgment before which Paul stood, the throne upon which Festus sat, Caesar's throne, and Christ's seat of judgment. The word "bema" simply means a judicial bench, tribunal, judges seat, or throne. There is no distinction made in Scripture between this throne and the throne of God. There is only one throne, and it is occupied by both the Father and the Son (Rev 22:1,3). Presently that throne is devoted to sustaining the saints (Heb 1:8; 4:15-16; 8:1). That very same throne will be the place where all are assembled in the last day for judgment. The saints will not be excluded from the day of judgment (and Scripture nowhere speaks of "days" of judgment). In act, Scripture reminds the faithful they will have boldness in that day (1 John 4:17). Jude also tells us God is able to present us faultless before His throne with great joy (Jude 24-25).

I'm haunted by the thought that I'm failing to please God. I am often deceived into thinking I need to try harder. My human effort is no match for meeting the requirements of entering into

God's holy presence. How do I become a warrior? How can I fight the fight of faith, when my thoughts are to focused on me?

Your sensitivity is proof of your acceptance! This is precisely the struggle described in Romans 7:14-25 and Galatians 5:17. In both cases, the struggle was in the mind. The thoughts of doubt, fear, etc., are flaming arrows hurled into your mind by the devil (Eph 6:18). He does this to all of God's children, making every effort to drive them away from the Lord.

One practical measure is to seek "grace to help in the time of need" (Heb 4:15-16). That grace may not make a superman out of you, but it will get you through the trial. You already have faith, but you need further help that only the Lord can give. One man who was challenged by Christ's promise "All things are possible to him that believes," responded, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Jesus did help the man, and He will help you also.

The Lord does not measure you by your accomplishments, but by your faith. That is what makes you acceptable to Him -- the fact that you believe the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). That faith is not merely intellectual, but is a reliance on the Lord Jesus. Enoch is said to have "pleased God," and it was his faith that made him pleasing (Heb 11:5-6).

In view of this, the focus of your attention is believing. that, of course, is something only the Lord can help you with--and He will do so. You are not alone in this warfare, and you must fight against thoughts that lead you to believe you are. they are temptations, not sins!

Peter reminded us of the sure word we have received in the Gospel. Knowing it is a lofty word, far beyond the reach of our natural abilities, he provided the secret to getting higher. "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do

well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Pet 1:19). In a nutshell, that means as you focus on what God has said about Jesus, the Lord Himself will open things up to you. That is His work, and He is faithful to do it.

be of good cheer, brother John. You are involved in "the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12). I deeply appreciate you sharing your heart with me, and encourage you to look up.

Any quick thoughts on 1Tim 2:12f?

This is the ordinary manner of the Kingdom. It does not exclude unusually gifted and insightful women. It has always been God's manner to use technically unqualified people, who excelled their peers. David, for example, was not old enough to be in the army when he fought Goliath. At 12, Jesus was not old enough to instruct the masters of the law. A woman judge was never used in Moses time, nor were provisions made for such during the time of the judges. yet Deborah occupied that position because of her unusual faith. the prophetess Huldah was sought out by Hilkiyah the priest, Achibor, Shaphan, and Asaiah. God spoke to the king of Judah through Huldah--something the church of Christ would never have allowed. Anna, a prophetess, announced the birth of Jesus to those waiting for redemption in Jerusalem. All of these women were unusual, and thus were afforded an unusual opportunity. I understand the Lord still operates on this principle. If, however, the woman does not have unusual insights and qualities, she is under the ordinary restriction.

What is your take on, "when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." 1Cor. 13:10.

This is more a statement of principle than a prophecy of events. The idea is that maturity eliminates the need for helps that are not thorough in their effect. It is not appropriate to refer this text to the completion of the New Testament canon, and I know of no text of Scripture that would encourage such a conclusion. The point Paul is making is that the Corinthians penchant for externals was proof of their juvenility. Their childish handling of spiritual gifts had not yielded an form of spiritual maturity.

In the ultimate sense, "that which is perfect" means precisely what it suggests -- that there will be a full blossoming of life in Christ Jesus--one that will obviate all "helps", which are themselves proof we are not yet perfect--else we would require no assistance. That time will come when the Lord appears, and we "know, even as we are known." That will be a "face to face" time, when we will no longer behold things in a cloudy glass.

I understand the word translated "done away" depicts destruction--a violent and abrupt passing of the temporal. That, of course, did NOT occur at the completion of the canon, nor will it occur prior to the end of all things. it also carries the idea of being without effect (Rom 3:3,31).

The whole focus of this body of believers these days is how God wants us to be prosperous, now, as we understand the task at hand for the "kings" to use their gifts in the job market, to bring money into the storehouse (the church, the tithe) and for the "priests" to understand that they are called to minister to the body of Christ as a full time occupation.

The whole notion of financial prosperity being integral to the new covenant and life in Christ Jesus is without support. Being a king and a priest has absolutely nothing to do with such things. The text

in reference says Jesus "has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen" (Rev 1:6). That condition was produced by us being "washed from our sins" (verse 5).

Notice. The relationship is "to His God," not to the world. Too, riches are referred to as "unrighteous mammon" (Lk 16:11), "uncertain riches" (1 Tim 6:17), and things "moth and rust consume," and "thieves break through and steal" (Matt 6:19). Those who seek such things are said to 'fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs" (1 Tim 6:9-10). To relate riches with being a king and a priest to God is an absurdity for which men will surely give an account.

Whatever may be said of earthly prosperity, it is a temporal situation. Paul, who certainly had attained at least as much as the pulpit sophists promoting this theological nonsense, said he had learned HOW to abound, and how to suffer need as well (Phil 4:12-13).

Being a king and priest to God has to do with serving Him--being used in his great salvation. It is being a worker together with God (1 Cor 3:9).

What your church is preaching is NOT good. No such thing was ever preached by Jesus or the Apostles. God has announced he is taking a people OUT of the world for Himself (Acts 15:14). His people are strangers and pilgrims in the world (1 Pet 2:11), and their citizenship is in heaven, where there are not earthly riches (Phil 3:20-21). A quest for riches, and particularly one which is fostered by a distorted view of being a king and priest to God, betrays a covetous heart.

Can you tell me why the Lord calls us who believe and are washed in His blood, "kings and priests?"

"**Kings**" has to do with reigning with Christ. In this world, it involves the overthrow of thoughts and imaginations that inhibit the knowledge of Christ (2 Cor 10:5-6), reigning over the sinful nature and bringing our whole persons into subjection to Jesus (Rom 5:17,21; 6:12). Preeminently, it has to do with the world to come, where we will sit with Jesus in His throne (Rev 3:21), reign with Jesus (2 Tim 2:12), and even judge the world and angels (1 Cor 6:1-2). In this latter sense (which is the primary one), we are kings in anticipation, like David was. he was anointed king long before he actually assumed the throne (1 Sam 16:13). We are not "kings" over earthly goods, which will perish. The whole idea is absurd. All your minister needs to support his postulate is a word from scripture that states what he is saying. Of course, there is none. he is preaching a conclusion, not a Divine affirmation.

"**Priests**" have to do with offering up spiritual sacrifices to God--serving Him here and now. It is not that SOME people in the church are priests: they are ALL priests. As it is written, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:5,9). Under the Law, only a select few actually served God--the Aaronic order (High priests), and the Levites (Priesthood). In Christ, all believers are priests, and Christ the High Priest. As individual priests, we have access to God, having the privilege of entering His presence at any time, and staying as

long as we desire. We have access to the living bread, and can partake of the altar -- which means we can imbibe or ingest the very Person of Christ as the Levites ate the sacrifices on their altar (Heb 13:10; 1 Cor 10:16-21; John 6:51-56).

The whole idea behind the use of these terms is a comparison between the Old Covenant and Israel with the New Covenant and the people of God in Christ Jesus. Under the Old, only a few were given privileges of service. under the New, ALL are given that privilege.

What your pastor is telling you has to do with supporting an institution--something that is given so emphasis whatsoever in the Word of God. We are "kings and priests unto God" (Rev 1:5-6), not to the institution.

I strongly disagree with your position on being "slain in the Spirit." Where did you get the idea this experience was against the will of those receiving it?

When I wrote, *"Some refer to this as being "slain in the Spirit." Those embracing this view believe God forces them into subjection, and sort of pounds a blessing into them apart from their own desire,"* that is precisely what I meant--"SOME." This is not a mere conjecture, as I have walked in the circles that espouse this view, and still have extensive contact with many of them. I did not mean, and did not say, that everyone using the term "slain in the Spirit" considered what they received something against their will. But for many, they profess they were made willing by the experience itself, affirming they were formerly obstinate. Of course, to their own Master they stand or fall. I am not their judge, nor am I representing myself to be such. I am referring to a human view or perception that has been treated as though it were Divine.

The extent of our experience of the Lord, of course, was not the

subject of my devotions on the unreasonableness of sin. Further, I do not take for granted that claims to what the Spirit "may" be doing are matters to be received as though they were equal to the Word of God. There are, indeed, people who not only believe God circumvents their wills, overpowering (as I called it) them, but actually rely on Him doing so. With them, it is not a mere matter of experience, but of teaching. It is a tenet, so to speak, of their faith. They are not content to let the matter remain a personal experience, but hold it forth as a standard for others--some even causing divisions in the body of Christ over the experience they call "slain in the Spirit," "overcome by the Spirit," "under the influence of the Spirit," "falling under the power," etc. We are simply not at liberty to develop a special spiritual nomenclature based upon our perception of personal experience, and then use it as though it were holy language. This has nothing to do with the reality of the experience. It has everything to do with the perception of the experience, and setting that experience up as a sort of Kingdom standard.

The Word of God affirms we have been "called into the fellowship" of God's "Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). That is a very real fellowship, in which we can receive "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him" (Eph 1:17) and "the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 Cor 13:14). This involves a Divine intimacy in which liberty, power, peace, and perception are realized. It brings a clarity to God, His Son, His salvation, and His Word, that is not available apart from Divine involvement with us. Peter referred to it as "the day dawning, and the Day Star rising in our heart" (2 Pet 1:19).

This goes infinitely further than lying in the presence of the Lord, or sensing something, but not knowing what it is. Those things happen in some measure to all who are in quest of the Lord--but they are not the highest experience, and not to be presented as though they were. If this were the case, God would have affirmed

their superiority, and left no doubt about the matter. But He did not, and we must not.

This by no means constitutes a denial that such things have, and do, occur. But they are beginnings, and not pinnacles. They are a stirring of the water, and not the refreshing waters. They lie at the threshold of Divine fellowship, and not at the heart of it.

Paul articulated the objective for every believer in this matter. In my judgment, he spoke of the most lofty and consistent experience, urging all believers to have the same objective (Phil 3:8-15). His phraseology is marvelous, and portrays an experience with the Lord that is absolutely transcendent. "Knowledge of Christ," "found in Him," "having "the righteousness of God," "knowing Him," "knowing "the power of His resurrection," enjoying the "fellowship of His sufferings," and being "made conformable to his death."

It is one thing to sense the presence of the Lord in a specific place or certain assembly. That is good, but it is not the best. It is powerful, but not the most powerful. It is quite another to walk in the Lord and in the power of His Spirit. Israel was in the presence of the Lord at Sinai, but Moses was "face to face" with Him. We have been called into an even higher relationship than experienced by Moses. Any pursuit that is less than that to which we have been called cannot be held forth as superior or as a Kingdom standard. That is the point of what I said on this matter.

When we are saved, all striving to be saved should end, because the saving is done. We already have eternal life.

We ARE saved, and we DO have eternal life -- but we do not have

the whole of them. We do have the "first fruits of the Spirit," with the bulk of our salvation yet to come. One evidence of this is our present vile body—it is certainly not saved, but they will be in the resurrection.

The striving which I mentioned is to obtain the whole of that for which we have been apprehended. Paul expressed it well for us all. "Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Phil 3:12-13).

Too, we have eternal life, and yet are admonished to "lay hold" of it (1 Tim 6:12). This does involve our awareness of what we already possess, as referred to in Ephesians 1:17-20 and 3:16-20. It also involves something that awaits us--something even greater than what we personally possess. Jesus referred to it when He said, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). That is the fulness of the which we currently possess in Jesus.

What we now have is great, and there is also a salvation "ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet 1:5)--that is the fulness of what we now have. "Now," bless God, "we are the sons of God' -- and "it does not yet appear what we SHALL be" (1 John 3:1-3). What we have is an "earnest" or down payment, and not the whole of what is reserved for us. There is an "eternal inheritance" that has our name on it, but which we have not yet received (Eph 1:14; Heb 9:15). Peter reminds us it is "reserved in heaven" for us, and that

God's power keeps us through our faith until the time we receive its fulness (1 Pet 1:4-5).

What we have now is like the grapes of Eschol to Israel. Those grapes were very real, and could be eaten. But the vine was in the promised land. So it is with our salvation. It is very real, but is a pledge of the fulness to be experienced when we are gathered to the Lord.

The flesh cannot be the old man in a Christian because that old man has been crucified and we have a new nature-an entirely new nature.

The "flesh" IS the old man. He has been crucified, but has not ceased to exist, any more than the impenitent thief ceased to exist though crucified. That part of our nature has ceased to be an integral part of our persons, having been circumcised from us in the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-12). We still deal with him, however, much like the Canaanites that remained in the land after Israel entered it.

The "flesh," or "old man" has access to our minds through our bodies, which have not yet been redeemed. As we keep him on the cross, however, he can have no dominance over us.

The Spirit leads us in mortifying the deeds of the body--which is living after the flesh (Rom 8:13-14). It would be pointless to warn believers about living after the flesh, if their flesh ceased to exist (Rom 8:5-10). It would also be pointless to admonish them to "put off the old man" if he did not exist (Eph 4:22).

The presence of this condition is the subject of Romans 7:15-25. There the struggle with the "flesh" is the subject. Though separated

from us, and no longer considered a part of our persons, it remains in our temporal parts ("members"), warring against the law of our mind. Legally, it is not part of us, but experientially it is, until we leave this world or Jesus comes again.

We DO have a new nature, praise the Lord--but NOT an "entirely new nature." Your body is certainly not new--but it will be. You have the "firstfruits of the Spirit," and not the whole of it. In this "new nature," old things have passed away and everything has become new. There is, however, another part of you in which this is not true. That is precisely what Paul meant when he wrote, "I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom 7:21-23). The glory of this is that we are not condemned because of this part of us, which we do not want, and against which we struggle. That is precisely the point of Romans 8:1.

If we were entirely new, we would not be capable of a wicked thought. There would be no imaginations to cast down, nothing to be "put off," and no temptation. While that it is not the case now, it will be when we are ever with the Lord.

Doesn't reigning in life connote walking in dominion, it means enjoying affluence, and having control over the issues of life?

This is not at all the case. "Reigning" is not synonymous with "control." In citing the glories of our salvation, the Spirit reminds us, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the

day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, IN all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom 8:35-37).

Being more than conquerors does not obviate grievous circumstances--it does mean they cannot separate us or divert us from the goal. In sharing some of his own experiences, Paul described reigning quite differently than some. "We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed" (2 Cor 4:8).

Again, he wrote "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labour more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (2 Cor 11:23-28). I suppose some would say Paul was not reigning in these "issues of life."

Keep in mind, this (Paul) is a heavenly prince speaking, and yet he acknowledged he did NOT have control over the issues of life. Those issues, however, did NOT have control over him--and thus became the evidence he was reigning in the very midst of them.

The notion that Jesus restored dominion to man in salvation is altogether false. Such WILL be the case in glory, but it emphatically is NOT the case now. This is precisely the point of

Hebrews 2:8-9. "You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But NOW we do NOT yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." The pledge of our coming dominion is the reigning Christ, NOT our present dominion. We will sit with Him in his throne AFTER we have overcome -- just as He sat down AFTER He had overcome. That is not a matter of conjecture, but is a promise from Jesus Himself. "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev 3:21).

There is a valid point made by this brother. Most believers are not aware of the greatness of the power that is toward them, and available to them (Eph 1:20; 3:20). In this, his urging that we reach higher and grow into maturity are certainly in order. But we are not there yet, nor will we fully be until we are forever with the Lord-- out of the body, and removed from the arena of conflict.

The position that is being espoused is peculiar to the Western world. There are precious saints throughout the world who are oppressed, persecuted, and enduring great hardship. Yet, IN their circumstances they are reigning with Jesus. They will rise in the judgment, together with great numbers of believers who have suffered through the centuries, and will denounce this teaching.

We are being oriented for "the world to come." Consequently, we are not of this world, but have been chosen out of it (John 15:19; Acts 15:18). Here we suffer with Christ, but the fulness of our reign is yet to time. That is rather elementary, yet has eluded many.

Is suicide a sin? If so, do you go to Hell for it?

Suicide is a sin--it is self murder, or the taking of life that God had given. The Word of God reminds that our bodies do not belong to us, but the Lord. In fact, they are even called "the members of Christ" (1 Cor 6:13-15). There is not a lot said in Scripture about suicide -- just enough to cause us to recoil from it. Paul stopped a Philippian jailor from committing suicide--and the man was saved that very night (Acts 16:27-33). Our lives are to be given to the Lord, not to despair.

As to whether a person committing suicide goes to hell, we have no word from God on the matter. That very condition indicates we are not to dwell long on such morose thoughts as taking our own life. It thrusts us into an unknown area. It is "appointed" to men to die once, and that appointment comes from God (Heb 9:27). We must be willing to leave the length of our life to Him, and not take matters into our own hands.

Does the bible say anything about how a Christian father should punish his daughter?

There are no specific instructions in the Bible on this matter. The disciplining of children is approached in a broad manner, allowing for discretion on the part of the parents.

When Solomon spoke of disciplining a "son," he did not exclude daughters. He mentioned the "rod" (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:14; 29:15). The point of discipline, or punishment, is always "correction" (Prov 23:13; 29:13). It must never be done to vent anger, or to inflict harm on the child. However, it should be harsh enough that the child realizes he has done wrong.

The commandment to all children is, "Children, obey your parents,

for this is right" (Eph 6:1; Ex 20:12). When this does not occur, measures must be taken to arrest disobedience and inconsideration. The best policy is to ask the Lord to assist you in this matter. Be stern enough to make the point, but gentle enough to encourage repentance and a clean heart.

How do we know if what we have said or are saying is directed by God and not on our own? Can this be determined by asking ourselves after we say something if what we said brought honor to God?

Anything that brings honor to God cannot be directed by Satan or ourselves--it has to come from. Of course, determining this can be a matter of human interpretation, and is therefore often difficult to determine.

Of pre-eminent importance is whether our speaking is in harmony with God's Word--and was it prompted by what God said. Secondly, our hearts are a sanctifying element. If, in our hearts, we want to please the Lord (as you surely do), that is a key ingredient in determining if what we said was directed by Him. Third, if we are living with a primary sensitivity toward the Lord, He is more apt to direct us. If the world, circumstances, or social considerations are our focus, we are probably not being directed by God. He directs us to the degree we are sensitive to Him and His Word.

A good verse to remember is this: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Prov 3:5-6). God will not fail to direct how we walk and what we say if we live totally for Him--trusting Him with all of our heart. You

will become sensitive enough to recognize whether you have been motivated by yourself or by God. It is all according to your faith.

Is the law different from a commandment?

The "Law" and "a commandment" are not synonymous. A commandment is a facet of Law, and not the Law itself. The Law is a principle. It was first embodied in the Ten Commandments -- a moral code that placed ALL of the responsibility upon men. It offered no grace, no power, and no recovery. When Paul referred to "the commandment" that "came" (Rom 7:8-10), he was referring to the portion of the law that convicted him of sin.

I thoroughly believe that I am saved by God's grace through Jesus' completed work here on earth. However, I do talk with others who add our works into this equation, especially in the areas of baptism, not having music in their services and taking communion every Sunday because they feel they are following a "commandment" to do this. Could you please help me through God's word find an answer for them on these areas?

To be precise, we are saved "by grace through faith," and "unto good works" (Eph 2:8-10). Our "works," in this instance, are not the cause of our salvation, but the affects, or evidence, of it. I am familiar with those who treat the things you mentioned as though they were equal with faith, which is the appointed means of appropriating salvation. They are not equal to faith, but are expressions of faith--and there is a big difference.

This is the matter with which James dealt in his book. His words have been wrested by legalists to say that works--our works--are the basis for our salvation. This is not so. James' point is that the

absence of works (and he is speaking of the works of faith) are the evidence of faith. Where they are missing, there is no faith, profession or not.

There are two sides to salvation: its foundation, or basis, and its evidence. The foundation of salvation--or the reason God saves us--is traced back to Jesus, and Jesus alone. He alone took away our sins (John 1:29; Heb 9:26). He alone satisfied the demands of God (Heb 10:7-9). He alone defeated the devil (Heb 2:14). He alone reconciled us to God (2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:21). He alone made peace with God for us (Col 1:20). God saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied (Isa 53:11).

Remember--we are saved "by grace through faith." Our faith can only lay hold of what God has done. Faith simply cannot take hold of what we have done. When men trust in what they have done, their trust is misplaced, and is not received by God. When, however, our faith DOES take hold of what the Lord has done, we immediately set about to do His will. Our doing is not perfect, which every honest soul will admit. Yet, it is received by God because it is motivated by our faith. If this were not the case, our works would have to be absolutely perfect, with no flaw, retarded response, or ignorance about what we should do.

Much of the argument over works is an attempt to confirm we cannot be saved while we are disobedient and walking according to the flesh. The argument has been taken so far that men have tried to merge human works with Divine accomplishment. That cannot be done, as you already know.

Some people deride baptism, the Lord's Supper, and other similar responses to the Lord Jesus, as though they were in the same class as helping our neighbor and feeding the poor. They are not in that category. Both baptism and the Lord's Supper portray the heart of the Gospel--the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Faith will

never balk at these ordinances, or treat them as though they were optional and inconsequential. Neither, indeed, will it approach them as though they were the means of obtaining the salvation of God.

Why do people associate Baptism with works? Where did this idea come from?

Because they see the necessity of baptism as impinging upon, or contradicting their view of salvation. It does not, of course, otherwise God would not have spoken of it as He does. Some say we "do nothing" in this matter of salvation -- however that would exclude anything we do, which includes believing, repenting, seeking the Lord, and even praying. Even those associating baptism with "works" do not believe that, however. They see baptism as distinct from faith, or believing. Jesus, however, said, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved" -- putting the two together (Mark 16:16).

Why do people make such a point of separating something called "works" from everything else the Bible teaches? What's the point of this?

Because they realize that God emphatically proclaims justification apart from works. With remarkable pungency the Spirit affirms, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom 3:28). "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified" (Gal 2:16). "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for

"the just shall live by faith" (Gal 3:11). "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3:4-5).

In each of these expressions "works" are associated with keeping the Law--measuring up in our own strength to the commandments of God. The reason no one can be justified, or made innocent, by this means is that it is impossible. Nothing that we do can undo the sin we have committed. It must be forgiven.

These verses do not teach that believers do nothing, but that their faith is what motivated God, not what they did. This is precisely the point made by James in the second chapter of his book. He affirms that genuine works are the evidence of real faith. Faith moves the real believer to do what God says. Where the response is not found, faith is glaringly absent.

Legitimate "works," or works recognized by God, are those that have been motivated by faith. Faith has sanctified them, or made them acceptable. The "works" God does NOT accept are those that are wrought independent of Him, or without faith. Such works are actually iniquity. as confirmed by Jesus reference to those who would claim in the last day they had done "many wonderful works in His name" (Matt 7:22-23).

