2025 SABBATH THOUGHT ARTICLES

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-01-04—BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, coincides with the last of the ten days of Teshuvah, a Hebrew word that simply means repentance. On that day, the book of Jonah is read every year in the afternoon in synagogues around the world. While it may seem out of place to talk about the Day of Atonement at this time of the year, there is an aspect of that day that is not commonly considered and it is a core message of the book of Jonah.

Jonah was a prophet called by God to preach a message of impending destruction to the city of Nineveh. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and it was huge—it had 120,000 inhabitants and required three days to traverse it. At the time of Jonah, their sins had reached a point where God intended to destroy the city unless they repented. What were their sins?

> [TS2009] NAHUM 3:1-3 Woe to the **city *[Nineveh]* of blood**! All of it is a lie *[hypocrisy]*, filled with plunder, the prey is not lacking. 2 The sound of a whip and the sound of rattling wheels, of galloping horses, of jolting chariots, 3 mounted horsemen with **bright sword and glittering spear**, and many wounded, and a mass of dead bodies, and no end of corpses, they stumble over the corpses –

The next verse also mentions whoredom, harlotry, and witchcraft but Nineveh's primary sins were violence (unlike Babylon who is the MOTHER of harlots and abominations[1]). Isaiah records[2] that Assyria was (and will be again) the rod of God's anger against Israel, so the Assyrians had a cruel and vicious streak.

But the story of Jonah is about more than the repentance of Nineveh. It is a story of God's MERCY. In fact, Jonah fled from God because he did *not* want Him to be merciful to Nineveh.

> JONAH 3:10-4:3 Then God saw their works, that **they *[Nineveh]* turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them**, and He did not do it. 1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "**Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You *are* a gracious and merciful God**, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for *it is* better for me to die than to live!"

Even after Nineveh repented, Jonah waited outside the city still hoping for its destruction:

> JONAH 4:5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till **he might see what would become of the city**.