Simply put, works are the evidence of salvation, and the activity into which faith brings us. Where works are thought to be the foundation or reason for our salvation, serious error has been espoused.

I find much of the old testament so far--boring. I do not mean to be irreverent to God's holy Word but I want to be truthful. Help please!

The writings of what we call "The New Testament" are based upon the writings of Moses and the Prophets. That is where God developed the terms and meanings that are so critical to an understanding of the Gospel (Lamb, sacrifice, altar, sanctify, wash, priest, intercessor, etc.).

When you read the Old Testament, you are reading something God inspired to be written for our learning. If it appears boring, it is because you are not looking deep enough into it. As you read you will learn things about humanity and about God. You see why men need a Savior, and why God has been aggressive to send one. You will see how men cannot save themselves even if God gives them a lot of information. You will also see how God chose to prepare men to receive the Savior.

Your job is to fill your heart and mind with Scripture. The Lord will then help you to see its relevance and power. Perhaps you should try NOT reading massive sections of Genesis thru Malachi right now--but keep exposing yourself to those writings. It is God's way of making you wise unto salvation. These are the Scriptures Paul was talking about in 2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Is it right to say that although Jesus did not destroy the law, He did change them? Like the one about eating unclean things/with unclean hands?

The Levitical laws concerning meats, clothing, etc., were ceremonial laws, as distinguished from moral laws. They were pictures of spiritual realities, and were not intended to define sin or introduced dietary practices that were to continue. Jesus "purged" or "cleansed" all meats, notwithstanding the opinions of dieticians. he said, "Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from

outside cannot defile him, because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, thus purifying all foods?" (Mark 7:18-19). Paul elaborated on the matter in foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Tim 4:3-5). He also added, "I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom 14:14)--and he was talking about "meat." God confirmed the same to Peter in a vision (Acts 10:14-28).

We all agree the Jesus died a physical death on the cross. Do you feel that He also suffered a spiritual death.

Death means separation -- physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of a person from God--and that is precisely what happened when Jesus died. Scripture refers to this as Jesus becoming a curse (Gal 3:13), and being made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21). In this way, sin was judged and put away by God (Heb 9:26). Yes, He did suffer spiritual death. Of course, He recovered from this death, praise the Lord, that we might be joined to Him. It was no mere oratory when Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me!" That was the penalty of our sin.

In the book of Job 4th chapter - who was talking?

Eliaphaz is talking. He is not quoting Job, but observing what Job had done--instructed many, strengthened the weak, upheld the falling, and strengthened feeble knees. In his dialog, however, he did not assess Job properly, thinking the righteous man had some secret sin that was not apparent. Like many today, he figured that if

hardship came upon someone, it was punishment for some sin he had committed. Eliaphaz was wrong, and so are they.

Does God predestine us to go to heaven or hell? Thus far I've concluded that He only has predestined us to have free will, otherwise Christianity would not make since.

God does NOT predestinate us to go to heaven or hell. Nor has He predestinated us to have free will -- that is the way we are created. Having a will is how we are created in God's image--with the ability to want and choose. If that will is not "free," it is not "will" at all. We would just be robots--and they have no will.

The Bible tells us what God has predestinated. It is that those in Christ will be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom 8:29). In other words, God has predetermined that those who receive Christ will end up being like Him. That is what 1 John 3:1-3 also says.

How can I get my mind back and focused on Jesus and His word, I am 50 years old, and facing many distractions in my mind.

First, this is not something you can accomplish by yourself -- it requires the help of the Lord. The good news is that He is willing and able to undergird your effort and fulfill your desire. It is, as Scripture affirms, "God who works in you, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure": (Phil 2:13).

The role of Scripture is indispensable in obtaining a spiritual focus. As you may recall, the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:18). He uses Scripture to neutralize competing influences--like distracting thoughts. Filling your mind with great affirmations of

Christ's person and accomplishments is a key ingredient. While the Word of God does inform us of our duties and obligations, that is not its primary role. We need to understand our Lord. That is the understanding that sheds light on what we are to do. I suggest passages like Romans 5, Philippians 2, and the book of Hebrews. Also, digest a lot of the Gospels--that exposes us to the nature of God as revealed in our blessed Lord's ministry. You will find many people Jesus helped had the same type of concerns you have. The Holy Spirit will work with the Word, bringing it to your remembrance, clarifying its meaning to you, and causing it to be powerful within you.

It is also good to ask the Lord to give you understanding. This is what David did, and he was very familiar with the Scriptures he had (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). Along with this, ask the Lord to fulfill Ephesians 1:17-20 to your heart. That is what was prayed for believers in past centuries, and it is still available for them.

If you feel yourself losing focus or being distracted, ask the Lord for help. It is really that simple. He will hear you, and give you the desires of your heart. Remember the time when a man asked Jesus for help for his son. Jesus told him if he could believe, all things were possible to him. the man replied, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). The Lord answered his petition, and He will answer yours.

You will not be able to avoid facing distractions -- that is a part of fighting the good fight of faith. However, they do not have to dominate us, but can be cast down, or dethroned with the spiritual weapons we have been given in Jesus (2 Cor 10:5-6).

I believe you are experiencing what is explained in Romans the seventh chapter. There are thoughts intruding into your mind that you obviously do not want. They are not invited, yet force their way into your thinking processes. This is precisely the experience

Paul explains in Romans 7:15-25. The things he did NOT desire to do had to do with thinking, not external, or outward sin. He was battling with thoughts he did not want--thoughts that tempted him to lose his focus. He first confessed this was really not him. He knew that was the case because the intrusions were against his will--he did not want them. Secondly, this became evidence to him that he was reconciled to God. The presence of conflict was the proof of spiritual life. That is the conclusion he reached in Romans 7:25-8:1.

Be of good cheer in your quest for a focus on Jesus. This is what God wants for you, and He is pleased with your desire. If you do not quench the desire, it will come to pass.

I have always believed, but I am new in really trying to read and understand God's word and will for me. I was recently sent the Gospel of St. John. I kept running across a statement that has me confused. It refers to the disciple that Jesus loved. I thought he loved all the disciples? John 21:20 is just an example, it says Peter turned around and saw the disciple that Jesus loved following them--the one who had leaned over to Jesus during supper and asked, "Lord, who among us will betray you?" Which disciple is this?

The disciple that Jesus loved was John the Apostle. The phrase "the disciple that Jesus loved" does not mean Jesus did not love the other disciples. Rather, it means He ESPECIALLY loved John. The reason Jesus loved John with a special love was because of John's sensitivity to Jesus. He is the one who, because of his deep love for the Lord, leaned on Jesus at the last supper (John 13:23). He was also the first to believe when he and Peter came to the empty tomb (John 20:8). He was also the first to recognize the risen Christ when He appeared to the disciples while they were

fishing (John 21:7). He was more sensitive to Jesus.

John was to Jesus what David was to the Lord in the Old testament times. David is described as a man "after God's own heart" (1 Sam 13:14). It is not that no other people were close to the heart of the Lord. David, however, was especially close to the heart of God. Again, it was because of his sensitivity. The Lord could more easily direct and use both David and John.

These days there is much talk about the "unconditional love" of God. This phrase is nowhere mentioned in Scripture, and has been a source of confusion to many people. I believe the phrase is attempting to say is that God "so loved the world" in spite of its unworthiness, providing an abundant salvation for all through Jesus Christ. That does not mean, however, that God loves unconditionally. In the case of providing salvation, Jesus Himself was the condition. The love was offered through Jesus Christ, Who is the chief condition, or qualifier.

Allow me to get more to the point. Jesus has spoken clearly about Himself and the Father loving us. He speaks of some conditions--conditions that can be met by any honest and believing person. Here are His words from the Gospel of John. "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him . . . "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:21 and 23).

The Lord does love all of His children, or disciples, but He does not love them all alike. He is especially close to those who seek Him more earnestly and consistently. These are individuals who refuse to forget His Word and have a strong affection for Him. Those who want a lot of what God offers in Christ will receive a lot -- those who do not will not.

By saying God specially loves some people, the Word means He pours more of Himself out upon them. Your heart, if it is honest, will confirm that this is the way it should be. It offers a strong incentive to us all to draw close to the Lord, and be sensitive toward Him.

I go to court in . . . this concerns child support/custody issue. I have tried to do the right thing by the biological father but has hurt my child, he doesn't do what he was told as far as visitation etc. I have prayed, but I am still confused and scared. The judge says in aug. she will grant him his rights to visitation. I know that God's will, will be done but I feel as a parent I have a duty to my child to keep her safe as possible. I would like scripture to help me get through this time. thanks!

There is no easy answer to this situation. Your approach to it is provided in Philippians 4:6-7 and 1 Peter 5:7. Here is what those verses say. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6-7). Essentially, this means as you tell the Lord what you really desire, He will calm your heart, giving you peace. That means He will help you not to be afraid. Too, He is fully able to change the mind of the judge and your former husband. The Bible tells us God can change even the king's mind to do whatever He wants to be done (Proverbs 21:1).

1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you." Casting your anxiety upon the Lord is pouring out your heart to Him--telling Him your concerns, what makes you fearful, and what you want to happen. Your faith will get hold of this truth,

that God really cares for you--He really does! The judge may not care about you or your child, but God does. Your former husband may not care for you or your child, but God does. What is more, He can do something about the circumstance. Ask God to help you believe that. He will answer your prayer.

One further word. There are some circumstances for which we cannot plan like we would like. We do not know what questions may be asked of us, or what we will be required to do in such times. When Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them they would face such times. They would stand before rulers and people of authority, and it would be intimidating. Here is what He told them to in those times. "Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13:11). Ask the Lord to fulfill that very promise to you.

When 1 Cor 15 states that the perishable will be raised imperishable and the corruptible incorruptible, is it that these very bodies are those which are to be glorified? hence....changed? Or, is it that we are to have totally different resurrection bodies?

The answer to both questions is "YES." Our bodies will be "changed," and the new body will be "totally different." Both truths are revealed to us. They are not intended to cause confusion, but to show us the greatness and glory of the resurrection.

In explaining the resurrection, the Spirit points out that it is OUR own body that will be changed: i.e., "The body is sown in corruption, IT is raised in incorruption. IT is sown in dishonor, IT is raised in glory. IT is sown in weakness, IT is raised in power. IT

is sown a natural body, IT is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor 15:42-43).

In another place, the fact that the resurrection body is totally different is accentuated. "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor 5:1-6).

These texts are not intended to be a technical explanation of the resurrection--one that conforms to the world's way of viewing things. In saying that our bodies will be changed, the Spirit is confirming the personal nature of the resurrection body. Our bodies are a part of our persons. Remember, we are composed of "spirit, soul, and body" (1 Thess 5:23). All three of them are involved in our salvation--the body being the last. It is not that there is an impersonal body involved in the resurrection that is not tied to our spirit and soul. Rather, it is one which is really a part of us. It will not be like living in an impersonal house, but having our whole person eternal, with nothing about us being temporal.

The resurrection body is "totally different" in the sense of being of a different order, or kind. The picture is much like that of a butterfly emerging from a cocoon, or a frog emerging from a tadpole. Both of these examples are pictures of the new life that God has placed in nature. They really defy human explanation. The butterfly came out of a cocoon in which a larva was wrapped. There is no apparent similarity between the two, yet they are, in a sense, the same life--only in another form.

The truth of the resurrection is something our faith is to grasp. Faith is higher than intellectual understanding, and brings confidence and assurance. It cannot be explained satisfactorily on an earthly level--but faith comprehends the resurrection, embraces it, and looks forward to it.

Is it wrong for me to participate in these when there are such differences in our views of Scripture? By participating in these, do I compromise my stand on Scripture? How do you feel about a denominational preacher preaching in "your" pulpit?

The gauge of a person's acceptance is not the accuracy of everything he believes or teaches. Were that to be the case, there are few, if any, that could measure up--including mighty Apollos (Acts 18:25). The objective of the Divine commandment, we are apprised is "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5). It is possible to have these and still be in the state of growth--with even only a little progress having been made (as with novices).

All of these indispensable traits have to do with character, and the real nature of the person: (1) A pure heart, (2) A good conscience, and (3) Sincere (or unpretentious) faith. The only way these things can be detected in others, is for the individual to have them himself.

I am sure you already know that it is completely unjustified to assume that everyone associated with a denomination lacks these qualities. It is also unwarranted to imagine everyone in what we call a New Testament church possesses them. The church at Ephesus was precise in its teaching, and faithfully sought and detected false teachers. All of this was commendable, yet Jesus had something against them--something that threatened their acceptance and existence. They had abandoned their "first love" (Rev 2:4). That "first love" can be described as having a "pure heart," "good conscience," and "sincere faith."

After nearly 50 years of preaching the Gospel, I can tell you that the closest affiliations I have enjoyed have been with people from

other groups. These people did not sanction all of the teachings of their particular sect, and had risen higher than their associates. They were like Nicodemus was to the Pharisees--from one point, he was one of them. Yet from another point of view, he was not (John 7:50-51).

I have followed this principle in life without disappointment. As I have lived honestly before the Lord, I did not shun associations with anyone who shared that emphasis in life. I have found that a fervent and earnest quest for the Lord has excluded me from many within the very movement with which I am identified. I have also found it brought me into fellowship with others totally unfamiliar with it.

There are two things that must be kept in tact by any associations you have--and you are at liberty to operate wherever you can keep a good conscience in these matters. (1) The association must not erode your faith, mitigate your love, or defile your conscience. (2) Your association must not require you to subdue expressing your faith.

It is not wrong to have any person minister from "your pulpit" who profits the people, clarifies the things of God, makes heaven more real, and provokes people to love and good works. It is always wrong to have anyone in "your pulpit" who obscures the things of God, causes people to forget their salvation, or settle down in this world--even if it is a brotherhood dignitary. Edification is never wrong, and a lack of it is never right. It is really just that simple.

You never compromise your stand on Scripture by coming into a realm where that stand is questioned. You know this because Jesus went regularly to the synagogue (Lk 4:16). The early Christians continued meeting in the temple (Acts 2:46). Paul sought out synagogues in which to teach (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1, etc.). However, at the point the people flatly rejected the message of the

Gospel, or asked that it no longer be spoken, the association was abruptly terminated (Acts 13:46).

There are no set rules on this matter. You must be directed by each circumstance. Do not deprive yourself of rich fellowship from those who have not embraced the Restoration Movement, yet have embraced Christ. Nor are you to countenance those who are identified with the movement, yet are shallow in their view and questionable in their commitment. God only recognizes one association as valid and commentary--only one. He calls us into that association--"the fellowship of His Son" (1 Cor 1:9). That is the only association we are to honor. Wherever it is found, treasure it.

I can say of you what Paul said of the Corinthians. "I am glad I can have complete confidence in you" (1 Cor 7:16). Your deep desire to please the Lord is what will protect you.

What is the difference between the doctrines of trinity and oneness? I have talked with both and the oneness person says the trinity people believe in three Gods and the trinity person say the oneness people are legalistic. This seems to be separating the 2 largest groups of Spirit filled churches and I was wondering why?

First of all, understand that the terms "trinity" and "oneness" are strictly human terms. They have been developed by men to attempt to explain God--which task is not possible. The Scriptures teach there is "one God" -- but nowhere affirm there is "one Person." All of Scripture, particularly the sayings of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles, speak of three distinct Divine Persons. The Father sent the Son (1 John 4:14). The Son listened to and obeyed the Father (John 15:15). The Son reconciled us to God (2 Cor 5:18-20). The Son sent the Spirit (John 15:26). The Spirit strengthens us so Christ can dwell in our heart by faith (Eph 3:16-17). We are

blessed by all three--the Father, Son, and Spirit (Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 13:14).

At Christ's baptism, all three were revealed (Matt 3:16-17). Jesus prayed to God (Matt 26:42). The Spirit led Jesus (Matt 4:1). The Father heard the Son (Heb 5:7). The Son sits at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33) . . . etc. These are affirmed by Scripture. This is HOW the Lord wants us to know Him, and how He has revealed Himself. These things simply do not fit into the words "trinity" and "oneness." They are to be embraced as they have been stated.

The differences in the doctrines is that "oneness" group believes God is One Person (which Scriptures do not say). Thus, father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are one Person acting in three different ways (like John he carpenter, auto mechanic, and plumber). In such a case, the Father could not sustain the Son, nor could the Son be led by the Spirit. The "Trinity" group believes there are three Divine Persons, with three different functions. In this, they are correct. However, there is a great temptation for men to have a mere theological view of this matter, without having the life of God--and that is never right.

Embrace the view that allows you to pray to the Father, through the Son, and in the Spirit.

I believe that the salvation of the Christian cannot be canceled. But below scriptures (Heb 6:4-6) makes me confused. It seems that the Christian's salvation can be canceled. Is it right?

Whenever a Scripture conflicts with or contradicts what we believe, the Scriptures are always to be embraced. God cannot lie or misrepresent the case, and His Word is never wrong.

The text you mentioned (Heb 6:4-6) is true, and is stated precisely. It represents how we are to think, and no other form of thinking is acceptable. It DOES mean that someone who has "once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come" can "fall away" to such an extent they cannot repent. That, of course, is what the text says-- and God says what is true.

This does not mean that salvation has been "canceled," but that the individual has drifted away from it. Remember, we are "saved by grace THROUGH FAITH" (Eph 2:8). Our salvation is only as secure as our faith. As long as we are believing and trusting, we are safe. But we must not take for granted that believing God is automatic, or that it can never be abandoned. Jesus spoke of some who only "believed for a while" (Matt 13:21). Paul spoke of some who "denied the faith" (1 Tim 5:8), "strayed from the faith" (1 Tim 6:10), and even made "shipwreck of the faith" (1 Tim 1:19).

Faith is something that must be "KEPT" (2 Tim 4:7). Keeping the faith involves "fighting the good fight of faith," and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12).

While we are saved now, we are not yet totally saved. The bulk of our salvation is yet to come (1 Pet 1:5). Our bodies, for example, are not yet saved--but they will be (Rom 8:23; Phil 3:20-21). Paul said he had not yet apprehended that for which he was apprehended, and neither have we (Phil 3:12-13). As long as we are in that state, we must battle to keep our faith, resisting the devil, and pressing toward the prize held before us.

What we now possess in Christ is referred to as "the firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23). It is also called "the earnest (or down payment) of the Spirit" (Eph 1:13-14). That simply means we do

not have everything yet, and must not adopt a theological view that says we have.

This does not mean we are in and out of salvation every day. It does mean God will "keep us from falling" as we keep on believing (Jude 24).

Our situation is much like that of Israel. They were delivered from bondage in Egypt so they could be brought into Canaan, the promised land. Every single one of them came out of Egypt, but not all of them entered into Canaan. Some fell along the way because of their unbelief. That is the way it is with those in Christ Jesus. When they begin, every single one of them is delivered from bondage to sin. However, only those who keep on believing will enter into heaven. That is the precise point made in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12.

Is it wrong for me to participate in these when there are such differences in our views of Scripture? By participating in these, do I compromise my stand on Scripture? How do you feel about a denominational preacher preaching in "your" pulpit?

The gauge of a person's acceptance is not the accuracy of everything he believes or teaches. Were that to be the case, there are few, if any, that could measure up--including mighty Apollos (Acts 18:25). The objective of the Divine commandment, we are apprised is "love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith" (1 Tim 1:5). It is possible to have these and still be in the state of growth--with even only a little progress having been made (as with novices).

All of these indispensable traits have to do with character, and the real nature of the person: (1) A pure heart, (2) A good conscience,

and (3) Sincere (or unpretentious) faith. The only way these things can be detected in others, is for the individual to have them himself.

I am sure you already know that it is completely unjustified to assume that everyone associated with a denomination lacks these qualities. It is also unwarranted to imagine everyone in what we call a New Testament church possesses them. The church at Ephesus was precise in its teaching, and faithfully sought and detected false teachers. All of this was commendable, yet Jesus had something against them--something that threatened their acceptance and existence. They had abandoned their "first love" (Rev 2:4). That "first love" can be described as having a "pure heart," "good conscience," and "sincere faith."

After nearly 50 years of preaching the Gospel, I can tell you that the closest affiliations I have enjoyed have been with people from other groups. These people did not sanction all of the teachings of their particular sect, and had risen higher than their associates. They were like Nicodemus was to the Pharisees--from one point, he was one of them. Yet from another point of view, he was not (John 7:50-51).

I have followed this principle in life without disappointment. As I have lived honestly before the Lord, I did not shun associations with anyone who shared than emphasis in life. I have found that a fervent and earnest quest for the Lord has excluded me from many within the very movement with which I am identified. I have also found it brought me into fellowship with others totally unfamiliar with it.

There are two things that must be kept in tact by any associations you have--and you are at liberty to operate wherever you can keep a good conscience in these matters. (1) The association must not erode your faith, mitigate your love, or defile your conscience. (2)

Your association must not require you to subdue expressing your faith.

It is not wrong to have any person minister from "your pulpit" who profits the people, clarifies the things of God, makes heaven more real, and provokes people to love and good works. It is always wrong to have anyone in "your pulpit" who obscures the things of God, causes people to forget their salvation, or settle down in this world--even if it is a brotherhood dignitary. Edification is never wrong, and a lack of it is never right. It is really just that simple.

You never compromise your stand on Scripture by coming into a realm where that stand is questioned. You know this because Jesus went regularly to the synagogue (Lk 4:16). The early Christians continued meeting in the temple (Acts 2:46). Paul sought out synagogues in which to teach (Acts 13;14; 14:1; 17:1, etc.). However, at the point the people flatly rejected the message of the Gospel, or asked that it no longer be spoken, the association was abruptly terminated (Acts 13:46).

There are no set rules on this matter. You must be directed by each circumstance. Do not deprive yourself of rich fellowship from those who have not embraced the Restoration Movement, yet have embraced Christ. Nor are you to countenance those who are identified with the movement, yet are shallow in their view and questionable in their commitment. God only recognizes one association as valid and commentary--only one. He calls us into that association--"the fellowship of His Son" (1 Cor 1:9). That is the only association we are to honor. Wherever it is found, treasure it.

I can say of you what Paul said of the Corinthians. "I am glad I can have complete confidence in you" (1 Cor 7:16). Your deep desire to please the Lord is what will protect you.

When you mentioned the old covenant in connection with wine skins. Does that really go together? Was Jesus saying it was not the THING to do [fasting] when the bride groom was there? It was not the THING to do, to put new wine in old skins. The reason I bring it up is in Luke.5: 39 Jesus says the new aren't desired for--, the old are better. I think the New Covenant is better.

The interrogation concerning fasting was the occasion that prompted our Lord's remark -- but the remark is not confined to the subject of fasting. As the Pharisees practiced fasting, it was a mere routine. It did not allow for the presence of the Lord, or the invigorating effects of spiritual life. That, of course, was a depiction of the entire structure of the Law "was symbolic for the present time," and was "concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation" (Heb 10:9-10).

Christ's entire earthly ministry was an introduction to glory of the New Covenant age. He was injecting into society life with which it was not accustomed, and which sharply conflicted with their views. That contrast is seen in the conduct of the disciples, which differed radically from that practiced and taught by the Pharisees. That is what gave rise to their question.

Our Lord's words concerning old wine being "better" were not words of commendation, but of a common perception. They stated a misconception of the case, and not an accurate one. This was a view limited to the "now," and does not take the future into consideration. Only the individual imbibing the "old" thought this--a practice not recommended or sanctioned in Scripture. In fact, "old" wine would eventually distort the both the mind and conduct of those consuming it. "New wine" was offered to the Lord, not

"old wine" (Neh 10:39; 13:5,12). The blessing of the Lord is pictured by vats overflowing with "new wine" (Prov 3:10). Divine benefits are related to "new wine" being found in the cluster of grapes (Isa 65:8). "Old wine" is really not better. Even on the day of Pentecost, the Apostles were thought to be full of "new wine," not "old wine" (Acts 2:13). The "old" must eventually give way to the "new" because it is obviously temporary. In other words, what Jesus was bringing would result in significant change--and that is what His critics objected to. By saying "the old is better," they were saying "Why should we change?" That is the mind set Jesus is refuting.

The New Covenant, together with the benefits related to it, are, indeed, "better" -- but that is not what Jesus is saying here. He is saying it is not perceived as "better." It is similar to what took place when the Temple was rebuilt. Some of the older Jews observed it did not measure up to the old temple, and thus were disappointed (Ezra 3:12; Hag 2:3). They thought the old was better. That is how it was with those asking Jesus the question.

Jesus was stating a principle that addressed the immediate situation, but was not confined to it. He was saying you cannot confine life, or put it into a container. It expands the environment into which it is placed, and therefore the environment must be made new. That is why the new birth is essential--there must be a new container for the new life. That is why we are strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man--that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17).

Since the old man can not be changed, what is the process of sanctification? Is that the putting off the old man daily and putting on the new man??

Sanctification DOES involve putting off the old man and putting on the new. It also includes "learning." As it is written, "that each of you should know [learn] how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor" (1 Thess 4:4). From a higher view, this "change" is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, who moves us from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). On a practical basis, this involves unplugging from the cursed order, and plugging into the eternal one. This is required because we are really two people in one frail frame. Paul alluded to this condition in Romans 7:15-25 and Galatians 5:17.

Our role in sanctification is twofold. To "deny" ungodliness and worldly lusts, and "live" soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world. The grace of God instructs us in this procedure. Sanctification, then, has two sides. Refusing what God has cursed, and embracing what God has blessed--putting off the old and putting on the new.

God has rejected the entire Adamic order. He has done so because it cannot be changed or corrected. A person must be born again, as you know. Our Lord Jesus came from an earthly lineage. Luke traces it all the way back to Adam (Lk 3:23-38). Matthew takes it back to Abraham (Matt 1:1-16). But there is no earthly lineage after Jesus. From an earthly perspective, He died without children. But from a heavenly view, He is an "everlasting Father" (Isa 9:6). His offspring are spiritual. Sanctification is the process through which we are brought into total harmony with Christ Jesus and the spiritual blessings to which He has raised us (Eph 1:3; 2:6).

Is it the soul that goes thru the process of sanctification? or the whole man?

The whole man is involved in sanctification. "Now may the God of

peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess 5:23). This text identifies our parts in order of their priority. The "spirit" is our essential person. That is where we are "born again," and receive a new heart. There is where the "new creation" occurs (2 Cor 5:17). The "soul" is the rational and emotional part of our persons. It is not yet saved, but must be governed by our spirits. The soul is capable of having "imagination" and "thoughts" that must be "cast down" (2 Cor 10:5-6). There is where temptation occurs. Often believers are cast down because of their circumstances, and must admonish their soul to hope in God (Psa 42:5-6,11; 43:5). Sanctification involves bringing our souls into accord with the revealed purpose of God--not allowing the lure of this world to distract us. Our bodies are obviously not yet saved--but they will be. Believers are looking forward to the Lord changing their bodies, making their sanctification complete (Phil 3:20-21). Until that time, we must master our bodies, bringing them into subjection to the will of God (1 Cor 9:27). That is also a part of sanctification.

Since we can only cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this process, is it an act of faith and surrender to the will of God and then "act" as if we are whole???

I know what you are saying, but it must be stated more strongly. We are doing more than simply cooperating with the Spirit. We have been brought into the process to a much greater extent than commonly perceived. We are really wrestling against spiritual powers (Eph 6:12). We are really fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). All of our effort is involved in placing our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-3). The Holy Spirit underwrites our effort, enabling us to do what is otherwise impossible. Without

Him, it simply could not be done. Without our involvement, it will not be done.

When Israel was delivered from Egypt, it was unquestionably the Lord who brought them out with a mighty hand. But they were involved in a remarkable amount of activity. They had to gather their goods, kill the passover lamb, sprinkle blood as directed, eat the lamb, keep their clothes on, and simultaneously come out of Egypt at the midnight hour. All of that could not have been done without the Lord. That was a picture of sanctification.

Living the new life is not something that is acted out--although I realize that is not what you meant. We have really been made new--yet a part of us remains old. We have really received salvation--but not the whole of it. Faith proceeds upon the basis of what has been done already, looking forward to the completion of the process. The Spirit addresses this matter in the sixth chapter of Romans. "Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom 6:11-14).

There you have sanctification. Something has really happened to us, and we are proceeding to live in view of it. As our faith takes hold of what the Lord has already done, He will ensure that we arrive safely at the goal. In the meantime, we do not pretend. We acknowledge there is "another law" within us that wars against the law of our mind (Rom 7:23). But that is not the only law we have. With our minds, we ourselves are serving the Law of God (Rom 7:25). We admit we have failings, but do not want them, nor do we

welcome them. They are evidence the sanctification process is not yet complete--but it will be, praise the Lord!

How is it that the Church of The Nazarene Believes that women can be ordained as a pastor of a church? What is the scriptural position they use?

There is no Scriptural basis for this position. There were several prophetesses mentioned in Scripture (Miriam-Ex 15:20, Deborah-Judges 4:4, Huldah-2 Kgs 22:14, Noadiah-Neh 6:14, Isaiah's wife-Isa 8:3, Anna-Lk 2:36, and Philips four daughters-Acts 21:9). Deborah was a Judge of God's people. In fact she was the only woman Judge they had. She was, however, a most unusual woman, and gifted of God. Miriam was noted for leading the woman (Ex 15:20). Huldah was consulted by several men (2 Kgs 22:14).

In each of these cases there was a departure from the normal practice of men leaders. The only example we have of a prominent woman leader in the church is found a reference to the church at Thyatira, where a false prophetess taught Christ's servants to commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols.

There you have everything on the matter--at least most of it. It is apparent that the only thing that would justify a woman pastor is the absence of qualified men, or the presence of a most unusual woman with keen spiritual insight.

Would you consider it a divisive issue in regard to the church ordaining women pastors. Is it a Nonessential in regards to the historic Christian church?

Those insisting on following this practice over the objection of

other brethren would be forcing something that cannot be justified by Scripture on the people of God. That is something divisive, and would not be right.

Those who teach in the body of Christ are not determined by theological or ecclesiastical positions, but by God Himself. He has placed pastors in the church (Eph 4:11), and we have no record of any pastor that was a woman. Notwithstanding those observations, if God raises up a Deborah or Huldah among us, we all do well to give heed to her. If she does not contribute to our faith, however, or offer unusual spiritual insights to us, she probably is not acting within the will of God.

I would not venture to pass any hard and fast rules on this matter. The fruit of the division to ordain a woman to be a pastor will confirm whether it was from God or not.

Does the Bible regulate worship and confine true worship to specific acts, or is all that the Christian does in life worship?

Because worship is a matter of the heart, it is not, nor can it be, regulated. Worship is not a response to a command, or to a Divine directive, but to an awareness of the person of God. It is the result of seeing Him as He is.

Romans 12:1-2 deals with the presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, affirming this to be our "reasonable service" (KJV). Other versions correctly translate this phrase "your spiritual worship" (RSV), "spiritual service of worship" (NASB), and "spiritual act of worship" (NIV). Other places this form of the word "latreuo" is used are John 16:2, Romans 9:4; Hebrews 9:1,6.

To my knowledge, there is not a syllable of Apostolic doctrine

concerning procedures or acts of worship. In fact, no church was ever told to worship God, or given instructions on how to do so. Their worship is assumed. It is part of new life in Christ Jesus. As it is written, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3). The word used here is "latreuo," which is used 22 times in the New Testament. To my knowledge, it is never used of a commanded act or procedure.

Jesus affirmed the real issue is worshippers, not worship. He said God was seeking worshippers, not worship. He said the hour was coming when such people would (not ought to) worship the Father "in Spirit and in truth," or in reality and their whole heart. According to Jesus, this is the kind of worship God is seeking (John 4:23-24). None other is acceptable.

If we confine our thoughts about worship to what the Lord has said concerning it, we will find there is no confusion in His words.

If it is true that "All who are confined to a state of nature cannot comprehend a message that reveals spiritual things in spiritual words!" then why preach the message to the natural man?

You must not leave God, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit out of the scenario. Jesus said the Father "draws" people to the Son (John 6:44). He also affirmed He alone can show people who the Father is (Matt 11:27). The Holy Spirit convicts men of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:7-11). All of these things are accomplished through means--particularly the preaching of the Gospel. I can tell you if God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit did nothing when we preached the Gospel, nothing would happen. It is Their influence that brings the productivity. We sow, and we water, but God gives

the increase. All of this is shown in the remarkable reference to Lydia's conversion. "The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul" (Acts 16;14).

Those who preach the Gospel are not doing something that involves only them and those who hear. The Lord is also active in the process. The impotence of the natural man, and the hostility of the carnal mind requires this circumstance. God be praised we have not been left to ourselves.

God has spoken succinctly on this matter, affirming the "natural man CANNOT receive the things of the Spirit of God," and that such things are "foolishness" to him. There is nothing in the statement to question. It is to be believed.

You cannot have salvation without the appointed means of obtaining it--and that is preaching. God has appointed that men be saved through "the foolishness of preaching." That process, as I am sure you know, does not exclude God any more than it excludes human responsibility. It takes both God and man to be saved. I am saying without God, salvation simply is not possible.

When Jesus confronted the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, He asked him, "Do you want to be made well?" The man understood what Jesus said, and acknowledged he did desire wholeness. He also admitted he was powerless to do it himself. Jesus then told him to pick up his bed and walk. There is no way that anything in that man could do what Jesus said. But he believed what Jesus said, picked up his bed, and walked. It was Jesus that made the difference--not nature.

That is a perfect parallel to what occurs in salvation. Jesus seeks us out, appealing to our will and our faith. In all of this, we ourselves are involved--but we are not the only ones involved. The Lord is also in the process. We are NOT left to nature alone. If we had no

access to Divine resources, we would remain in unbelief, just as surely as the impotent man would have remained prostrate at the pool of Bethesda had Jesus not worked.

The difficulty comes when we are tempted to compare theologies-- Calvinism VS Armenianism, or any of the other countless comparisons. The truth of the matter is that all human attempts to explain Divine utterances are in the same class. The Word of God is simply to be believed. It is then that the Lord will help us make more sense of it--at least to the extent we are capable and He is willing to do so.

I do not think for one moment you believe a person can be saved without Divine activity. If God, Jesus, and Spirit, died or became inactive, there would be no hope of salvation. That is simply another way of saying if we were confined to nature, we could not be saved. That is what I am saying.

I very much appreciate your spirit, and obvious desire to be pleasing to the Lord in your persuasion. God honors that, and so do I. Remember, Jesus said of those exposed to His preaching, "He who is of God hears God's words" (John 8:47). Those who are "of God" did not arrive at that status without God--i.e., they were not confined to a state of nature. It is axiomatic that any valid response to God or achievement pleasing to God requires God, Christ, and the Spirit. That is one of the reasons early Christians were referred to as "those who had believed through grace" (Acts 18:27). Whether or not this blends with any developed theology is entirely beside the point. Paul told the Philippians it was "given" to them to believe (Phil 1:29). Peter said we have "obtained like precious faith" (2 Pet 1:1). That by no means excludes our effort or our preaching.

In Deut. 7:3, the Lord clearly declares that no one from Israel should take a wife from the people they conquer. No intermarriage. But in Deut 21:10 and following, there is an option for taking a wife, if she's attractive, from the conquered. Haley's "Alleged Bible Discrep." book doesn't address this point. I'd like to know your thoughts.

The Jewish economy, or the Old Covenant, was unlike the New Covenant. The people were born into the covenant, not reborn as those in Christ are. For this reason, God forbade them to intermingle with the heathen. Not only would they be tempted to learn the idolatrous and immortal ways of the heathen, they would also contaminate their blood line.

The passage in Deuteronomy 21:10 did provide for the men to take a wife, if they judged her to be unusual. If they chose to do this, however, the woman was required to shave her head, pare her nails, and be severed completely from her people. That amounted to a renunciation of her former ways and heathen customs.

As you know, one such woman, although not taken in war, was Ruth. She was of the Moabites, who had been summarily cursed by God. Yet, she became the grandmother of David, and proved to be a woman of great faith. She, together with the women described in Deuteronomy were exceptions to the general rule. They were, however, required to cut all ties to their heathen ways, and heartily embrace the God of the Jews and His Law. I take it that this was a concession God made to the weakness of the Jewish men.

In Christ, we are not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Even widows are told if they marry again to only do so "in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:39).

I need your advice on how I can keep unwanted thoughts away from my mind.....so I can do God's work.

This is best done indirectly. By that, I mean you cannot simply push these thoughts out of your mind. They are like a foreign army, invading your mind. The Bible refers to these unwanted thoughts as "fiery darts," or flaming arrows, telling us they come from the devil. It also tells us that FAITH is the shield God has given us to quench them, or nullify their effectiveness. As we put the things of God into our mind, the Holy Spirit goes to work within us, removing the power of these unwanted thoughts. This is a battle, and there is nothing easy about it, as you already know.

The battle you are having is described in Romans 7:15-25--the invasion of unwanted thoughts. First, in faith recognize this is really not you. Second, refuse to allow them to have their way--resist their suggestions. God will make your desire effective. Third, comfort yourself by realizing you have real life from God--that is why Satan is stirring up these distracting thoughts. You have a deep desire he does not want you to have. That is why he is doing all he can to take it away from you.

Please just help me by advising me on what verses I should claim to get lustful thoughts out of my mind....How do I overcome them?

You will never be able to get lustful thoughts out of your mind. You WILL be able to stop them from bearing fruit. Remember, these thoughts are temptations. As such, they are under God's control. He will not allow you to be tempted above your ability (1 Cor 10:13). It is something like a bird landing on your head. You may not be able to stop it from landing there, but you can stop it from building a nest there.

The way you overcome such thoughts is by refusing to do what they suggest. It is what the Bible calls saying "No" to ungodliness

and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age (Tit 2:12). That very passage informs us that grace teaches us how to do this (Tit 2:11-12). The real victory is not found in NOT having the thoughts at all, but in not being turned away from the Lord by them. There will also come a time, by the grace of God, when the thoughts will not come so frequently.

Also, admit with Paul that unwanted thoughts are really not yours. They are like enemies that have invaded your mind. This is precisely what Paul meant when he said, "Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Rom 7:20).

Being in Christ does not seem to make putting off the flesh that much easier!

Think of it from a larger point of view--remembering that everything you have said is the truth. Being in Christ makes putting off the flesh "POSSIBLE!" of course, it is a fight, but certainly not a hopeless one. Let's look at it from another point of view.

Remember who you are opposing. The devil has successfully deceived 'the whole world' (Rev 12:9; 1 John 5:19). he was even able to "tempt" Jesus (Matt 4:1). Additionally, you are battling against "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph 6:12). They have been responsible for enslaving nations, keeping the world in moral and spiritual darkness until Jesus came.

All of these adversaries work through your flesh--that is all they

have to work with. The very fact that you have overcome them-- regardless of how much effort it took--reveals how STRONG you are, not how weak you are. It is all in how you look at it. You may think you are just crawling along, depleted of all of your strength. But look at it the right way. Think of yourself like the woman with an issue of blood, who pushed through a great crowd to touch the hem of Jesus' garment (Matt 9:20-22). That a weak, diseased woman could get through the crowd to touch Jesus' garment revealed strength--strength given to her by God.

Remember, Christ's strength is made perfect in your weakness (2 Cor 12:9). Knowing this, Paul confessed (and so must you) "when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:10). What a marvel it is

What you feel "squirming, wriggling, kicking, wrestling with the shackles" is not merely the new man under the restraint of the flesh, it is also the flesh under the restraint of the Spirit. That is the meaning of Galatians 5:17. "For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want." It will not be long, and we will be freed from the warfare. What a blessed consideration!

Your last paragraph, from the attached devotional appears to indicate that one can lose one's salvation, if they sin...please clarify this..thanks.

The phrase "lose one's salvation" is not found in Scripture. It is a term developed by men to explain a theological position. One can make shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim 1:19), become a castaway (1 Cor 9:27), deny the faith (1 Tim 5:8). It is possible for someone who has escaped the pollutions of the world to fall into a state that is worse than it was before being in Christ (2 Pet 2:20). There are

some people who were made partakers of the Holy Spirit to come to a condition where they cannot be renewed to repentance (Heb 6:4-6).

All of this is true because we hold salvation by faith. As long as we have faith, it is not possible to be lost. But do not take for granted that faith can be kept without effort. We are to fight the good fight of faith, and thus lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). Too, remember, we do not have all of our salvation yet. scripture reminds us it is "ready to be revealed" in its fulness (1 Pet 1:5). What we have now is the "firstfruits of the Spirit" (Rom 8:23), and not the fulness. One thing that makes this evident is our present bodies. They have not yet been saved, but will be in the resurrection. in fact, our adoption is not complete until this happens. That is what is meant by the expression, "Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom 8:23).

God has given us several examples to help avoid thinking once we are in His favor we are locked into it, so to speak. God put Adam and Eve in the Garden, but they were expelled. God took all of the children of Israel out of Egypt, but did not bring them all into the promised land. The Spirit makes a precise parallel between that situation and our salvation in 1 Corinthians 10:1-7).

To be clear, no person who IS believing is in danger of being cut off from God. Such are kept by the power of God--but that keeping is "through faith" (1 Pet 1:5). God is "able to keep us from falling," praise the Lord (Jude 24)--but only if we maintain our faith. Further, a believer is consistently represented in Scripture as someone who IS believing, not someone who has made a profession of faith sometime in the past.

I've been feeling afraid of death and sort of spiritually insecure. Why do you think this happens to us. Does it happen to all Christians?

This is a way Satan tempts us. Scripture refers to his temptations as "fiery darts," or "flaming arrows" (Eph 6:16). Part of our salvation is deliverance from "the fear of death" (Heb 2:15). This does not mean we will never have to grapple with such fears, but they will not overcome us. We can triumph over them by believing in Jesus and receiving what He has done for us. God Himself will, then, cause the fear to leave.

The same is true of feeling insecure. You, together with all believers, are being "kept by the power of God through faith" (1 Pet 1:5). God is "able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24). Feelings of insecurity come when we look at what we have done or are doing, and see it is not the best. Such feelings will be overthrown when we consider what Jesus has done in our behalf, and how pleased God is with it. A sense of safety will then be given to us by God.

You have been tempted by the devil, good brother. It has not made you worse, and has not placed you in danger. It has only confirmed the devil knows you are being protected by Jesus, and is doing his best to divert your attention from the Lord.

What about the Sabbath day? Is it still binding on us. Am I sinning in attending church Saturday evening? I have to work on Sunday.

The Ten Commandments are a reflection of the image of God. They are good, and holy, and just, as Romans 7 declares (verses 12-14). But they are NOT the basis for determining whether a person is righteous or not. That is determined by personal faith in

Jesus Christ (Rom 4:13; Phil 3:9). And remember, being righteous or holy before the Lord is everything. If we are not righteous, there is no hope of being forever with the Lord. The Gospel announces that God's own righteousness is available to man through faith and in Christ Jesus (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-22).

As for the Sabbath day, Israel, who received the commandment, never really entered into God's rest, or sabbath—even though they kept the Sabbath day. That is precisely the point of Hebrews 4:1-11. God did not merely intend for men to set aside a day to rest from their labors. His intention was for them to "enter" into His rest. By that the Spirit means God's desire is for men to enter into His joy and satisfaction in what He has achieved. His accomplishments reach their apex in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That is where God Himself finds the greatest satisfaction (Isa 53:11-12). It is, in the truest sense of the word, where He "rests."

There is a greater rest that was typified by the Law's Sabbath day, but never fulfilled by it. That is the rest of faith, and is discussed at length in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. A parallel is made between the fourth commandment Sabbath and the rest of faith. The Sabbath day was bound upon Israel because their hearts were hard. They would have forgotten God altogether if He did not demand they remember Him on that day, dedicating it exclusively to Him. In Christ, however, our nature is changed, so that we actually know and delight in knowing the Lord. Now every day becomes a Sabbath so far as sanctifying the Lord in our memory.

This does not mean keeping the Sabbath is wrong. We are not better for keeping it, either. You have not sinned in attending church Saturday evening. That, of course, is not to be equated with keeping the Sabbath day holy.

It is never right to demand that everyone keep the Sabbath day—

even though no individual is condemned for choosing to do so. Colossians 2:16 forbids us to judge one another on this matter. The recollection of God as the Creator of the universe is wonderful--but it is certainly not the highest or most glorifying view of our God. Intimate fellowship with Him by faith is more wonderful. That is why Scripture affirms, "We which believe do enter into rest" (Heb 4:3). The word used in that text is "sabbaton," or sabbath. It is a higher and more extensive rest which overshadows, but does not obliterate, the former Sabbath. The Sabbath day commandment has not been obviated by a different commandment, but by a greater rest. It is something like the light of the sun removing the light of the moon. That rest is nothing less than satisfaction with the atoning death of Christ. When we enter into that rest, we cease depending on our own accomplishments, resting, as it were, from them.

When comparing the New and Old covenants, our approach must be correct. The New Covenant is a different kind of covenant, not at all like the Old Covenant. God said it this way, "I will make a new covenant. . . It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt" (Heb 8:8-9, NIV). The latter part of that chapter confirms this is the covenant Jesus is presently mediating. It is not a covenant of DOING, like the Old Covenant was. In fact, the Spirit makes this parallel in commenting on the nature of the New Covenant. "Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: The man who does these things will live by them. But the righteousness that is by faith says: Do not say in your heart, Who will ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down) or Who will descend into the deep? (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are

justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved" (Rom 10:5-10).

This is a foundational teaching. The Old Covenant put the entire responsibility in the hands of man. Believing or faith are not mentioned a single time in all of the Law—including all of the commandments, all of the directions, and all of the Levitical law. It was a system of doing. In the New Covenant, God does the foundational work, then calls upon us to believe it. He then accepts us upon the basis of our faith, and works with us to fulfill His will (Phil 2:12-13). The entire New Covenant is summarized in a few words. Jeremiah foretold it in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Spirit later gave it again in Hebrews 8:8-13. It is again summarized in Hebrews 10:16-17. In all of these references what the Lord does is the total emphasis. There are no Ifs, and there are no commands. If you will read those texts, you will find the following affirmations. (1) God will put His laws into the mind. (2) He will write his laws on the heart. (3) He will be God to the people. (4) The people will be His people. (5) Every one in the covenant will know Him, or be familiar and in love with Him. (6) He will not remember their sins any more. All of those things are promises—promises to be believed. They can only be possessed in Christ. Further, our faith will compel us to do anything and everything He commands us. Others scriptures that affirm the nature of the New Covenant, and how radically it differs from the Old Covenant are as follows. Jeremiah 32:39-40; Ezekiel 11:19-20; 36:26-27; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 2:10.

The "First day of the week" is frequently mentioned in Scripture, and always with a note of approval. This is specifically said to be the time when Jesus rose from the dead. "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week . . ." (Mark 16:9). This is also the day on which Jesus, following His resurrection, first appeared to His disciples. "Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were

assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'" (John 20:19). It is also the day on which He appeared the second time to His disciples. John refers to it as eight days following the first appearance, which would put it on the first day of the week. "And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!'" (John 20:26).

In addition, the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week. This feast took place 50 days after the high Sabbath of the paschal week (Lev 23:15-16). The Sabbath from which the count was made occurred the day after Jesus was crucified, and was the reason why His body was taken down from the cross (John 19:31; Mark 15:42). It was also the Sabbath honored by the women who came to anoint Jesus' body (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:54-56). Fifty days from that Sabbath day was the first day of the week--the Day of Pentecost, on which the Spirit was poured forth.

We are categorically told that the early disciples came together to break bread "on the first day of the week" (Acts 20:7). When instructing the Corinthians on setting aside special monies for the poor saints in Jerusalem, Paul specified that it be done on "the first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:2). As the church progressed, from Ignatius (A.D. 30-107) onwards, we "have a complete chain of evidence that The Lord's Day became the regular Christian name for the first day of the week."

Suffice it to say, there is solid ground for perceiving as "the Lord's Day" the first day of the week. This was the day on which natural light was created (Gen 1:3-5). It was the day on which Christ Jesus arose from the dead (Mark 16:9). His two recorded appearances to His disciples occurred on this day (John 20:19,26). The day of Pentecost took place on this day (Lev 23:15-16), and the early church is said to have gathered together on the "first day of the

week" (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 16:2). This is not simply another day! The events that took place on the first day of the week are conducive to godly recollections that sanctify the soul.

Why do we pray in Jesus' name, instead of the Father, Son and Holy spirit?

This is according to Jesus' own instruction. "And I will do whatever you ask IN MY NAME that the Son may bring glory to the Father." (John 14:13). ". . . whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father IN MY NAME, he may give it you" (John 15:16). "In that day you will no longer ask me anything. I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask IN MY NAME. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete" (John 16:23-24).

The design of salvation is to reconcile us to God (Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-22; Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-21). Jesus said he was the way to the Father (John 14:6). When we pray, Jesus taught us to say "Our Father who art in heaven" (Matt 6:9). Because of being in Christ, we are His sons, and are to approach Him as such (1 John 3:1-3).

The Lord Jesus is the appointed and exclusive means through which we come to God. The Holy Spirit is given to us to assist us in our entire spiritual life. Prayer is one of the areas in which He helps us. The Word refers to praying "IN the Holy spirit," NOT to the Holy Spirit (Jude 20).

The overall teaching of the Apostles is this. Man has fallen short of the glory of God. God sent Jesus into the world to resolve the dilemma by putting sin away. The Lord Jesus is now bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18). The Holy Spirit dwells within us to make us able to walk with the Lord, and for the Lord to dwell within us (Eph 3:16-17).

Nothing but praying to the Father through the Son fits into this revealed purpose. It is really just that simple.

Is it really possible to have "more faith." Doesn't God give us a fixed measure of faith?

The "measure of faith" mentioned in Romans 12:3 is not quantitative. It relates to the position one occupies in the body. The faith in reference has been granted to fulfill an appointed role in God's eternal purpose. Thus, those who prophecy are admonished to do so according "to the proportion of his faith" (Rom 12:6).

Faith is not granted to us in fixed proportions, or measures. That is why Paul observed the faith of the Thessalonians was "growing more and more" (1 Thess 1:3). Faith, as you know, is the "assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen." Just as assurance and conviction can increase, so can one's faith. This is, of course, from the experiential view. It involves having a more firm grip on eternal verities, and beholding them more clearly.

You are absolutely correct in your assessment of faith working in an environment of humility--or within a sense of the poverty of our persons apart from Christ Jesus. Such a condition contributes to one being "strong in faith," as our father Abraham was (Rom 4:20). His faith dominated him, towering over natural wisdom and the inclination to trust in human devices, or doubt the reality of Divine commitments.

I too have often thought of the expression you mentioned: "We've got to have more faith." The disciples said much the same thing when they implored Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith." He did not tell them they had asked the wrong thing, but added a fresh

dimension for their perspective. "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you" (Matt 17:5-6). Using what we have is really the secret to experiencing a growth in faith.

Faith is given to be used. That use involves the abandonment of our fleshly preferences, and the adoption of the Divine agenda -- humility.

What about the matter of prayer by laying on of hands.

The laying on of hands is listed as one of the foundational teachings of Scripture (Heb 6:2). Jesus put His hands on little children when he prayed for them (Matt 19:13). Paul also laid his hands on the father of a chief ruler when he prayed and healed him (Acts 28:8). Ananias did the same thing when he prayed for Saul of Tarsus to receive his sight (Acts 9:17-18). The laying on of hands was also employed when sending people out to do the work of the Lord (Acts 6:6; 13:3; 1 Tim 4:14)

There is certainly nothing wrong with this procedure, as long as it is motivated by faith, and not trusting in a mere routine. James spoke of a procedure for people who were sick. It is not honored in many of our churches, but it is given by God. "Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven" (James 5:14-15).

I see no reason to refuse either of these procedures (laying on of hands, or anointing with oil). They should not, however, be approached as a lifeless law, or as something like magic.

I think that Satan before he fell was the worship leader in heaven . . . I had always been led to believe that music was an area in the world that Satan had a stronghold over. Do you know if this is an implied teaching or is this stated somewhere directly in the scriptures. In Ezekiel 28 it mentions Satan's trade.

The Scriptures do indicate that Satan was somehow identified with musical expressions. This phrase in Ezekiel 28:13 is part of the basis for this assumption: "the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created." Other versions state the text differently. The NIV and NASB say "the workmanship of settings and sockets," and the RSV and NRSV say "settings and engravings." This does seem rather strange to me, since the word from which "tabrets" is translated is "toph," which means "tabret or timbrel." For whatever it is worthy, the consensus of language scholars is that "tabrets" or "timbrels" is precisely correct--and that the allusion is to a festive, yet formal, occasion of bestowing honor.

The word "workmanship" is can also be translated "service," "work," or "occupation." That is where the idea of being a leader in the praise of God is taken.

As you already know from the text, all of this is rather vague. Enough is said to confirm Satan fell from a lofty position and ministry. Yet, we do not know precisely what it was. The teaching concerning Satan's musical role is, therefore, an implied teaching, although it is not without significance.

In his allusion to Satan, Isaiah also spoke of his association with music. "All your pomp has been brought down to the grave, along with the noise of your harps . . ." (Isa 14:11). It is clear, therefore, that our adversary has in some significant way been connected

with music, even though all of the details are not supplied.

This does not mean that sound conclusions cannot be reached on the subject of Satan and music. Your persuasion that Satan exercises unusual influence in the area of music is correct. You may remember that the idolatry instituted by King Nebuchadnezzar involved extensive instrumental music (Dan 3:5-15).

It is also interesting to note that Israel's reprehensible decline from God was also marked by corrupt music. The prophets frequently referred to this association, affirming the Lord's disgust with it all (Isa 5:12; Amos 5:23; 6:3-5).

To me, the term "Christian Rock" is like an oxymoron. One word is identified with heaven, and the other with earth. one has associations the Spirit, and the other with the flesh. We must always remember that a tree is known by the fruit it produces. Jesus reminded us a good tree CANNOT produce evil fruit, and an evil tree CANNOT produce good fruit.

Those who promote what they call "Christian Rock" rarely tell us of anything but their preference for that kind of music. As long as they can display good and godly fruit, God will receive it, and so will I.

I certainly do not condemn innovative and energetic music for the Lord--in fact I rather enjoy it. However, it must be under the control of the Holy Spirit. It can be under the control of Satan.

I wonder if we should use John 14:16-29 to confirm peace is given to all believers. Is this really the best text to use as theme in discussing peace for all Christians?

I appreciate your concerns about this text. As you know, there are significant differences in the way John 13-16 is understood by

followers of Christ. My own persuasion is that His words were not strictly limited to the Apostles, although some of them related specifically to them. I understand Jesus to be primarily declaring the nature of the His Kingdom rather than matters limited to the Apostolic office.

This particular discourse of our Lord is one of the more lengthy ones of record--if not the most lengthy. I do not understand the following to be in any way limited to the Apostles, although the words were spoken to them. To me, these are clearly universal in their application, and are generally considered to be so.

1. The mandate to serve one another (13:15-17).
2. A new commandment to love one another (13:34-35).
3. The preparation of a place for His people, and gathering them to Himself (14:1-3).
4. Coming to the Father through Him alone (14:6-7).
5. The indwelling Spirit, whom the world cannot receive (14:16-18).
6. Knowing that He is in the Father, and the Father in Him (14:20).
7. The individual having Christ's commandments and keeping them being loved by the Father and Jesus (14:21).
8. The Father and the Son making their abode in those who love Jesus and keep His words (14:23).
9. The disowning of those who keep not Christ's sayings (14:24).
10. The requirement of abiding in the Vine (15:1-7).
11. The Father glorified by Christ's disciples bearing much fruit (15:8).
12. The Father loving individuals, and them continuing in Christ's love (15:9).
13. Keeping Christ's commandments and thereby abiding in Christ's love (15:10).
14. Christ's joy remaining in His disciples (15:11).
15. The commandment to love one another as Christ loved (15:12,17).

16. Being Christ's friends if we do what He has commanded (15:14).
17. The hatred of the world incurred by His disciples (15:18-23).
18. The convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (16:8-11).
19. The Father loving Jesus' disciples because they believe He came from God (16:26).
20. Disciples having tribulation in the world (16:33).

Although John did not include the dialog, the institution of the Lord's Supper also occurred on this occasion. I know of no one suggesting that was in any way limited to the Apostles.

These expressions are all confirmed in Apostolic doctrine to the churches. To me, that circumstance verifies they were a declaration of the manner of the Kingdom.

There certainly were things Jesus divulged on that awful night that especially applied to the Apostles. I do not know how one would determine from Scripture that they applied uniquely to them. Jesus made no such distinction, nor is such a suggestion found in the Apostolic writings. It seems to me that when subjects of that discourse are expounded as general benefits for believers in the Epistles, we are in order correlating them with Christ's words in John 13-16.

I know of no text that suggests the Apostles had a special peace -- or that the peace of Christ is ever, in any sense, associated strictly with the Apostles.

The text I have chosen says, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. " I know of no conservative theologian of any era that affirms this was restricted to the Apostles. Numerous times Scripture declares peace comes to believers "from . . . the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; 2

Cor 1:2; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; 6:23; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:2; 1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; Phile 3; 2 John 1:3).

I am aware of those who corrupt the Word of God by making claims to possess miraculous power. But that has nothing to do with peace being given by Jesus--His peace, given "not as the world gives." It is just as wrong to remove general commitments as it is to assume the continuity of specific ones.

The phrase "guide you into all truth" does not necessarily imply truth to which they had never been exposed--i.e., new revelation. I know of no doctrine the Apostles preached that had not been alluded to by Moses and the prophets. In fact, Paul affirmed he only spoke what Moses and the Prophets said would come to pass (Acts 26:22). The Spirit opened those mysterious things to the Apostles, enabling them to expound and apply them without flaw. In this, their's was a unique ministry. That, however, has no bearing upon the peace Jesus said He would give, and which the Apostles said He is still giving.

Scripture is not to always to be viewed in sections, with the option to include or exclude everything in the section. Matthew 24 is another example of this, where both the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world are mentioned. It would be inappropriate to brush aside all references to the end of the world because the destruction of Jerusalem is also specified.

Another example is what men call "the great commission." Scripture states it was given to "the eleven disciples" (Matt 28:16-20). While the commission was, in a sense, unique to them, it was not exclusively for them. This is generally understood among conservative believers. Following the line of reasoning you suggest, this text should be inappropriate for us even more than the one in John. No Apostle every referred to this event when writing to the churches--they frequently referred to peace coming from

Christ, the Holy Spirit being given by God to believers, experiencing tribulation in the world, etc.--but never to "the great commission."

It is the same with John 13-16. There are matters declared there that are unique to the Apostles. However, everything in the passage is not confined to them. Handling the Word aright involves knowing what applies to all of the saints, and declaring that to be the case. The Apostle's doctrine confirms the peace Jesus leaves falls into that category. The words of the Prophets also are to be addressed in this manner. The promise, for example, of the New Covenant, was not given to us. It was specifically given to Israel (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:8-13). Yet, it is our privilege to enjoy that very covenant in Christ, as the book of Hebrews declares. Too, a "new heart" and a "new spirit" was not promised to the world, but to Israel (Ezek 11:19; 36:26). Yet, that very promise is fulfilled in Christ Jesus to Jew and Gentile alike. These examples could be multiplied many times. They confirm the acid test of Scriptural applicability is not WHO received the Word, but WHAT was declared in it. Technically, nothing in all of Scripture was addressed to brethren Ray and Given. Yet, even for them, "ALL Scripture" is "profitable."

As to the abusers of Scripture, God will hold them strictly accountable for their corruption and misuse of His Word. In the meantime, we cannot allow them to deprive us of things clearly affirmed to be ours.

I know of no text of Scripture that affirms or suggests that believers may teach that some of Christ's words have become obsolete, or are inappropriate to declare. That may appear to be a good course of action to counteract the influence of religious pretenders. I do not believe, however, the Word of God will support such an approach.

Regarding the scripture verse with this devotional: what did Jesus mean when he said that the Father is greater than He?

When the Word became flesh (John 1:14), and entered into this world, He "emptied Himself," or "made Himself of no reputation" (Phil 2:5-8). This involved humbling Himself, and becoming obedient to God, even to the death of the cross. He voluntarily became dependent upon God. While in the earth, He said He only said what the Father told Him to say (John 8:38; 12:50; 14:10). He also said He only did the works He saw His Father doing (John 5:20,36; 10:37; 14:10).

That was a remarkable condescension of our Lord. It was not that way before He entered into the world--before He became a man. Jesus, however, laid aside His equality with the Father to save a fallen race. That is the precise meaning of Philippians 2:5-8. The Father being greater than the Son, therefore, refers to Christ's state AFTER He became a man.

The Spirit comments further on this in First Corinthians 11:3, where it says, "Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God." Other affirmations of this truth are as follows. "and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God" (1 Cor 3:23). "For he has put everything under his feet. Now when it says that everything has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When He has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to Him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:27-28).

This does not mean Jesus is not Divine, or that He is not God. It

DOES mean He gave up much to save us--more than we dare to imagine.

In your first passage..Romans 6:6 you said " ..we know that our old man" ...it is suppose to state "we know that our old self" God bless

The translation that I use does say "old man" (KJV, NKJV). More contemporary versions do say "old self." The Greek word used in this text is "anthropos." It does mean "man," and is so translated in most texts. Out of the 560 times it is used in the New Testament Scriptures, nearly all versions (contemporary ones included) translate it "man." Contemporary versions translate it "self" 5 out of those 560 times (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22,24; Col 3:9-10).

I do prefer the word "man." The point of the Romans passage is that Christ has removed our condemned nature from us. We drag it around like an old carcass, but it is really not us. it is like another man. That same thought continues into the seventh chapter.

Thanks for the input. The difference is in the translation. I did quote it correctly.

Do you think that praying in Jesus' Name means to add "In Jesus' Name" to the end of our prayers, or does it have more to do with praying by Jesus' authority? This is how I view it. It is like the baptismal act done "in the Name". It is by the authority and the ability of Christ that we both come into covenant and approach the throne of the Father.

Any inclination to ritualism and lifeless procedures must be crucified, together with other aspects of the flesh. Too, our speech,

whether addressed to God or man, is to reflect our heart, and be in strict comportsment with the truth. I know of no word from God that allows for a lack of coordination between the heart and the mouth.

Concerning saying "in Jesus' name" at the conclusion of our prayers, it is certainly not a bad practice. I view it as a confession with my mouth that Jesus is my Lord and God's Christ. Thus I am confessing with my mouth that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God. To so conclude our prayers is not a law of the Kingdom. If that were the case, it would nullify its power.

I am not sure that "in the name of Jesus" means by His authority. I know this is a common perception, but I do not believe the Word of God supports such a view. I understand Scripture to equate "the name of" with "the person and character of." You may recall that when God declared His "name" to Moses, He proclaimed His Person and character (Ex 33:19; 34:5-7). This is also reflected in other proclamations of His name: i.e., "whose name is Jealous" (Ex 34:14), "whose name is the Lord" (Jer 16:21), "whose name is the God of hosts" (Amos 5:7), "whose name is the Branch" (Zech 6:12), "His name is called the Word of God" (Rev 19:13), etc.

With this in mind, praying in the name of Jesus is actually praying in harmony with His Person and character. It is prayer that proceeds from our identity with Him, to Whom we have been "joined" (1 Cor 6:17). This, of course, is not determined by what we say at the end of our prayer. It is, however, in order for what we say at the conclusion of our prayer to acknowledge the situation--even though it is not compulsory.

Believers are told if they will believe in their heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and confess with their mouth that He is Lord, they will be saved. It is evident this does not refer to some initial series of "steps," but to an ongoing involvement. In my own

judgment (and this is a personal persuasion), prayer is an excellent place for this to take place. This passage also teaches the coordination of the heart and the mouth. It seems to me that when our hearts grasp the truth of what has occurred in us being "joined to the Lord," it will erupt from our mouths.

Our baptism "in the name of the . . ." does not, of course, refer to a formula, or what was said when we were baptized. In this case also, "in the name" does not, in my opinion, refer to the authority of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The NIV points out that the word "into" is more appropriate than "in." This same use of the word is employed in Acts 8:16, 19:5, Romans 6:3, and Galatians 3:27. We are actually baptized "into" the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--which is what I understand Christ's words to mean. This is confirmed throughout the Apostolic writings. We are said to be "in the Father" (1 John 2:24), and the Father in us (John 14:23; 2 Cor 6:16). We are said to be "in Christ" (Rom 8:1), and Christ in us (Rom 8:10; Col 1:27). The Holy Spirit is said to dwell in us (Rom 8:10; 1 Cor 3:16), and we in the Spirit (Rom 8:9; Gal 5:25).

I am persuaded that prayer "in the name of Jesus" refers to this involvement. The commitments Jesus made to such prayer makes this obvious. "And whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name" (John 16:23). There is no chance that such prayer will not be answered--none at all. As you know, it appears that precious little prayer is uttered out of deep involvement with Jesus. Knowing that God has "called us into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9), this remains an area of great opportunity.

All of this, of course, is not set in motion by tacking on "in Jesus name" at the conclusion of our prayers. It is in order, however, for

our tongue to confess what our heart perceives. We can glorify God, honor Jesus, and instruct the novice, by such an utterance.

I would very much like to know if Satan can read our thoughts and would like to know the scripture that would back it up??

I do not believe this is ever affirmed in Scripture. Satan, rather than reading our thoughts, seeks to tempt us with thoughts. These thoughts are referred to as "fiery darts" or "flaming arrows" (Eph 6:16). All temptation takes the form of thought, and comes from Satan. The old Tempter tries to invade our thinking, not read our thoughts.

Given this revealed situation, I would say Satan especially cannot read the minds of God's children. Their minds are said to be guarded, or protected, by the peace of Christ. "And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:7). When our minds are "pure," devoted to the Lord, Satan cannot penetrate them, or decipher them.

The Word of God affirms that God Himself knows our minds. "The LORD knows the thoughts of man" (Psa 94:11). Everything is open and apparent to Him (Heb 4:13). I do not believe Satan is ever said to have this power. Praise the Lord for that!

Would you have a scripture that I could use to subdue involuntary and unholy thoughts that enter my mind? I pray for forgiveness as soon as an unholy thought enters and I try to change the thought pattern, but I do not seem to have the power of God as I should to stop them from popping into my mind.

Romans 7:15-25 deals with this situation. Unwanted thoughts are the very thing the Apostle is talking about when he says, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but **WHAT I HATE** I do . . . If then I do that which I **WOULD NOT**, I consent unto the law that it is good . . . For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, **THE EVIL I DO NOT WANT TO DO**--this I keep on doing . . . Now if I do what I **DO NOT WANT TO DO**, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (Rom 7:15,16,19,20).

Paul (and us) was not able to keep the thoughts from entering his mind. He did not want them, yet they came to him. He concluded "So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members" (Rom 7:21-23).

This situation, while grievous, did not drive the Apostle from the Lord. He saw it as proof that he was justified--proof that he had been reconciled to God. He did not **WANT** the thoughts because they were contrary to His new nature. That is why he begins the 8th chapter with these words, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). By saying "Therefore," he is confessing, I know I am not condemned, but have been justified because these unwanted thoughts are offensive to me. Look at this way: conflict is proof of life. Dead people experience no such war within.

The author of these unwanted thoughts is the devil himself. These are the "fiery darts" or "flaming arrows" mentioned in Ephesians 6:16. He throws them, as it were, into our minds. These are his temptations. He wants us to welcome and embrace these thoughts, because that is the means he uses to draw us into sin. When,

however, we hate the thoughts, and refuse to allow them expression in our lives, we frustrate and nullify their power. That is the way we resist the devil--by saying "NO" to ungodliness and worldly lusts. grace, of course, teaches us to do this (Tit 2:11-13).

Your hatred for such thoughts confirms you are not condemned by them. You will not be able to stop them from coming at you, for the devil is hurling them. They are part of the "good fight of faith" into which you have been called (1 Tim 6:12). Remember, you have been given "the shield of faith" which is able to extinguish these flaming arrows. Do not feel condemned because these thoughts come. You have not sinned when you are thus tempted, and must not confess such to be sin--it is not. You have only sinned when you welcome the thoughts and do what they suggest. When you do not do this, however, you have won. Give God the glory, and assure your heart you are not condemned.

A person has a born again experience and they are saved at that moment. BUT, the conversion of the flesh can take a lifetime.

You have captured the general sense of things, but need to state it more precisely. The flesh cannot be changed, nor can it enter the Kingdom of heaven. What we do is subdue the flesh, or refuse to allow it to dominate our lives. it is what the Scriptures call "putting off the old man" and "putting on the new man" (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-11).

You are absolutely correct in saying this is a lifetime process. As long as we are "in the body," we must wage this war. What we are doing, in a way, is unplugging from what is cursed and plugging into what is blessed.

Our behavior can be changed radically and quickly, and does not necessarily have to take a long time. Paul quit persecuting the church the instant he embraced Jesus. There are other parts of our character that are not so easily subdued. How well I know this to be the case.

I am in so much pain and even want to commit suicide I keep begging and pleading for him to help me or send me a sign or somethin. I don't know how much longer I can hold out before something pushes me over the edge for good...what can I do....

What you are experiencing is temptation. Like all temptation, it comes from the devil, and is designed by him to hurt us. All of us experience this temptation, and no one is excluded from it. The Bible tells us even our Lord Jesus was tempted when He was in the world. He overcame, or was victorious over, the temptations. He also knows how to help us be winners also.

Temptation is like a flaming arrow hurled at us from the devil. It is like an infection the devil hurls into our thinking. The Bible talks about it in Ephesians 6:16. If we try and confront temptation all by ourselves, we will find it is too difficult to handle. This is why Jesus taught us to pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one (Satan)" (Matthew 6:13).

God is not cursing you, and you must not give in to thinking that He is. That is another temptation. Thoughts about suicide are temptations also. From God's viewpoint, you are being tested--like taking an exam. He has promised He will not allow you to be tested or tempted above your ability. The Bible puts it this way, "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a

way out so that you can stand up under it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). That is the truth.

It will not be easy, but you must work at believing this. When you honestly try to do this, God will help you to believe it. He will also see to it the devil does not push you too far. That is also the truth. In your prayers, tell the Lord precisely what you told me. Ask Him to deliver you from these temptations. He will hear you.

This is the way things work for those who believe in Christ. When they are in deep water, so to speak, it seems like they are going to drown. The waves of life get high, and seem like they will overwhelm us. However, as we make every effort to swim, and keep on top of the water, the Lord Himself comes along side of us and helps us. He holds His arms underneath us, where they cannot always be seen, and sees to it we do not sink. The Bible says it this way. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, 'Destroy him!'" (Deuteronomy 33:27). The "him," in this case is the tempter--the devil.

Mark 13:30 Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. What does Jesus mean, "generation"? How many people or years does a generation designate? In other words, if the generation of the apostles was supposed to have seen all those things that were to come to pass, what are we doing here? I have a bible software program that showed the word: generation 105 times! I just don't understand the significance, unless I can assign a number of years to that word.

This text shows the poverty of a merely academic approach to Scripture. The text itself is a complex one, together with its

parallels in Matthew 24 and Luke 21. You may recall the disciples also asked a complex question. Matthew gives the fuller question: "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt 24:3). Christ's answer covered the fulness of their question. Briefly stated, it includes the destruction of Jerusalem, and His coming and the end of the world as well. The destruction of Jerusalem was a sort of minature introduction to the end of the world, but did not exhaust all of the answers He gave.

In this instance, "This generation" has more than one application. First, Jerusalem would be destroyed before the present generation passed away. Roughly, a generation was around 40 years. That is based on the Lord's statement concerning the passing away of the unbelieving generation in Numbers 32:13. The last 140 years of job's life is referred to as a time he saw "four generations" (Job 42:16)--making a generation around 35 years. The word is not meant to be specific when used in this manner. It is a general description.

In a broader sense, "this generation" refers to the Jews themselves, as distinguished from the nations, or Gentiles. In that case, the Jews would not be removed from the earth until its conclusion. In my judgment, it is used in this manner also in the text.

Why do you think most people want to throw out the Sabbath commandment, but think that all others are still valid?

The Sabbath day was never bound upon the people after Jesus. Neither, indeed, did Jesus bind it on people. he said He was the Lord of the Sabbath, and that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).

Christians are admonished not to allow anyone to judge them in regard to sabbaths because they were a shadow of things to come, and not the real substance (Col 2:16).

Those in Christ Jesus do not enter into a superior rest, which was introduced by the Sabbath commandment. This is the reason for the rather lengthy discussion of "rest" in the fourth chapter of Hebrews.

it is not a matter of Christians throwing out the Sabbath commandment. It is that a better rest has been brought in by Jesus.

When Gentiles were converted who were not even familiar with the Ten Commandments, the Apostles and elders specified the commands they should keep that were originally related to Judahism. They are specified in Acts 15:29. Keeping the Sabbath day was not one of the requirements.

I feel so strong when I see or hear of anyone suffering any kind of pain it feels like I am there in the midst of whatever is going on, and this is scaring me. This is what is confusing me. My question is: is this normal for someone just coming into the word to doubt and trust at the same time?

Having a tender heart is a wonderful virtue. Your faith, however, must be allowed to be the superior part of your thinking. There are things in life that cannot be answered satisfactorily--like the terrible events in Colorado. One time Jesus was asked about an atrocity that occurred in His time. Pilate had mingled the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifice--a terrible event that was apparently generally known among the people. Our Lord's reply provided no explanation for why it occurred. "Do you suppose that

these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk 13:1-5).

Those who endure such tragedies are not to be viewed as worse sinners than those who were spared such things. Those left behind are to review their own lives, seeing to it that any repentance that is in order takes place.

Our view of these things must be mingled with an acute awareness that everything is not over for those who were killed. Particularly the innocent will be fully exonerated before an assembled universe, and those who committed the crimes will be punished for them. In the meantime, our hearts do go out to the bereaved.

Being angry with God is not an option. It is better to acknowledge you do not have all of the facts -- nor is it necessary that you have them. How would you have felt about the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, the destruction of Jerusalem, the merciless slaughter of millions of Christians etc.

Our anger must be directed toward the devil and his wicked hosts. Sin has brought these tragedies into the world. Even the innocent have suffered because of it. Our role is not to provide answers for why each event happens, but to thank God that is not all that happens. Also, let us give thanks that God is going to set everything straight.

In Geneses we find Adam's children obviously marrying brothers and sisters, even cousins. Today we are unable to do so genetically or lawfully. Can you explain?

Under the Law, after humanity had been populated, god strictly forbade intimacy between those who were close of kin (Lev 18:6-18; 20:12-21; 27:22-23).

There are no reasons for the prohibition, other than that it is an abomination before the Lord (Ezek 22:11). It is out of keeping with both His law and His nature. The instances of it that occurred were in spiritually primitive times. the scarcity of the race, as well as the sparsity of spiritual knowledge constrained the lord to be tolerant with the situation. But that toleration has ended with the enlargement of both our race and knowledge from God.

My problem is, when I set aside time to read my bible, no matter how much scripture I read, when I stop I can't remember or comprehend what it was supposed to mean. I've tried various bible studies but they don't seem to help and I've prayed about it often.

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to bring to our remembrance the word of God (John 14:26). He also illuminates the mind, showing us the significance of what has been revealed. This indispensable ministry is proclaimed in several different ways in Scripture.

1. The eyes of our understanding, or heart, being enlightened, or illuminated (Eph 1:17-20).
2. Being strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man, that Christ can dwell in our hearts by faith, and we will be able to comprehend, or discern, the immensity of our salvation (Eph 3:16-

20).

3. As we give heed to the Word, the day will finally dawn (our understanding will be fruitful), and the Day Star will arise in our hearts, bringing confidence and assurance (2 Pet 1:19).

In the Kingdom of God, understanding comes from faith. As we believe, the Lord gives us the understanding. This is reflected in a statement found in Hebrews 11:3. "By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

As you read the Scriptures, believing them is the primary thing. I believe you already know this, and do, in fact, believe them. It is always in order to pray as David did, "Give me understanding . . ." (Psa 119:34,73,125, 144, 69).

Remember, when you read the Scriptures, you are feeding your soul, or living by every Word of God (Lk 4:4). You are being nourished by the Word, through the Spirit, and by means of your faith. Your understanding will also be fruitful in due time.

I suspect you are trying to understand all of the details of Scripture--something like we learn to do in academics. Understanding the Word is different from understanding earthly text books. You want to first see the broad principles, or declarations, of Scripture. They are the key to understanding the details.

For instance, when you understand Jesus cannot lose and Satan cannot win, it illuminates many otherwise obscure texts. Or, when we see that faith is always blessed, and unbelief is never blessed -- or heaven is always primary, and earth is always secondary . . . etc.

I suggest that you see if there is anything you understand--anything

at all. Strive to get hold of one thing, not everything. Do not try and understand the whole of what you read, but some part of it. That understanding, however small it may appear, will be like a mustard seed that will grow and grow.

Be encouraged in your efforts. The Lord wants you to understand, and you also want to understand. That is an equation that is sure to yield good results.

What, exactly, is involved in salvation? I know faith, but what about repentance and baptism? How do those fit in? I have been studying the Bible about this, but I can't make sense of all the verses.

Faith is what apprehends the truth. It is also what constrains a valid response within the believer. Repentance involves turning from the way that condemned us, and turning to the Lord. Scripture calls it turning from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (Acts 26:18). The Word also tells us that "godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted" (2 Cor 7:10). From another viewpoint, repentance is necessary to believe the Gospel. Thus it is written, "Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Again, repentance is "toward God," and faith "toward the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). As you can see, repentance is tied to both faith and salvation. That is why Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish" (Lk 13:3,5).

Baptism, though controversial in church circles, is never controversial in Scripture. It is the appointed means of identifying with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3-8). In fact, it is called "the form of the doctrine" in Romans 6:17. That is, it is an outward portrayal of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Peter says "baptism does now also save us" (1 Pet 3:21). It does not do so by mere ceremony, but by procuring for us a good conscience, as Peter says in that text. The

associations of baptism all have to do with salvation. Here are some of those associations.

1. Repentance (Acts 2:38).
2. The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
3. The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
4. Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).
5. Salvation (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
6. Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
7. Being raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
8. Being identified with Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
9. Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
10. Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
11. The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
12. Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
13. Coming into Christ (Gal 3:27).
14. Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
15. A commandment (Acts 10:48).
16. The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
17. Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
18. Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).

19. Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

Faith is the means of approaching God, obtaining His promises, and securing His approval. Repentance is the means of disassociating ourselves from the past and securing us to the future. Baptism is the appointed means of publicly and effectively becoming identified with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. To balk at either repentance or baptism evidences unbelief.

There is no question in Scripture concerning the necessity of faith, repentance, or baptism. They were all ordained and given by God, and that without exception.

I want to tell my Baptist brothers and sisters that the election was held 2000 yrs ago and JESUS won, no need for further voting. Do you have any more history as to it origin?

I do not know of the history of this practice: i.e., voting members into the church. I know it has been around for a while--but not as long as the truth. I assume the practice originated in an attempt to keep undesirable people out of the congregation. That cannot be accomplished by "voting," however, which assumes the ones doing the "voting" are all close to God and spiritually perceptive. The church did not manage to keep Ananias and Sapphirra out -- in fact, I suppose modern congregation would have voted them in.

The best way to keep "bad" people out of the church is to have an atmosphere where they are not comfortable. However, at no point can we demand more of the people than God does.

You are so right in your assessment of the practice of "voting" people into the church. Those doing this would argue they are not judging whether or not the person is saved, but determining whether or not they are worthy of being part of their congregation.

If this is so, it is harder to be a Baptist, in some cases, than to go to heaven!

Our role as members of the body of Christ is to RECEIVE those whom God has received. To be more precise, those whom Jesus has received. As it is written, "Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7). Putting it another way, John wrote, "And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves his child as well" (1 John 4:21-5:1, NIV).

We really do not have a choice in this matter. Even people who are "weak in the faith," or do not clearly see what is involved in their salvation, are to be "received, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Rom 14:1). Again, we are told, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Rom 15:7, NIV).

I do not believe any of the congregations practicing "voting" members in, would say they were "voting" on whether or not God had received the person. If that were the case, it would be presumptuous, for they were sitting in the seat of God. If that is not what they are doing, they are imposing more upon the believer than God Himself has. That seems to me to be the height of absurdity.

When the Scriptures say early believers are "added to the church" (Acts 2:41), it is assumed the rest of the church recognized what had been accomplished by God. By receiving the brethren and loving them, they were agreeing with God. Think of the seriousness of rejecting someone God and Jesus have received -- OR accepting someone they have rejected. Something to think about.

I want to hear your comparison between God's omnipotence and His sovereignty.

Omnipotence has to do with the inherent authority of God. The phrases "Almighty God" and "the Almighty" emphasizes this aspect of His Person (Gen 17:1; 29:25; Ezek 10:5, etc.). The idea is that what He wills He is also able to perform (Gen 26:3; Rom 4:21). Nothing is "too hard for God" (Gen 18:14; Jer 21:17). The knowledge of this lifts the hearts of the saints to lean the weight of their soul on the Lord. That is why Paul prayed believers would be able to see God "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think" (Eph 3:20). God cannot conceive of a purpose He cannot fulfill. In a very practical sense, "He is able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before His presence with exceeding joy" (Jude 24). Omnipotence, then, has to do with His ability.

Sovereignty relates His Omnipotence to the environment in which there are presently adversaries and opposing influences. God has, for example, chosen to fulfill His "eternal purpose" in an arena dominated by Satan. Satan's dominion, however, is under His own dominion. While Satan is the "God of this world," he is not its Sovereign. The Sovereignty of God involves not only establishing His will, but frustrating all opposing wills. Thus, He announces His intentions to His enemies (i.e., the devil in the Garden), as though challenging them to subvert it. Isaiah referred to God's Sovereignty when he wrote, "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that will I do" (Isa 46:9-11). Using both good and evil personalities, the Lord brings His will to pass, ruling "in the midst

of His enemies" (Psa 110:1-2).

From another viewpoint, Sovereignty presents God as ruling over under-rulers, or others possessing in authority. In the world to come, that will include us, who will 'reign" with Jesus, and Jesus Himself, Who will be "subject to the Father" (1 Cor 15:27-28).

The glory of this is that both His power and Sovereignty, or government, is in the behalf of those trusting in Jesus.

Good to hear from you, brother Dave. I am always refreshed by your commitment to the good things of God. I pray the Lord will continue to bless your ministry.

The other night on the radio I was listening to Hank Hannegraph and he said that the thief on the cross wasn't baptized so therefore it is not necessary. I do believe that we should be baptized, learning about it and then getting dipped but as far as washing our sins away I am confused about.

The thief on the cross could not be baptized into Christ's death (Rom 6:1-4; Col 1:11-12), because Christ was in the process of dying. The New Covenant also was not yet into effect, because it was ratified by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:29; 13:20). The remission of sin had not yet been preached as Jesus commissioned it to be (Luke 24:47). In view of this, it would be improper to cite the thief on the cross as an example of the procurement of salvation.

Additionally, the thief was an exception to the rule, and not the rule itself. Prior to Jesus, the baptism of John was in effect. The scriptures tell us that those refusing his baptism "rejected the counsel of God against themselves," cutting themselves off from

God (Luke 7:29-30). Under ordinary circumstances, therefore, the thief would have to be baptized with John's baptism. But his circumstance was not ordinary, and the Lord saved him in an extraordinary manner. To make his salvation the standard for everyone would necessitate the Apostles referring to that thief in their preaching. We have no record of them ever doing so. They knew, and we must also know, that his situation was an exception to the rule. That is something God can do, but it is by no means something that is intended for everyone. We do have a record an Apostle commanding baptism (Acts 2:38; 10:48). Jesus also commanded that people be baptized (Matt 28:18-20). Baptism is NEVER associated with anything that sin not associated with salvation--never.

There is no need to speculate or philosophize about the matter. The Scriptures read, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16) In speaking of baptism, we must stick to what the Lord said about it. We will never be wrong in doing that.

Can you tell me anything about the Book of Jasher that is mentioned in Samuel in the Bible?

The "Book of Jasher" is also mentioned in Joshua 10:13. It is considered to be a collection of divine odes (songs), written to commemorate remarkable events. The Syriac version of this Scripture calls it "the Book of Canticles." It is understood to be a book of national ballads commemorating the brave deeds of Israelite heroes. The word "Jasher" literally means "upright." It would be like a hero book that accented the character of great men of God, and what they were able to do through their faith.

What can I do to retain more of the Bible in my mind?

This is an area where the Lord Himself can help you. It is understood that you must first put the Word of God into your mind -- reading and thinking upon it. I am assuming you are doing this. Keeping, or retaining, the Word is done both directly and indirectly. Directly it comes from reading it and meditating upon it. Indirectly it takes place by refusing to be sidetracked by lower and distracting thoughts--resisting the devil, in other words.

A prayer that will assist you in this matter was spoken repeatedly by David, who also wanted to retain the Word. He prayed, "Give me understanding" (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). That is the real key to retaining the Word--understanding it. That is also something only the Lord can give you -- and He DOES want to do so.

..."eat my flesh and drink my blood" What does Jesus mean by eat--masticate? digest? What does Jesus mean by His flesh?--His words? His life? What does Jesus mean by drink--ingest? be filled with? What does Jesus mean by His blood?--His life? His forgiveness?

As you already know, there is no way to understand this text by referring to a dictionary or lexicon.

Jesus is referring to ingesting His Person--becoming a "partaker of Christ," as mentioned in Hebrews 3:14. He is God's "bread from heaven," as He states in the sixth chapter of John (6:32-35). He is to the soul what the manna was to the bodies of the Israelites.

The point Jesus is making is that unless the life of Christ is in us, we really have no life as God sees things. Just as what we eat and digest becomes a part of us, so eating Christ's flesh and drinking

His blood refers to Jesus becoming a part of us. This is the same thing as Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17), and being a participator in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).

Faith is the means by which we ingest Christ, or get Him into our persons. He dwells in our hearts "by faith" (Eph 3:17). Earlier in the same chapter, Jesus told these people, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent" (John 6:29). Eating His flesh and drinking His blood is another view of that very thing.

... when do you think the Apostles came to realize fully His divine nature, as John, for instance, expresses in his gospel: "...the Word was God...all things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made.."? After Jesus' resurrection? Thomas does call him "My Lord and my God." Still, even at the ascension they were asking about "restoring the kingdom." Would it be after the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost?

The answer is not simplistic. There was a sense in which the knowledge of this burst suddenly upon the Apostles. An early example is when Peter saw who Jesus really was, and confessed it (Matt 16:16-18). As you recall, Jesus told him he had been blessed. He did not acquire this knowledge through natural means, but it was revealed to him. At that time, the revelation was like a sudden flash of light that quickly dissipated. Shortly after this was revealed to Peter by the Father, he was soundly rebuked by Jesus in a most telling way: "get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence to me." I understand that Peter really did perceive Jesus as He was. Yet, it got away from him, so to speak. It was almost like putting money in a bag with holes. The weakness was not in the revelation, but in the container housing it. I recall how Paul spoke

of the Holy Spirit strengthening us with might in the inner man, so Christ can dwell in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17).

Another example is on the day of Pentecost, when Peter boldly announced God's gracious salvation was for those who were "afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." For the first time, he affirmed "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I believe he saw it, as he was elevated in, and dominated by, the Holy Spirit. Still, from 10-15 years later, the Lord had to reason extensively with Peter to convince him the Gentiles could hear and receive the Gospel (Acts 10). That does not mean Peter failed to see what he proclaimed at Pentecost. It does mean he did not keep that perception.

You may also recall the Apostles and elders met to consider the matter of the Gentiles' acceptance. That gathering took place a considerable number of years after Pentecost. It also had to do with the Savior and His salvation. After due consideration, they were able to associate the acceptance of the Gentiles with the testimony of the Prophets. This, as you know, was a major step forward for the early church.

Revelation, or illumination, is thus seen from two perspectives. One is speaking through the Apostles without a lasting awareness of what was declared. Second, a fuller apprehension of the revelation, with its significance registering upon the human spirit. This allows for an infallibility in expression (a requisite for the Word to be trusted), yet forbids us to put our trust in men--even Apostles, who are "ministers by whom we believed" (1 Cor 3:5).

In his second Epistle, Peter referred to a process that takes place in spiritual understanding. As you know, this transcends academic knowledge. Still, it involves the personal apprehension of the truth by the believer. "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place,

until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Pet 1:19). I understand this to be an affirmation of Kingdom principles. The Seed of the Kingdom is the Word of God -- whether we are speaking of an Apostle or one who has believed on Christ through their word. As we focus upon that Word-- particularly the Gospel of Christ--we come into a sort of spiritual realm. I like to call it the circumference of hearing. Eventually, as we wrap our minds around the Word of the Lord, the "day will dawn," and the "Day Star" will arise in our hearts. That is another way of saying it will all come together for us. The objective and harmony of the Word will be seen, making the understanding fruitful. That is when we are able comprehend the height, depth . . .

There is a sense in which this happened to the Apostles. As I understand it, they did not receive a bushel of understanding on the day of Pentecost that stayed continually with them. What they said was infallible, and they saw it at the time. Yet, as time progressed, they saw the scope of it, and comprehended its implications. This is an area where the Apostle Paul especially shines. He did not see everything at the first as clearly as He did at the conclusion of his journey.

It is the nature of faith to grow. That is why Paul rejoiced that the faith of the Thessalonians grew "exceedingly" (2 Thess 1:3). Peter hints at this in a remarkable statement he made about the faith received by the Apostles, as well as that which we receive. "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours in the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:1). The NASB reads, "to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours." The difference, therefore, is not in the faith itself, but in the "measure," or ministry for which it adapts the individual (Rom 12:3-8). While the Apostles had a lofty and unparalleled ministry, being placed "first" in the church (1 Cor 12:28), their faith functioned just as ours. They grew in it, their understanding was enlarged, and they

had to fight to keep it.

All of this has no bearing whatsoever upon the validity of Scripture, its inspiration, or its infallibility. God anchored the truth through them in a manner that will stand forever--totally without flaw or weakness.

The faith of the Apostles advanced. It was greater at the ascension than it was at the tomb. It was greater after His ascension than it was during the ascension. It was greater on Pentecost than it was during the 40 days Jesus spoke to them of things pertaining to the Kingdom. It is my understanding that it continued to grow after that, as evidenced in the matter of the Gentiles' acceptance.

There is an interesting observation about the disciples inquiry concerning the restoration of the Kingdom to Israel. Jesus did not rebuke them for asking the question, nor did He give the slightest indication that it was a foolish inquiry. What He did say is that it was not for them to know "times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority" (Acts 1:7). Our approach to eschatology must allow us to retain those words without modification.

Well, there are some thoughts on the subject. I do not want to burden you with a bulky reply. This is a matter to which I have given considerable thought. I am not at all satisfied with the stereotyped approach taken by the academians and grammarians.

What about eating meat offered to idols? and, Why is the eating of blood prohibited?

Meat "offered to idols" was meat KNOWINGLY offered to idols. We know this is case from the Spirit's instruction on this matter to the Corinthians. "Eat anything sold in the meat market without

raising questions of conscience, for, The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. But if anyone says to you, This has been offered in sacrifice, then do not eat it, both for the sake of the man who told you and for conscience' sake--the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be judged by another's conscience? If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for? So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:25-31, NIV). He also speaks of this matter in 1 Corinthians 8:7: "Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled." That is the kind of eating that is forbidden--eating meat that has been knowingly offered to an idol, and eating it with the idol in mind. We do not yet have this problem in the Western world, although it might not be far away. When I have traveled in third world countries, these instructions come to life.

The eating of blood is referring to extracted blood, not blood within the meat of animals butchered normally. In the process of butchering, the blood is drained from the body. In the case of things "strangled," this was not the case. The Levitical Law provided some rationale for the proscription against eating blood. "Therefore I say to the Israelites, None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood. Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off" (Lev 17:13-14). We know from the instructions given to the Gentile converts that this remained a standard for God's people, even though many of the other ceremonies did not. Even before the

Law, God also prohibited the eating of blood (Gen 9:4), so it is not restricted to the ceremonial law.

Another reason for this is that it highlights the value of eating Christ's blood, which is an absolute requirement (John 6:53-55). That is a spiritual activity, but it is accentuated by the command not to eat blood. Here is the only life we can partake of.

I was discussing the topic of tithing with someone at work and he argued that it was Jewish tradition and didn't necessarily apply to Christians. He said that the new testament only requires 'sacrificial giving' I didn't really have an answer for that. Any responses?

It is fashionable in some church circles for people to view tithing as an Old Testament standard that has no relevancy for those in Christ. That is not what the Word of God says, nor is there the slightest hint in all of Scripture that this is the case.

Rather than the tithe being taught by Jesus and the Apostles, it is assumed that everyone realizes it belongs to the Lord. Holy people of God have always tithed--before the Law, during the Law, and after the Law.

Before the Ten Commandments, or any word was given from God concerning tithing, Abraham "paid tithes to Melchizedek," a mysterious high priest of God that appeared to him (Gen 14:20). After God had appeared to Jacob--a considerable time before the Law was give, or any directives came from God concerning the tithing, he vowed to "surely give the tenth" to the lord (Gen 28:22). Tithing, then, was not based upon a commandment, but on a sense of God's ownership of all things. It was a way of acknowledging that truth, and faith caused the godly to sense it.

Under the law, the tithe was given to support the Levitical priesthood. Because the Levites did not receive an inheritance in the land, and did not own anything, the tithe was the Divinely appointed means of supporting them (Numbers 18:20-21). Paul alluded to this practice as being the same principle through which the Gospel ministry was to be supported (1 Cor 9:13-14).

The Lord Jesus, when rebuking the scribes and Pharisees, did commend them for tithing, saying that should have done that (Matt 23:23).

In the book of Hebrews, it is categorically stated that the Lord Jesus is now receiving tithes. "Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he receives them, of whom it is witnessed that he lives" (Heb 7:8). Some object that the one whom it is witnessed that he lives is Melchizedek -- but this is not the case at all. The death of Melchizedek is not recorded, but no place is it suggested that he lives on, or is immortal. That is something that is true of Jesus alone. And, if He is receiving tithes, obviously someone is paying them. Your friend was wrong. The term "sacrificial giving" is not in the Bible. It has been concocted by men, most of whom are not noted for the giving practices.

Tithing is, of course, the foundation of giving, not the whole of it. That is why the Scriptures speak of "tithes and offerings." Incidentally, God said to Israel that they were guilty of robbing Him because they withheld their tithes and offerings from Him. I do not know what would lead a person to conclude this was not possible today.

What do you do with an addiction?

Addiction is a medical and psychological term. The Scriptural expression is "slaves of sin" (Rom 6:6,16,17,20). One of the functions of salvation is that it sets us free from sin (Rom 6:22). Those whom men call "addicted" are delivered the same way they are from other sin. It is through their faith in and association with the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, "He whom the Son sets free is free indeed" (John 8:36).

2 Thessalonians 2:9 mentions "counterfeit" signs. The scriptures consistently appeal to the miraculous as proof of the working of God. If Satan could also work miracles, then the evidential value of miracles would be undermined. What think ye?

This is another case where etymological considerations prove wholly inadequate. From the higher point of view, the signs and wonders Satan works are lies. That does not mean they are not supernatural. Anyone affirming that Satan never works in a manner transcendent nature has taken a position that can be quickly struck down from Scripture. Neither, indeed, does "power, signs, and lying wonders" mean they are not real, or suggest they are mere delusions of the mind. The phrase "lying signs and wonders" emphasizes their deceptive nature, not their lack of reality.

When Satan attacked Job, the robbing of his flocks, destruction of his children, and being covered with boils were certainly not a delusion--yet they were all wrought by Satan. They were also within the framework of God's will and power.

A classic example is also provided in the Egyptian magicians. I would not care to affirm their rods did not really become snakes, or that they were not really eaten by the rod of Moses (Ex 7:10-12). The Scriptures affirm they really did turn water into blood (Ex 7:21-22). They also brought real frogs upon the land (Ex 8:7). Their power, however, ran out, so to speak, at this point. They tried

to "bring forth lice, but they could not" (Ex 8:7). If they really did not turn water into blood, or did not really bring frogs out of the water, it would be pointless to mention their inability to bring forth lice. The very statement assumes the reality of their former deeds.

There are, of course, other examples of things wrought by Satan and his hosts that were transcendent to nature, and could only be removed by Jesus. Jesus said Satan "bound" a woman with an infirmity that left her bowed together for eighteen years (Lk 13:10-16). The demons that possessed the man from Gadara (Mark 5:1-6) certainly caused very real affects. The father having a child possessed of a demon saw that demon cast the boy to the ground where he lay wallowing and foaming (Mark 9:20). As you know, there are numerous other cases, but these will suffice for now. My point is these things were supernatural, but not Divine. They seemed to testify to an invincible devil, however, which was a lie. Too, they could be reversed by the power of Christ, while Satan could not obviate what Jesus did.

As wrought by Satan, delusion itself is a sort of wonder. It transcends human intellect, capturing those who have no faith or relish for the truth. It makes no difference how intellectual they are, or how gifted and logical they are. When men without Christ face Satan's delusion, they face something for which they are not adequate. Such are "taken captive" by Satan, "to do his will" (2 Tim 2:26). That is beyond the realm of nature. Were this not the case, we would not require a Savior to deliver.

The text in Second Thessalonians is certainly a defining one. Rather, however, than it testifying to what Satan cannot do, it is affirming what he DOES do. The phraseology confirms he is not God, but neither is he man. He does have power, but it is subordinate power. His works draw men into the realm of delusion, not to the truth.

First, the text is not an affirmation of Satan himself, but of one of his subordinates. I do not know that we can use this text to describe the limitations of the devil, although he surely has them. The miracles are "counterfeit" because they have not come from God (which is what the worker affirms). They are "miracles" in the sense that they are above the capability of mere humanity. They are evidence of Satan's work, not that of man. However, great value must not be assigned to them, for they are neither lasting nor all powerful.

The text says this man comes according to the working of Satan "with all power, signs, and lying wonders." Men have debated over this text, because the manner in which it is stated does not fit comfortably into their theology. Thus some have assumed the word "lying" applies to "power," "signs," and "wonders." I understand the literal translation to be "In wonders of a lie." If this is the case, and the language indicates that it is, the point is not the counterfeit of the miracle, but the personification of the lie. This would be a parallel with the expression "strong delusion." It presumes the use of "all power"--not the "all power given to Jesus, but the power given to Satan.

There are several statements made in Scripture that make me uncomfortable with the thought that Satan cannot really work a miracle. John spoke of demons who "worked miracles" (Rev 16:14). Jesus said false prophets would come who would show "great signs and wonders" (Matt 24:24). They would be of such magnitude that, were it possible, they would deceive the very elect. I gather this involved more than merely clouding the mind with some form of rhetoric. I do not know that speeches in any form are ever called "great signs and wonders." This is something they would offer in substantiation of their lying message. It is their message that made their signs and wonders "lying." Anything that is not united with ultimate reality is, in fact, a lie--whether it be a sign, wonder, deed, word.

Again, John wrote of the false prophet that "wrought miracles" by which he deceived those who had aligned themselves with the Lord's enemy (Rev 19:20). He uses the same word that is used for Christ's miracles (sameia).

A "lying wonder" is a kind, or category, of wonder. It is not a description of something that is not a wonder.

The Scriptures do not make miracles the acid test of truth. Moses warned of one who claimed to be a prophet or dreamer. If he gave a sign or a wonder, and it came to pass--and if he then told the people to go after other gods, they were not to hearken to him. The Lord was trying them, to know whether they loved him with all of their heart (Deut 13:1-3). Of course, our Lord also warned of false prophets and false christs who would do the same thing (Matt 24:24).

The words "miracles," "signs," and "wonders" are not, therefore, confined to the glorious working of our Lord. Moses spoke of such things in an evil sense, as well as Jesus, Paul, and John. This category of works, transcendant to nature, are designed to deceive--that is what makes them "lying."

God does uphold all things by the word of His power. Amen! That is why the devil can do nothing unless it is given to him to do so. There are occasions, however, when he does receive such power. He is, in the end, a vassal of the Lord.

How do you know there is a GOD?

The Scriptures assume man has an innate persuasion that there is a God. The first chapter of Romans indicts the world for suppressing this knowledge, as evidenced by the creation (Romans 1:18-26).

There, it affirms God's "invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (verse 20). The orderliness and precision of the universe testify to an orderly and deliberate God. Mankind, however, "refused to retain God in their knowledge," and thus He became obscure to them.

The real question is not "How do you know there is a God," but "What would lead me to believe there is not." The presence of the precise universe and the intelligence of mankind are proofs of God--just as surely as the paintings of a great artist are proof of him. Our minds should tell us that orderliness can no more come from chaos than an unabridged dictionary could fly out of an explosion in a print factory. The creation, then, proves there is a God. That is also the teaching of Psalms 19:1-4. There are more proofs, but that is the emphasis of Scripture.

IF there is a GOD how do you know if He is the God of the Bible?

One of the ministries of the Lord Jesus is the exposition, or opening up, of God. He is the One who can convince our hearts that the God of the Bible is the true God. Here is how Jesus said it, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11:27). Unless, therefore, the Lord Jesus makes this matter clear to us, we simply will not know. Now the question arises, If the only person knowing the identity of the Father is the one Jesus chooses to reveal Him to, how can we be that person? The Lord Jesus goes on to answer that very question. He confirms that He actually WANTS confirm to truth of God to people. You probably have heard this verse. Jesus went on to say, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my

yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt 11:28-30).

Putting it all together, the answer to your question is, one must come to Jesus about this matter. By reading the Word of God and then going to Christ, your niece will receive the answer. He said, "Learn from me!" He will be "gentle" in His teaching if she is willing in her heart.

I know there are academic proofs presented for the existence of God, and strong theological arguments for Him being the God of the Bible. But there is no place of learning like at the feet of Jesus. Those of us who have come to Him can attest that this is the truth.

I was baptized at the age of 10, I'm now 61 and came back to the Lord at the age of 50. I don't know if I knew the importance of baptism at the age of 10. Should I have a second baptism now (I'm talking immersion)?

There is only "one baptism" (Eph 4:5). Knowing the importance and full meaning of baptism is not necessary when one is baptized. If it was, no one could be baptized. All of the doctrine on baptism is addressed to people who had already been baptized (Rom 6:1-8; Gal 3:27-28; Col 2:11-12; 1 Pet 3:21). In other words, far more happened when we were baptized than we thought.

When a person falls into sin, or leaves the Lord, then returns, it is not necessary to be baptized again. When God has graciously granted you repentance, and you have returned to Him, your acknowledgement of the truth is what pleases Him. It also restores you to His favor. This is taught in Second Timothy 2:24-26. Notice in that passage that those recovering themselves were not said to

have been rebaptized. It is sufficient for you to have confessed your sins, knowing He is faithful and just to forgive your sin, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

This situation is pictured in Christ's words to Peter when he refused to let Jesus wash his feet. Jesus replied to him, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet" (John 13:8-10), In your baptism, you were fully "washed" (Acts 22:16). When you returned, you did not require that washing again, but only the washing of your feet--or the part of you that had become defiled.

Other passages on believers who have left the Lord, and recover are: Gal 6:1-2; James 5:19-20; Rev 2:5. As you will see, none were counselled to be baptized again.

I am greatly pleased by your return to the Lord, and your obvious desire to please Him. God has received you with joy.

Is it wrong for Christians to watch Star Wars? I've heard both sides of the argument. What do you think?

This is an area of conscience, in which one believer cannot dictate to another one. Each one has a personal view of the matter--but that is precisely what it is, a PERSONAL view. On matters like this, the Scriptures affirm, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). In that particular text he was speaking of matters regarding eating meat and the observance of specific days. Both were matters of conscience, not revelation. The Lord asks you to do whatever you do before Him, always aware of His eye being upon you (Col 3:17). That is intensely personal, and we must

keep it just that way. If, in the process, our minds are contrary to the mind of the Lord, and IF we maintain a good conscience, the Word says, "if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you" (Phil 3:15). All of us must be willing to depend upon that taking place.

Why is Balaam spoken of in such a bad way in the NT (2Pet.2; 15) and (Rev. 2; 14). ? When I read the story of Balaam in the OT, it seems he did everything exactly as God commanded him and even refused to waver a little bit in obeying the voice of the Lord.

Balaam is one of those mysterious prophets of Scripture--by that I mean, his real person does not stand out. The Word does tell us enough, however, to show that his heart was something less than devoted to God. He had some fear of the Lord, but it did not dominate him. He spoke for wages, not for the Lord. That is what 2 Peter 2:15 and Jude 11 emphasize. Simply put, he loved money more than God. Rather than seeking to bless the people of God, he actually taught Balak that if that wicked king could seduce the Israelites into committing fornication with heathen women, the curse of God would be upon them. That is what Balak wanted--for Balaam to "curse this people for me" (Num 22:6). Balaam knew he could not simply curse the people God had blessed. Therefore, it is written, he "taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel" (Rev 2:14). Of his despicable action it is written, "but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet 2:16).

Why is Lucifer called the Day Star in the OT and the NT refers to when the 'day star ' arises in our hearts? I dont have the reference right now, but it is there.

The term "Day Star" only appears one time in Scripture, and it applies to Jesus (1 Pet 1:19). He is also called the "Morning Star," or one that shines even in the daylight (Rev 2:28; 22:16). That peculiar prophet Balaam also foretold a "Star" coming out of Jacob, which was the Lord Jesus Christ (Num 24:17).

Satan is never called a "star." In a prophecy about the fall of Satan, Isaiah affirmed the devil once said, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God" (Isa 14:12). Ezekiel referred to him as once being "the anointed cherub" (Ezek 28:14). It is also written Satan "was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness" (Ezek 28:17). That is as close as it comes to calling him a star--but he is never called one, much less the "Day Star."

What is "Spiritual Discernment"? Is it one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The phrase "spiritual discernment" is not found anywhere in the Word of God--in any version. One time, the Scriptures mentions a gift placed within the church as "discerning of spirits" (1 Cor 12:10). That was the ability to detect a false spirit, even though it appeared to be a true one. Paul told us some of Satan's ministers are transformed into "ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:15). That is, they look like they were really from God--and even their words seem to justify that conclusion. But they are NOT from God, but come from Satan. The "discerning of spirits" involves detecting who they really are. It also involves knowing who really came from God.

One of the classic examples of the discerning of spirits is found in the book of Acts. While Paul and his brethren were in Ephesus, they confronted a woman who had an evil spirit. It was a spirit of

"divination" which granted unlawful knowledge to the possessed woman. When she saw Paul, she cried out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation." You could not be more accurate than that! But Paul discerned it was an evil spirit speaking, and not God's Spirit. After "many days, "Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour." (Acts 16:16-18). While what the evil spirit said, speaking through the woman, was technically correct, the message actually drew attention to Satan's kingdom rather than God's.

Elaborate on Spiritual Discernment as much as possible, and give me Bible references.

Spiritual discernment is not a special gift, but something available to all of God's people. It is understanding that comes from the Holy Spirit shedding light on what God has said. Scripture informs us the "natural man" (the man who is NOT born again) cannot understand the things of the Spirit of God--Scripture, or what God has revealed. The things God has revealed, it goes on to say, are "spiritually discerned." The text then elaborates by saying the Holy Spirit takes the things of God and opens them up to us. That is when they are "spiritually discerned" (1 Cor 14-16).

When we eat at the Lord's table, we are also to "discern the Lord's body," or understand what happened when He died, bearing our sins in His body on the tree (1 Cor 11:29; 1 Pet 2:24). That is speaking of understanding, when the truth makes sense to us.

Another phrase meaning the same thing is "spiritual understanding." Again, this is something from all of believers. In fact, Paul prayed that believers would be given this blessing. He

also says it is necessary to walk pleasing before the Lord (Col 1:9-10).

The same thing is called the "eyes of our understanding being enlightened" in Ephesians 1:17-20. This occurs when the Lord helps us to see what he had actually revealed to us in the Gospel. We need His help to see it. Apart from His influence, and before we are born again, the "eyes of our understanding are darkened" (Eph 4:18).

This should suffice to confirm to you that discernment is something all of God's people must have. There are special measures of it given to some who are able to detect what is coming from God and what is not in unusual cases. There had better, however, be no pretending in this critical area.

I am substituting for our Sunday school superintendant on Sunday at and am looking for a brief, appropriate devotional to use for Memorial Day weekend. Any suggestions?

I do not have such a devotional in print. It is difficult to find much in Scripture about national holidays, such as Memorial Day. I think I would approach it from two perspectives. Jesus once said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). it is also written, "For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:7-8).

Some thought could be developed on the exemplary conduct of those who gave their lives for their country. That is a rare and noble sacrifice, as the above texts indicate. There is, however, an

even more notable sacrifice found in Christ, who gave Himself for His "enemies" (Rom 5:10).

I am sure you will be able to weave these two threads of thought together for a profitable reminder to the people. May the Lord bless you in the effort.

Is there a difference between a "disciple" and being "saved." Someone told me they were the same.

They are not the same. A disciple is a "learner" or student-- someone who learns from someone else. Today, we would call a disciple a "pupil." Jesus spoke of a disciple not being above his teacher, or not being greater than the one teaching him (Matt 10:24-25. Jesus' enemies said they were "Moses' disciples" (John 9:28)--they were not saved. The Pharisees also had disciples (Matt 22:15-16)--they were not saved. John the Baptist had disciples (Mark 2:18)--some of them were not saved. On one occasion, Paul found "certain disciples" in Ephesus who had been followers of John the Baptist, yet were not saved. After preaching to them, they believed and were saved (Acts 19:1-10). One time, after Jesus spoke to a great number of His own disciples, some of them left Him, following Him no more. It is written, "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66).

As you can see, you can be a disciple, and NOT be saved. A true disciple of Jesus is one who follows Him and learns from Him. All saved people are disciples, but all disciples are not saved. Some people are not disciples of Jesus, but of some other man. Some of Jesus' disciples are just curious, and have not yet received Him as Savior--like the disciples that left Jesus in John 6.

A "saved" person is someone who not only learns from Jesus, but willingly and heartily serves Him also. It is someone Jesus has received (Rom 15:7), whose sins are washed away, and whose name is written in heaven.

Do those who are not born again have no spirit, since they have not Jesus? I wonder...

We are not yet fully joined to the Lord -- only our essential being, our spirit is. It is obvious your body is not yet one with Him. It will be, however, in the resurrection. It should also be obvious the soul is not joined to the Lord either, because it is capable of gross thought and imaginations that must be cast down. Remember, whatever is born of God "cannot sin" (1 John 3:9). Whatever part of us, therefore, that is capable of sin has not yet been "born of God." That is why we have to "possess" our souls (Lk 21:19), and exhort them (Psa 42:5,11; 43:5).

The person who is not born again does have a spirit. It is alienated from God., however, and an enemy to God (Eph 4:18; Col 1:21). In that sense, the unsaved are "dead" in their spirits. That is why they are called "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1) and "dead in sins" (Eph 2:5; Col 2:13). "Dead" does not mean non-existent, but separated from, and unresponsive to. The body apart from the spirit is dead (James 2:26), but it is not nonexistent. We offer "life" to such people. That is when the Lord "quickens" or makes them alive--the same thing He gracious did for us (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13).

What about the "Investigative Judgment" view of the Seventh Day Adventists? I am an Adventist, yet am having trouble with this teaching. ??

You are certainly not the only one having difficulty with the "Investigative Judgment" theory. It is not taught in Scripture, nor is there the slightest allusion to the restoration of the Sabbath day, or the heresy of observing the first day of the week.

This is purely the "doctrine of men," with no other basis than human tradition. Neither John the Baptist, Jesus, nor the Apostles taught the Sabbath day was to be kept. Jesus rose again on the first day of the week, made his two appearances to the disciples on that day, and the day of Pentecost was on that day. All of those occasions were when Divine activity took place.

The Investigative Judgment fabrication traces its beginning to (in the words of William Diehl) "the birth of the Advent movement." It is said to have "eternal consequences," even though there is not a syllable of Scripture concerning it. Even though the Word of God makes no reference to a Reformation movement, those embracing the Investigative Judgment affirm it is the "final Reformation movement to finish the restoration of the sanctuary.

While boasting affiliation with the Lord Jesus, the seventh day position requires neither Jesus, an atonement, or the presence of the Holy Spirit. It has not requirement for the Apostolic writings, which make absolutely no mention of it at all.

With seeming authority, the proponents of this view say God made no issue of the Sabbath day until the Advent movement surfaced. Then, they say, "God winked at the error of the Sunday Sabbath of past generations." Now, however, after over 1800 years of "winking," God is calling upon all to "repent and accept the new light of Christ, a division in the sense of judgment." Mind you, we have absolutely no record of Jesus ever saying anything like what these people affirm. With pretended authority they say, "God will no longer wink at the error of past generations."

The whole position is complicated by the fact the church is built

upon the foundation of the "Apostles and prophets" (Eph 2:20), neither of which said anything about "Investigative judgment." Mind you, during the very formation of the church, when multitudes were being garnered from the Gentile world, which knew nothing about the Sabbath day, the holy Apostles did not say one word about the Sabbath day requirement. They did not give the slightest hint that those failing to observe it were in error.

So, my dear brother, you do well to question the doctrine. It is a lie, having nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus, God, the Spirit, the Scriptures, or salvation. We are "complete in Him" (Col 2:10), not in Sabbath keeping.

What is friendship...esp. Biblical Friendship

One who supports and is close to another. It is paralleled with being a brother (Psa 35:14). In Christ, a friend with whom we can share our deepest and most personal thoughts. that, of course, is what Jesus does with His people, as affirmed in John 15:15.

Appeasing the wrath of God sounds primitive.

There are two things that tend to elude humanity. First, the depth to which man fell when he sinned. Second, the extent to which God has gone to bring reconciliation. Both of these perspectives are recurring themes in Scripture. Theological views, and other human opinions, must be sifted through the Word of God.

While I mean no disrespect, it appears you are filtering key Scriptural terms like "atonement," "the wrath of God," "sacrifice," etc., through human philosophies and perceptions. This is not an innocent gesture. Such an approach clouds the nature of God and

the nature of sin--both of which must be comprehended to acquire any measurable degree of atonement.

Throughout the Levitical system, the Living God developed the concept of atonement, or reconciliation. The concept was vividly depicted in overt actions that involved sacrifice and the shedding of blood. The word "atonement" is mentioned 105 times in the NIV, 88 times in the NASB, 87 times in the NRSV, and 99 times in the NKJV. The word itself means to cover, placate, atone, and reconcile. It simply is not possible to read Moses and the Prophets without an acute awareness of both the word and concept of atonement, both of which were developed by God Almighty. To brush aside these remarkably abundant inspired references as though they were "primitive" is certainly not characteristic of faith.

When the Holy Spirit expounded the atonement wrought by Christ, He referred back to the sacrifices ordained under the Law. There are at least 152 references to the death of Christ within the context of atonement developed under the Law. They include the expressions "a ransom for many," "the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world," "the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," "God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood," "Who was delivered up because of our transgressions," "reconciled to God through the death of His Son," and countless others (Matt 20:28; John 1:29; Rom 3:24,25; 4:25; 5:10). No amount of human reasoning, however astute, can remove these Divine affirmations. Such reasoning can, however, deprive the soul of the benefits of Christ's reconciling death.

The atonement, as presented in God's word, is not a matter for discussion, however treasured such exchanges may be. The atonement, or reconciliation, is to be received, not bantered about in powerless discussion. That is why it is written, "And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Rom

5:11).

I do not know if I speak for others or not, and really do not care. I would, however, like to hear more exulting in God through the Lord Jesus, through Whom we have received the reconciliation. Unless that can be done, I am afraid extended discussion will only throw a shroud over our Lord's great salvation.

"Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female." - Genesis 7:2. I could not find anything on the subject of clean and unclean animals prior to this verse. I wonder if God would have given prior directives that we do not find recorded.

There is nothing in God's Word prior to this concerning clean and unclean animals. It must be remembered that Genesis was written by Moses nearly 800 years after the flood. While it was no doubt written with some of the distinctions revealed under the Law, the actual existence of "clean" and "unclean" categories among animals did apparently exist from the beginning. I do not know that a special revelation was given to Noah on this. I am of the opinion the nature of each animal was reflected in the names given to them by Adam. At the time he named them, Adam was in an unfallen state, characterized by keen wisdom. In fact, this was the very first task assigned to Adam (Gen 2:19-20). The names given by him were appropriate. Thus it is written, "whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Gen 2:19).

Throughout the Scriptures, both people and things were named in accordance with their nature and character. I assume, therefore, the very names of the animals reflected their clean and unclean status.

Secondly, throughout the world, even where God is not known, there is a general awareness of the difference between clean and unclean; i.e., between a dove and a vulture, or a sheep and a hyena, etc.

To my mind, God established the family as the first and most fundamental of all human relationships, the very basic element of society.

In a sense this is true, but human relationships are subordinate to spiritual ones. In Christ we "are come" to higher and eternal relationships (Heb 12:22-24).

I know of no place where Jesus or the Apostles presented the view that the family unit was the basis human relationship. In fact, Jesus spoke quite to the contrary. "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Lk 14:33). "For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW; and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matt 10:36-38). Again, He said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

I understand this by no means allows for the neglect or abuse of

one's family. In fact, those who do not provide for their own have denied the faith and are "worse than an infidel" (1 Tim 5:8).

One thing it does confirm, however, that the family is not the most fundamental of all human relationships. Nor, indeed, was it when the first one was established. The first relationship was between Adam and God. The second was between Adam and Eve. The fundamental relationship is the one for which all competing interests must be forfeited if required. It is the one that must not be abandoned, upon which the destiny of men depends.

Even when young, Jesus practiced correct priorities. He had to "be about" His father's business. This did not make Him insensitive to family relationships. He did provide for His blessed mother while in the process of being cursed for humanity. On another occasion, when His mother and brothers sought to draw him away from His ministry, He claimed the superior relationship was with those hearing His Word. "And He answered them, saying, Who is My mother, or My brethren? And He looked round about on them which sat about Him, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and Mother" (Mark 3:33-35).

The church is by no means dependent upon the solidity of families. That is something men have concocted, and it is wholly without a single word of support from God's Word. If that were the case, Timothy could not have been the giant of the faith that he was, having no believing father. As for that, right among Jesus' disciples was a twin, Thomas. I have often wondered where the other twin was.

The New Testament was written during a time when the families were anything but solid. The church at Corinth, as you will recall, had questions about marriage that were carefully addressed. Understanding there was some impending test before them ("the

present crisis," 1 Cor 7:26), the Apostle even spoke of marriage as a handicap under certain conditions (7:32-34). I understand the reference being to the stress brought upon those under persecution when they thought of their mates, even to the neglect of their faith. However, such things could not have been said were the family the fundamental relationship.

The approach of the Lord to the family is always within the context of redemption--redemption is never within the context of the family. Even in the well known Ephesian passage concerning husbands and wives, the Spirit adds, "This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). Believers were to be acutely sensitive about marring the representation of Christ and His church that has been Divinely woven into the fabric of marriage. Neither, indeed, are husbands to fail to "love their wives," and wives to "revere their husbands." Peter also spoke of husbands being considerate of their wives so that "their prayers may not be hindered" (1 Pet 3:7). There is no question which relationship was fundamental--husbands were to see their wives primarily as "heirs together of the grace of life."

To my knowledge, there is no special commendation given to any congregation for having tightly knit and loving families. There are, however, frequent commendations for the love they had "to all saints" (Eph 1;15; Col 1;4; Phile 5,7; Heb 6:10). In fact, the indication of being Christ's disciple is not having love for our family, but that believers "have love one for another" (John 13;35).

There is never a departure from this perspective. Superior human relationships are between those who are related in Christ Jesus. That relationship transcends all others, and is to be maintained at all cost.

Satan has, indeed, attacked the fabric of the home, and I am against that. Infidelity, incest, abuse, abandonment, inconsideration, etc.,

are wrong and intolerable. They reveal a wicked heart and alienation from God. There is to be absolutely no tolerance of such things, and repentance from, and abandonment of, these things, is mandatory.

A person who fellowships with God, living by faith and walking in the Spirit, will be the very best husband, wife, and child.

Conversely, being a good husband, wife, or child does not move the individual one millimeter closer to God. It does not purify the heart, tune the conscience, or make one more productive toward God. Multitudes of believers have their faith eroded in their homes, where unity in Christ does not exist. They find refuge among the saints, kindred spirits who are fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life. If the family is the most basic and fundamental coalition of personalities, these things simply could not be true.

I hope I have not rambled on this, or led you to believe I am insensitive toward my blessed family. I am, however, strongly against emphases foisted upon the church that are wholly without Divine commendation or revelation. The churches primary role is to be "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15). As it nurtures the saints, they will become competent in addressing the difficulties or challenges they face on the home front.

What must a person do to be saved?

That question is asked, in precisely that way, one time in the Bible. The answer given is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household" (Acts 16:31). This answer is a summation, which entails several matters. For one thing, the person asking the question had not yet heard the Gospel of Christ. The next verse, therefore, reads, "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house" (Acts 16:32). Within

the very same hour, it is said, "And immediately he and all his family were baptized" (Acts 16:33).

Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Peter told those who asked him "What shall we do?", "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). To an political official who inquired why he could not be baptized, Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.' So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him" (Acts 8:37-38).

So what must a person do? He must first and foremost believe what God has said about Christ Jesus, His only begotten Son (believe--Acts 16:31). Believing that will compel the person to do whatever the Lord requires. Specifically, He requires an abandonment of sin (repentance--Acts 2:38), confessing we believe Jesus is the Son of God (I believe--Acts 8:38,) and baptism into Christ (be baptized--Mark 16:16).

That puts a person into Christ. Then one must work out his own salvation fear and trembling, knowing God Himself is working within him (Phil 2:12-13). This involves resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:8-9; James 4:7), being faithful unto death (Rev 2:10), and striving for perfection (2 Cor 7:1-2; Heb 6:1). The reason for these requirements is that we are not in heaven yet. However, the Lord desires for us to be, and will assist us through His Holy Spirit to finish our lives triumphantly.

Something is drastically wrong, though, when - according to statistics published in the media - divorce and abortion are as common in church members as in the general public!

This is a tragic circumstance. I have very strong persuasions on the matter. The condition is certainly not owing to any deficiency in the power of the Gospel, the ineffectiveness of faith, or the insufficiency of required Divine resources. I do feel, however, that it is owing to the modern agenda that has been adopted by the contemporary church. It simply is not enabling people to be rooted and grounded in the faith. Strong confidence is almost unheard of in our churches. Scriptural illiteracy is so dominant it is staggering. There has been a shift in emphasis to meeting people's perceived "needs." Powerful preaching, the Divinely ordained means of saving those who believe, has given way to everything from counseling to specialized ministries for the young, the old, the married, the single . . . etc. It has all contributed immensely to career and academic development. Wherever I go, and whatever kind of church I am granted to speak in, I find conditions virtually the same. The saints are largely neglected.

All of this has yielded the immoral circumstances we have before us--at least it has contributed measurably to them. People living in gross immorality, and acquiescing in divorce (which God Almighty has said He hates), can sit comfortably in most services without a twinge of conscience. Such, however, was not the case with those who heard Jesus and the Apostles.

I once asked a question while preaching in college chapel. It was never answered. "If God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit were suddenly to either die or totally withdraw from humanity, would our program still continue?" While I do reserve the right to be wrong, and certainly hope I am, I am persuaded it would not change very much at all. Until, by choice, life CANNOT be lived without fellowship with Jesus, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9),

it cannot and will not be lived acceptably. God Himself does not govern His Kingdom without Jesus, having placed all things into His hand. He certainly will not honor any endeavor that does not rely implicitly and consistently upon Him.

Is it wrong for churches to address the special problems of divorced people?

This is certainly not wrong. It is HOW the problems are addressed that is the issue. The church cannot depart from the revealed agenda of God in order to meet people where they are. Its role is to lift people into the realm where spiritual power and Divine blessings are realized. That is in "the heavenly places." God does not throw us blessings, but personally gives them to us within the framework of "the knowledge of God," or our personal involvement with Him. That is the circumstance to which Peter referred when he wrote, "as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him" (2 Pet 1:3).

Sin rises when people do not walk in the Spirit--when they leave their "First love." The Lord affirms, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). That is the unwavering truth, and it is not possible for a single individual on the earth to "walk in the Spirit," and fulfill the lusts of the flesh. For those who have been caught in the wake of other's transgressions (like sister Vanita), their faith needs to be strengthened. Their hearts must be assured of their acceptance by God, and that He does not hold them responsible for the sins of others that have swept over them. Their hearts must be assured that everything God has given us in Christ still belongs to them. They must be helped back up into the "heavenly places," where "all spiritual blessings" are found (Eph 1:3,6).

The genius of this is that the believer is thereby brought within the circumference of Divine influence. There, together with their Lord, they can address their problems without the partial knowledge of a so-called professional. In the last analysis, every individual must work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. No one else can do that for us--and we cannot do it unless we are brought within the realm where God can work in us both to will and to do of His own good pleasure. The Gospel is still "the power of God." Faith is still "the victory that overcomes the world." The Holy Spirit still "helps our infirmities, making intercession for us in unutterable groanings. The holy angels are still our ministers. The Lord Jesus still lives to make intercession for us. The Father's eyes are still upon the righteous, and His ears are still open to their cries. But all of this is of no avail if we are not made conscience of it. That is the job of the church. It simply is not possible to live in union with God and be dominated by sin or sorrow at the same time.

Can you lose salvation? This is one I struggle with.

Salvation cannot be "lost." Nor, indeed, can anyone take it from us. That does not mean, however, that we are locked into salvation when we enter Christ. Salvation is obtained and maintained by faith, and faith must be fed and maintained. At the point a person ceases to believe, he ceases to possess salvation, for we are saved "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8-10). A person can make "shipwreck of their faith," dashing it upon the rocks of neglect and indifference (1 Tim 1:19). The faith must be "kept" until the end (2 Tim 4:7).

Jesus spoke of some who believed "for a while" (Lk 8:13). They

got off to a good start, but did not "go on to perfection" (Heb 6:1). That is why God says, "Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him. But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb 10:38-39).

All of this does not mean we are in and out of salvation. Faith is the victory that overcomes the world, although it sometimes grows faint and even weary (1 John 5:4-5). As long as the individual IS believing, there is nothing in heaven, earth, or under the earth that can separate the individual from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:36-39). If, however, faith is neglected, and one ceases to believe and trust in the Lord, ones grip on salvation becomes loose. Every one who IS believing is safe. Everyone who is NOT now believing is in danger of rejection by the Lord. Eternal life, it must be remembered, is knowing god and the Lord Jesus Christ--knowing them intimately and personally (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20). Salvation is as secure as our knowledge of, or involvement with, the Lord by faith.

What is the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

The text certainly confirms that all sin is not the same, as some imagine. Our Lord does not precisely define this sin--or state that it is a specific action or deed. It is not something that can be done inadvertently, accidentally, or ignorantly. It is a condition that is deliberate, driven by a hardened heart and a hatred for truth and the Lord.

Our Lord's words were occasioned by the charge that He cast our demons by the power of Beelzebub, a term applied to Satan (Matt 12:24). The Scriptures do not say Jesus heard what the opponents (the Pharisees) SAID, although He may well have done so. Rather, we are told, "And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them . .

. " (Matt 12:25-32). He then unveiled the absurdity of thinking Satan would fight against himself by empowering anyone to cast out demons.

Demons are not the only spirit with which men must contend. There is also the Holy Spirit, who strives with men (Gen 6:3), convicts them (John 16:8-11), and opens the words of Jesus (John 16:13-15). Those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit repudiate His influences and degrade His Person. They are so calloused to His Presence that they deride Him like Pharaoh did God (Ex 5:2).

There is a line man can cross that makes his situation utterly hopeless, God has not identified that line, and we are out or line trying to identify it. However, He knows where it is. Once crossed, the person's state becomes "worse" than it ever was before (2 Pet 2:20). It is a condition from which recovery is not possible (Heb 6:4-6). This state is reached by refusing to give heed to the Spirit, choosing rather to quench and grieve Him (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30). Eventually, the point comes where the person becomes so hard and so calloused that even the Spirit of God cannot convict them. Such people are pictured as blaspheming against God even when He pours terrible judgments upon them (Rev 9:20; 16:9,11).

Those who "draw back," refusing to yield to the convincing power of the Spirit, are moving into a dreadful condition. Unless their backward movement and hard hearts are corrected, they will move into the realm where they willingly blaspheme against the Spirit, repudiating everything holy. Such people are said to be "reprobate" (Jer 6:30; 2 Tim 3:8; 2 Cor 13:5), with no hope of recovery. Judas was such a man.

If Jesus had identified the point at which this sin takes place, unthoughtful men would have lived as close to it as they could, thinking they could avoid it through sheer will power. However, when we take Jesus' word seriously, we will not tamper with our

souls, refuse His Word, or wander aimlessly in forbidden territories.

Any transgression has the potential of leading into the sin which never has forgiveness. No child of God is promised they can dabble in transgression without becoming insensitive to God and placing themselves in danger.

The sin that can never be forgiven is the result of hardening the heart, resisting the Spirit, and repeatedly refusing Christ Jesus. No man knows when it occurs, but God does.

One further thing. No person who is concerned about having committed this sin has committed it. Their concern reveals they are still sensitive to God, and their conscience is not "seared" (1 Tim 4:2).

Is smoking a sin? Bible referewnces would be helpful.

The Word of God does not say smoking is a sin. That is one of those things each person must decide for himself. It does say some things that assist the individual in making a choice that will honor God.

(1) Whatever we do it to be done in the name of the LORD, giving thanks to God (Col 3:17). Smoking, then, must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to Him.

(2) Whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23). This particular text deals with the conscience. It teaches that no person can do unto the Lord what they doubt is right. The persuasion of faith must accompany what they do. The person who smokes must do so with a good conscience, determined to honor God by it.

(3) Our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God is to be honored in our bodies (1 Cor 6:19-20). Although the particular sin of this passage is fornication, it does state a principle of spiritual life. Because our bodies were purchased by Jesus, He is to be honored by them. If a person would not mind a picture of Jesus with a cigaret or cigar in his mouth, then he probably could see nothing wrong with smoking.

(4) Whatever overcomes a person makes him a slave to it (2 Pet 2:19). Enslavement takes various forms. One can be a slave to false teaching, sin in general, or even a particular sin, like drunkenness. If a person can be overcome by smoking, becoming enslaved to it, it would be wrong.

The answers to most of these things are quite obvious to some of us. Others, however, have difficulty seeing any correlation between these texts and smoking. There is, however, a solemn obligation laid upon every individual to see to it they honor God in whatever they say or do, keep their bodies undefiled, and do nothing that does not easily blend with their walk with the Lord. That puts the matter squarely in the lap of every person. The decision to smoke or not to smoke is not one to be imposed by one person upon another. Rather, it is another area where we "work out our OWN salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12-13).

I have a great love for the truth ... there is still so much where I am surely still offensive to God How can one have a love of the truth, and still be in bondage to sinning?

You must remember you are two people in one body--a new man and an old man (Eph 4:22-24). Jesus has circumcised that old part from you (Col 2:11-12). It is really not you, but like a squirming

corpse is clinging to you. It is something every child of God contends with as long as they are in this world.

You have the "Spirit of life in Christ Jesus," but you also have "another law in your members, warring against the law of your mind and bringing you into captivity of sin and death" (Rom 7:23). This other law, or old man, is really not you. You know it is not because you are offended by its desires. That is what Paul meant when he said, "If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom 7:16-17).

You are under no obligation to obey this "old" part of you--even though it often seems extremely strong. Lift up your head now and rejoice. The existence of this "old man" only proves you have a "new man"--that is why he is exerting himself. The presence of conflict proves you have been justified. That is precisely why Romans 8:1 begins, "There is THEREFORE (in view of the conflict in 7:14-25) now NO condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus."

Your sensitivity is proof you belong to Jesus.

When people say becoming a true Christian what do they mean?

The term "true Christian" has been concocted by men. That is the reason it is difficult to understand. There is only one kind of Christian, just as there is only one Christ. I suppose people mean the opposite of a "true Christian" is a one who is a Christian in name only--another way of saying pretender.

Those in Christ do increase in their understanding of God and the Scriptures. The Word refers to this as the day dawning--when the

light comes on, so to speak, and what God has said makes sense. Here is how it is stated in 2 Peter 1:19. "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts." Prior to this, the person was in Christ, or a Christian, but did not see clearly.

There are people who claim to be in Christ who are not really in Him. But they are not really Christians any more than a false christ is really Christ.

I do not understand how God can make someone just to be a puppet and then be doomed to eternal separation (as in the ninth chapter of Romans).

God did not make certain individuals merely to be puppets, then destroy him. When, however, they choose to rebel against Him, becoming obstinate, as did Pharaoh, God ratifies their choice by hardening their heart. You will remember that Pharaoh hardened his heart first, then God confirmed it (Ex 8;15,32; 9;12).

The argument in Romans 9 confirms that men cannot circumvent God. When they attempt to overturn His counsels, He dashes them to the ground. Rather than them using Him, he uses them.

Romans 9:18 provides this explanation: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." Doctrines that teach this is done arbitrarily, without any consideration for the heart of the person involved, are in error. God has not kept from us those whom He wants to harden, and those upon whom He wants to show mercy. He is inclined to those with a humble and contrite heart (Psa 34:18; Isa 57:15). He is also repulsed by the prideful and hard of heart (James 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5).

When God has a work to do that is NOT for blessing, He uses the wicked (as with Neuchadnezzar in chastening Israel, Judas in betraying Jesus, and various adversaries He raised up to those of old (1 Kgs 11:14,23). This Divine tactic is even seen in the crucifixion of Jesus. Even though the Jews crucified Him through the hands of lawless men, Peter told them it was "according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Later, believers said in one of their prayers that the enemies gathered against Christ "For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done" (Acts 4:28).

Knowing the hearts of wicked people, God can maneuver them into positions where they can be used, like Pharaoh, to get great honor for Himself. In this He shows He is Sovereign. It does not mean the people had no will. It does mean God used their wicked wills for His purpose, not allowing them to ultimately serve their purposes. This aspect of the Lord's rule is mentioned in Second Timothy 2:20-21. Some people, like vessels, are for dishonorable use. It is because they themselves are dishonorable. We know this is the case, because those used for honorable purposes are admonished in this text to contribute to becoming ready for Divine use by cleansing themselves.

I realize this is a somewhat feeble explanation of a most profound truth. If these things cause us difficulties, then we must follow the example of Paul, who saw seemingly contradicting aspects of Divine judgment. He broke out in confession and praise, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Rom 11:33).

When a miracle happens to somebody even though they are non believers is that from God?

God has wrought many miracles for people who did not believe. The most obvious are the Israelites when they were delivered from Egypt. They all came out of bondage. They all passed through the Red sea. They all drank water from a rock, and were sustained by bread from heaven---but they did not all believe (1 Cor 10:1-10). Jesus also healed ten lepers, with only one returning to give thanks (Lk 17:12-17).

God's judgment will eventually be more harsh on the person who actually experienced something supernatural from God, yet continued in their unbelief.

If you are weak on a certain thing which makes you guilty because obviously that is a sin and you try your hardest not to do it but still does it and you do not want to hurt God but you repeatedly keep on asking for Gods forgiveness does he keep forgiving you?

God forgives when we repent and ask for forgiveness. That is the promise of 1 John 1:9. There is something else, however, that you must know. The secret to overcoming sins that tend to dominate us is not trying, but believing. God speaks about this particular kind of sin in Hebrews 12:1-2: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith . . . "

You lay the sin and weight aside just like the lame man picked up his bed and walked--believing you can do what Jesus says. If your

faith is weak, you pray like the father of an oppressed boy did to Jesus, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

One final word. Do your best to stay away from things that appeal to the sin that easily entangles you. Cut off the source of the temptation. God will honor your obedience in these matters. That sin is surfacing because you are in the place where it can easily speak to you.

How comes some people can heal themselves even though they haven't got God in their lives? I am a born again Christian and I have so much faith and I know that when I pray to God he hears me. God has made me a better person and I am so glad he is in my life but there is one thing I don't understand, I suffered from migraines for 11 years and last year I got prayed on and for a couple of months after that my migraines completely went but started slowly slowly coming back again, even now I don't get as many as I did before I got prayed on but once in a while I do get them how comes they come back?

No one heals themselves. All healing, regardless of the means used (prayer, faith, medicine, doctrine, etc.), comes from God. That is why the Bible says of God, "Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases" (Psa 103:3).

But healing is not the thing that proves someone is of God. Jesus healed a soldier's ear who came to arrest Him (Lk 22:50-51). That certainly did not mean that soldier was approved by God.

All people, sinners and saints, experience recovery from illness, accidents, etc. That is not the sign of whether a person is blessed or not. Paul had a sickness that he asked Jesus to take away. He asked Jesus to do it three times, but Jesus did not do it. Instead, He told

Paul He would give him grace to bear up under the infirmity (1 Cor 12:7-10). Instead of wondering why it was not taken away, Paul actually rejoiced in his infirmity, realizing that at that time He was being strengthened by Jesus.

Epaphroditus, a strong Christian worker, almost died in Paul's jail cell (Phil 2:25-27). Paul left Trophimus "sick at Miletum" (2 Tim 4:20). Sickness, whether your migraines, or some other illness, comes on us because our bodies are not yet saved. They will die--it does not make any difference who we are or what we have done. The body we receive at the resurrection will never be sick--but no such promise has been made concerning our present bodies.

Continue praying, and do not be discouraged when your body is not perfectly whole. That will not happen until we are raised from the dead. Until then, our bodies are our weakest part.

Looking at 1 Cor 15 and 1 Thess 4 concerning the resurrection of the dead. When a person dies, are they immediately with the Lord? If so, what about the dead in Christ raised first? Can you guide me to some of you studies that will help?

For the believer, to be "absent from the body" IS to be "present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). We will not be with Him, however, in the fullest sense of the word. Remember, there are three parts to our constitution: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). At this time, only the spirit has been regenerated. Our bodies and soul will be renewed in the resurrection. I understand the soul to be the expressive part of our persons, which includes our emotion, feeling, and intellect. All of those can be dominated by sin if we do not manage them in the power of the Spirit.

In the resurrection, we will receive a glorious body, like Christ's

(Phil 3:20-21). Then we will enjoy Him in the fullest sense. Until that time, departed saints are with the Lord, but not in the fullest degree God has appointed. We have not received a lot of information about that status. John saw the souls of martyrs under the altar. They were restless and longing for their blood to be avenged (Rev 6:9-11). They were in the same place as the Lord, but not in the ultimate position they would enjoy.

I cover some of these things in my series on "Our House From Heaven." You can access it by the following link:
<http://wotruth.com/down-6.htm>.

Somewhat related, what about the "New heaven and the New earth? If a person dies and is in heaven, will the be moved somehow to the "New heaven?" This question came up in a Bible study.

John saw the glorified church "coming down out of heaven from God." He described it as a holy city, the New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev 21:1-2). At that time, God will bring together everything in heaven and earth, something He determined before the foundation of the world to do (Eph 1:10).

Yes, the glorified church, or the redeemed from all ages, will occupy and rule the new heaven and earth. That is the "earth" Jesus promised the meek would inherit. God Himself will then join them in this renewed realm (Rev 21:3).

There is much about this that has not been made perfectly clear. But enough has been revealed for us to know those with Christ now, will be brought with Him when He returns (1 Thess 4:14). They will then be united with their resurrected bodies, and will finally occupy the new heaven and earth.

Why be involved in church? isn't our relationship to the Lord a personal thing?

God places us in Christ's body, through whom Jesus ministers to us. That is the focus of Ephesians 4:11-16 and Colossians 2:19. While being in Christ is a personal thing, it is more than that. We ourselves are not the bride of Christ, but a part of that bride. We have not been given everything God has to offer, but rather a "measure of faith"--a part of the whole that is beneficial to the rest of the members of His body (Rom 12:3ff).

A saved person trying to make it on their own, unless circumstance has placed them in such a condition (like those imprisoned, or John on Patmos, etc.), is like trying to keep a live coal burning apart from the rest of the coals. We are being built up together as a habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph 20-22). Scripture affirms no part of Christ's body can say they have no need of the other parts (1 Cor 12:21-22).

Following our study last week, we have more questions concerning the differences between body, soul, and spirit, especially the soul and spirit. Where in the Scriptures do we find the distinction made between the two?

The distinction is not given in an academic way. First Thessaonians 5:23 identifies them as separate, and Hebrews 4:12 declares the Word of God can distinguish between the two. The two words are used together in the following texts. 1 Sam 1:15; Job 7:11; Isa 26:9. The most definitive verse, in my judgment, is found in 1 Corinthians 15:45 in which Christ is compared with Adam. "The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam

became a life-giving spirit." Christ brings transformation at a deeper level--the spirit, which we understand is the essential person, created in the image of God. There is where stability and solidity in the faith is realized.

The soul fluctuates, moving between despair and rejoicing. Often David would admonish his soul, which was cast down (Psa 42:5,11; 43:5). Jesus taught us we could lose our own soul (Matt 16:26). No such thing is said of our spirit, or essential person. Jesus also taught us to possess, or manage, our soul (Lk 21:19). In this latter verse, some of contemporary versions translate the word *psuche* as "lives." It is my understanding that "*psuche*" refers to our abilities of expression, where spirit (*pneuma*) refers to the part of us that is in the image of God. That word (*pneuma*), as you probably know, is the same used for the Holy Spirit, who is never called "*psuche*."

Why did Jesus give an option of believing in him or at least on the works that he did?

Believing is not an option--it is the only acceptable response to Him. The reason for this is that everything required for salvation was accomplished behind the scenes, so to speak. The only evidence of the effectiveness of Christ's death is the message of the Gospel--something to be believed. The removal of sin, the defeat of the devil, the removal of the Law that was against us, and the reconciliation of the world to God, were all achieved in an unseen way (John 1:29; Col 2:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal 3:13). None of them could be attested to by the natural senses.

When Jesus said, "If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him" (John 10:37-38), He was challenging people to see that what He did was in perfect harmony with what had been revealed

about God. He was requiring them to believe God had sent Him, and that He was not an impostor. Remember, the people had just finished charging Him with being an impostor, saying He really did not come from God. "The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God" (John 10:33). Our Lord's answer was telling them this was a most foolish statement.

Everything about Him pointed to God--what he said and what he did. To put it another way, there was nothing about Him, his words, or His works, that could lead to the conclusion He was not the Son of God. Because they were unbelieving, He told them to believe that what He was doing was of God. That sort of honest-heartedness would bring them to the point where they would believe in Him, and thus be saved.

Why is the "second coming" not corresponded to the resurrected Christ three days afterward when this would have been "is come in the flesh"?

The second coming of Christ is a global and public event, not a provincial or private one. When he comes again "every eye shall see Him," even those who pierced Him (Rev 1:7). As the disciples saw Him ascend up into heaven, they were told they would see Him come again, just as they had seen Him leave (Acts 1:11). That was AFTER He had spent time with them following His resurrection.

His return will not be secret like His resurrection was. It will be attended by His own shout, the voice of the arch angel, and the trumpet of God (1 Thess 4:16; 1 Cor 15:52). Then, the dead will be raised and the living changed into a state of incorruption, as death is swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:52-54). None of this occurred when Jesus rose from the dead. In fact, no one saw Him actually

rise from the dead. He appeared after His resurrection to his disciples, and not during His resurrection. Further, the world never again saw Him after He died. That is why, on the evening of His betrayal, He told His disciples, "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also" (John 14:19).

Thus, the resurrection of Jesus does not fulfill the promise of His second coming. When He appears again, He will change our vile bodies, that they may be like unto His (Phil 3:20-21).

Is it wrong to be an organ donor? If it is wrong then is it wrong to accept organ transplants?

There is nothing in the word of God on this subject. Like several other issues, it is a matter of conscience. Each believer is responsible for being "fully persuaded" in their own minds on matters like this (Rom 14:1-5). When God has not provided directions on an aspect of life, no individual can dictate to another on what is proper.

This is a case where James' counsel is appropriate. "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him" (James 1:5). That honest prayer, coupled with a fervent desire to honor the Lord in our decisions, will yield an acceptable answer to you.

"...the sun will be darkened, and the moon will turn red as blood, before the great and glorious Day of the Lord comes. And then, whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved." - Acts 2:20b-21.

What about calling out to the Lord? How does that match up with abiding in the Lord? Obeying His commands, keeping the testimony of Jesus? What is the difference between that time and now? Will not the same teachings from scripture apply to people then as it applies to us now? Commands, warnings promises and all? >>

In a nutshell, Joel's prophecy affirmed that salvation would be brought to humanity before an end was brought to time. The world would not end without the promise made by God were fulfilled. The Seed that would bruise the serpent's head would come, as promised (Gen 3:15). All nations would be blessed as promised (Gen 18:18; 22:18).

On Pentecost Peter is announcing the era of salvation was beginning. What was occurring did not fulfill everything Joel prophesied (like the sun being darkened and the moon turning into blood--parabolic language denoting the end of the world). The promised blessing--salvation--had finally arrived. It was not discriminating, but for 'all flesh.' It was not confined to men or women, but was for 'young men and maidens.' It was not restricted to age, but was for 'young men and old men.'

Calling upon the name of the Lord is what initiates the process of being saved--a process only God can make effective. It is asking God to do what He promised He would do. It is relying upon the Lord. It is abandoning self-efforts, recognizing only the Lord can save. It is like a man sinking in the ocean crying out to the captain of an ocean liner, 'Help! Save me!' Calling upon the name of the Lord is an acknowledgment, or confession, that we have no other hope.

When the people cried out 'Men and brethren, what shall we do,' they were calling upon the name of the Lord. When the Ethiopian eunuch said, 'See, here is water, what doth hinder me from being

baptized?' he was calling upon the name of the Lord. When the Philippian jailor cried out, 'What must I do to be saved?' he was calling upon the name of the Lord.

Abiding in the Lord, obeying His commands, keeping the testimony of Jesus, etc., are all part of calling on the name of the Lord. They all evidence a relinquishment of self, and dependence upon the Lord. Calling upon the name of the Lord is like the door that opens to all of those things, enabling the person to do them.

There is no place--absolutely no place--in the Kingdom of God for not abiding in Christ, disobeying Him, or failing to keep His testimonies. However, none of those things can be done independently of Divine involvement. If the Lord does not come along side of us and help us, we simply will not get it done.

So, in faith, we continue to 'call upon the name of the Lord.' That is not a one time occurrence. Christians are described as 'all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours' (1 Cor 1:2). It is not something they once did, but something they continue to do. David well described the life of the believer when he wrote, 'I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD' (Psa 116:13).

Why is it more difficult for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of heaven than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle? (Matthew 19:24)

This is one of the remarkable sayings of Jesus. It highlights the absolute necessity of Divine involvement in salvation--particularly that of a rich man. The reason for the hardness of the matter is that a rich man has more of himself tied to this world. Riches are like a gigantic octopus that can take hold on a soul, dragging it down to

perdition. Paul put it this way, 'But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (1 Tim 6:9-10).

Some have suggested "a needle's eye" was a particular mountain pass through which camels often had to pass. In order to get through the pass, all of their packs had to be removed. The explanation sounds good to a novice, but is not true.

Jesus is affirming the IMPOSSIBILITY of a rich man being saved without God and Himself. As you suggest, this is also true of anyone who is saved. When Jesus made this provocative statement, the disciples replied, 'Who then can be saved?' They knew their Lord was talking about impossibilities from the earth's point of view. Christ's response: 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.' Thank God for a salvation that is possible with God! This is one of the remarkable sayings of Jesus. It highlights the absolute necessity of Divine involvement in salvation--particularly that of a rich man. The reason for the hardness of the matter is that a rich man has more of himself tied to this world. Riches are like a gigantic octopus that can take hold on a soul, dragging it down to perdition. Paul put it this way, 'But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows' (1 Tim 6:9-10).

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Every indicator of the approaching Judgment that Jesus mentioned had, according to Biblical accounts, taken place by the summer of AD 70 and places a 'check-mate' on any argument that Jesus is supposed to return at any time in our future. The game is over!

Please comment on your glorified body--the one that is fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. That is what the Spirit said would happen when Jesus appears (Phil 3:20-21). Also, tell what you have beheld when you saw Jesus as He is--that also is said to occur when He appears (1 John 3:1-2) -- and share about your own appearing, which will also occur then (Col 3:4).

It is interesting to me that the Son of man does not know the time of His return, but you do--and others who hold to the AD 70 delusion. To affirm the saints are presently glorified betrays a level of ignorance that is inexcusable. It also removes hope, by which we are being saved (Rom 8:24).

If, as you boast, "the game is over," then so is the fight. If that is true, there is no need to "fight the good fight of faith," "resist the devil," "mortify our members that are upon the earth," or "deny ungodliness." Such folly does not even need to be addressed. Any

honest heart knows there is no need for faith or hope if "the game is over." The fact that we still must "put on the whole armor of God" confirms the game is NOT over. Or--have you also removed your armor?

We do not want your view. It tells us we have what we all know we do not have, and robs us of faith and hope. I suggest you scrap the view at once, then you will "not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 John 2:28).

I want to ask, 'how do you know there is a God?' I have been struggling with this lately.

God is not known like we know there is a city Chicago, or that it is raining. He is known by faith--that is, by believing the testimony of His existence and Person. Nature testifies there is a God. The Bible tells us this in Psalm 19:1-4. Nature testifies to God much like a great painting testifies to the artist, or a good book to its author. The universe is orderly, precise in every way. For all of that to happen without an orderly God would be like an unabridged dictionary popping out of an explosion in a print factory.

Your own conscience testifies to the existence of God. The very fact that you are asking this question should tell you something. When God created man, He made him in His own likeness. Among other things, that means there is a deep hunger within humanity to find and know God. Humanity is incurably religious.

The Word of God also testifies to God. Through the Bible He has told us of Himself, what He is like, and what He desires.

In a nutshell, faith, or believing God, is itself the evidence of God. That is what the Bible means when it says, "Now faith is the

substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). The reason faith proves the matter is that God works through our faith. Faith is like a house God can work in, and produce the results you want. If your desire is to know there really is a God, then work on believing what He has said about Himself--especially through Jesus Christ. When believing seems difficult, follow the example of a man Jesus once challenged to believe. He said, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24). God will not let you down.

Please correct me if I am wrong, but I could not find that David "repented quickly" after his sin with Bathsheba. Actually what he did was after his sin with Bathsheba he accumulated his sin with premeditated murder.

The dreadful sin of placing Uriah at the forefront of the battle was BEFORE Nathan came. David DID repent as soon as Nathan gave him the message. The immediate response is recorded, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD. And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam 12:13).

The Lord honored David's repentance, and so should you. It is later said of this man after God's own heart, "David did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and had not turned aside from anything that He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kgs 15:5). That is a remarkable statement. It does not ignore what David did when he sinned against the Lord, but it does show he was sensitive--which was precisely my point.

How can I know that I am born again? I have asked Jesus forgiveness of my sin, but I have these doubts. I find it hard to

pray and read my bible. I want to do what God wants of me but I am confused.

Peter reminds us that baptism is an appeal to God for a good conscience--asking Him to remove any doubt that our sins are forgiven and we belong to Him. Baptism is being buried in water with Jesus, with the promise we will be raised up to walk in a new life. Romans 6:1-6 tells us of the value of baptism into Christ. First Peter 3:21 provides Peter's comment about the good conscience. If you have not been baptized into Christ, then you should do that.

If you have already been baptized, then you are being tempted with doubts. The temptations are Satan's flaming arrows, hurled into your mind (Ephesians 6:16). Such thoughts are not wanted by the person who is born again. They come into the mind against our wills. Satan's aim is to get us to accept them as though they were the truth.

The word of God gives us some indications concerning whether or not we are born again. Here are some of them.

1. If we love and have a preference for the people of God. "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14).
2. If we do not love the ways of the world. "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).
3. If we believe Jesus is the Christ: that is, the exclusive One through whom we come to God. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves the father loves his child as well" (1 John 5:1).

4. If we are able to overcome the world, not being pulled back into a sinful life style. "For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God" (1 John 5:4-5).

Perhaps some further explanation will be helpful. Finding it hard to read the Bible and pray can be for one of two reasons. It can be because a person really does not like doing these things. It can also be because the devil is tempting us to do other things that take us away from those activities, even though we really want to do them. I think you are in the latter category. The fact that you are asking about this proves to me that you really want to pray and read the scriptures. Those two traits are evidence you are born again.

Those in Christ Jesus experience a struggle inside of themselves. You are really two people in one body. Part of you is born again, and part of you is not. That is the way it is with everyone who is in Christ Jesus. Take, for example, your body. It has not been born again--but it will be in the resurrection. In the meantime, there is a part of you that must be subdued. The bible calls it the "flesh," or the "sinful nature." It is also called "the old man" or "old self" in Ephesians 4:22-24 and Colossians 3:9-10. The struggle between the "old man" or self, and the "new man" or self, is described in Romans 7:15-25. As you read this section, you will be reminded of what you are experiencing.

What does the bible say about killing in war.

The New Covenant writings does not deal directly with this matter. John the Baptist did counsel the soldiers, "Do violence to no man" (Lk 3:14). The absence of direct teaching on this matter throws it into the area of conscience. My own conscience forbids me to do

such a thing. I cannot see that being in harmony with new life in Christ Jesus. However, I do have many brothers and sisters who think differently on the subject.

Fighting for our country is never commended or commanded in the New Testament writings. As with other matters of conscience, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom 14:5).

It seems to me that Balaam asked the Lord's counsel every step of his way and God told him to rise and go with the princes of Moabites. Why then was God angered?

Always remember that God "looks on the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). On the surface, it does appear Balaam was following everything told him. But we must look more closely at the matter. First, remember, Balak asked Balaam to curse the people of God (Numbers 22:5-8). Balaam asked the people to lodge with him while he sought the Lord on the matter--of whether or not the curse the people of God. Such a request betrays a faulty heart. The Lord's first response to Balaam was, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed" (Num 22:12). For Balaam, the matter did not end there, however. Even though the messengers told Balak Balaam would not come with them, he persisted in asking Balaam to curse the people of God. "Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me; for I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Therefore please come, curse this people for me" (22:16-17). When Balaam received the message, he said the right words, saying even if Balak gave him his house filled with silver and gold, he would not "go beyond the word of the Lord" (22:18). It certainly sounded good, didn't it. But Balaam did not send the men back. Instead he asked them to spend the night with him again, thereby opening the door to his own wicked lust.

At this point, the Lord appears again to Balaam and tells him to go with the men, but not to say one word more than He tells him. In this, God was testing Balaam--actually bringing out the man's wickedness. Notice the difference between God's test of Peter and His test of Balaam. When God lowered a sheet of unclean animals for Peter to eat, Peter refused to do so three times--until He got the real message God was sending (Acts 10). Balaam, however, did not refuse to go with the men who were asking him to curse the people of God. Although Peter's case was different, his response revealed a good heart. He just lacked understanding. Balaam's response revealed a bad heart. He did not care to have the right understanding.

Scripture later apprises us that Balaam was motivated by the desire for money. False prophets who seek to gain advantage by saying what is wrong are actually likened to Balaam. "They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Pet 2:15-16). Jude also points out Balaam was not following the Lord, but seeking his own financial profit (Jude 11).

If people insist on following their own way, the Lord will see to it that they have opportunity to do so. Examples are Pharaoh, Achan, Judas, Ananias and Saphirra, etc. Balaam's heart was not right. He was willing to curse the very people of God for money, and actually sought for God to approve him doing so. There are some things we do not need to ask about. Asking God whether or not to curse His people is like asking whether or not we should commit murder, adultery, robbery, or some other thing against the nature of God.

Please Explain to me the "Way". In the verse I am the way, the truth, and the life. For some reason the word "way" is confusing me.

Think of it this way: If Emily was lost in the mall, and could not find her way out, you would be "the way" out -- that is, you would take her by the hand and lead her out. That is the sense in which Jesus is "the Way." He takes us by the hand and brings us to God. Remember, the last part of that verse reads, "No man comes to the Father but BY me." Think of "by Me" meaning, "by Me bringing the person to God."

Verses that go along with John 14:6, where Jesus made that statement, are: Hebrews 2:10; 1 Peter 3:18; Acts 13:39; Ephesians 2:16-18.

Does God just make everything happen--like loved ones dying? That seems too cut and dried to me.

You are correct in saying things are not cut and dried. Too, everything is NOT "good." God works everything together for "good," but everything is not good. There is an "evil day" (Eph 6:13), and "evil works" from which the Lord delivers (2 Tim 4:18). If everything was good, Jesus would not have said, "resist not evil" (Matt 5:39)

The Word of God apprizes us that God is absolutely Sovereign. Nothing can overturn His will (Psa 115:3; 135:6; Isa 46:10; Dan 4:35). We also know that Satan cannot access the people of God without Divine approval, as made known in Job (Job 1:8; 2:3). Additionally, Jesus made known that Satan often desires key people of God to sift them--yet Jesus, as in the case of Peter, said

He prayed Peter's faith would not fail (Lk 22:31-32).

The Word of God does not say it is God's will that unusual deaths occur. Remember, Jesus was asked by some about certain people Pilate killed, offering them with their own sacrifices. He answered declaring they were sinners above others of that time. He also mentioned thirteen that were killed by a falling tower, making the same observation (Luke 13:1-5). Notice, He did not say that is what God desired for the people to die, but He did leave the people thinking about God, not a mere accident. ,

I speak as one who has experienced some of these things. My first wife died of Lou Gherig's disease, as well as one of my daughters. I also have a son who had massive brain cancer at the age of nine, but survived by the grace of God. In all of these cases, and more, I knew matters were in the Lord's hand--completely. The Lord has told us He will not allow us to be tempted above our ability (1 Cor 10;13). We must believe that holds true, even in some of these very difficult cases. There is no tragedy that is out from under the Lord's control. Our times, like David's, are in the hands of the Lord, not the devil's, or capricious men (Psa 31:15).

Through Isaiah, the Lord spoke of the righteous being taken away, their lives abruptly cut off without apparent reason. He made this most interesting observation. "The righteous perishes, And no man takes it to heart; Merciful men are taken away, While no one considers That the righteous is taken away from evil" (Isa 57:1). That is a consideration we must not allow to escape us-- deliverance from evil to come, i.e., things that are worse than what was experienced.

As you can see, most of these observations are general--and that for a reason. The Lord, as I understand it, does not want us coming up with canned answers about these more difficult areas of life. The just live by faith, not by explanations. As a believer in Christ,

you are absolutely correct in saying God will work everything together for the ultimate good of His people. He will also duly compensate those who have suffered unjustly, and righteously deal with those who inflicted the suffering. Those are all His prerogatives, and He will do it in impeccable righteousness.

It is God alone who can give or take life. Job, with no Bible, knew this, and we must know it also (Job 1:21). Whether it is blessing or calamity, we must believe it has been filtered through the Lord (Job 2:10). That is a matter for faith, not an answer for the intellect.

No person has a right to speak for God, i.e., "God wanted the little girl . . ." I do not question the possibility of such a thing, having considered it in both the death of my wife and that of my daughter. It is not necessary for us to have an answer for these things. Our view, however, must defer to God, not to the devil, and certainly not to circumstance. When matters are particularly troubling for us, we can ask for wisdom from the Lord. He will not rebuke us for asking, and will satisfy our hearts with an answer (James 1:5-6). There are some very difficult things that happen to us that remind me of the words of Jesus to Peter. "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7).

Heartless answers are never right, nor are they comforting. Far better to say, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen 18:25), then leave it there.

To say, "Everything that happens is God's will," is most foolish. Some people are going to perish, even though God "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (1 Pet 3:9).

You referred to Jesus not knowing the day or hour of His return. I always assumed that Jesus' limited knowledge was due strictly to His incarnation.

I understand this is still a limitation--a voluntary one. It allows the Son to fellowship with us in the expectation of His return. He is, after all, "expecting" (10:13). You will recall one of the last scenes of our blessed Lord finds Him sitting on a cloud with a sickly. He is informed from heaven when it is time to reap the earth (Rev 14:14-16).

His return from earth commenced His great intercessory work for His people. That is best conducted in fellowship with them in the matter of expectation. At least that is my understanding on this.

I do not understand Jesus to have regained everything He cast aside to redeem us. He is, at this very time, "the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5)--something He never was before. Our salvation was an extremely costly affair for Him. After "the end," we are told, He will deliver the Kingdom back to God the Father, and He Himself will be subject to the Father (1 Cor 15:24-29). That is not the description of our lord prior to coming into the world.

This, of course, has nothing whatsoever to do with Him being Divine, Rather, it reveals that the prospect of vast throng of people conformed to His image, and sitting with Him in His throne, was worth the unfathomable price He paid.

All of this, of course, is holy ground, and to be traversed with the greatest faith, humility, and thankfulness.

Can you tell me where to look for information, Scripture, etc. on dealing with a situation where one or two men attempt to divide a

church due to their own hate (brought on by the devil, obviously) and a misplaced desire for control?

A situation like this cannot be approached by just anyone. One or both of these men have been "overtaken in a fault." In this case, the "fault" is a disregard for the body of Christ. Those dealing with it must be "spiritual," or acutely aware of the Lord and His will--living close to Him. This requirement is given in Galatians 6:1.

The type of sin with which you are dealing is that Diotrephes, who "loved to have the preeminence" among the brethren (3 John 9-10). The attitude is a flagrant contradiction of the manner of Christ's Kingdom. Jesus told His Apostles, "If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). Someone must tell these offending men that there is no place whatsoever in the body of Christ for a desire for control. There can be no tolerance of the attitude. This word is given to elders. "Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Pet 5:3). The flock belongs to God, not to any man or group of men.

Doing damage to the church will be met with Divine judgment. Somewhere the church must capture the seriousness of this matter. Referring to the church as "the temple of God," where God Himself dwells, this Divine commitment is given. "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor 3:17). Make no mistake about this, if any person divides the church, a most serious infraction of God's will has taken place--particularly if it involves a thirst for control.

Having said this, there really is no revealed procedure about handling a situation like this. Each case must be approached with fervent prayer and a determination to do the will of God. The Lord will help you do what is right. If you personally are not the right

person to attempt the resolution, the Lord will raise up someone who is. You are right to be concerned about it, and can see from the Word that the situation is serious. May the Lord grant you faith, wisdom, and courage in the matter.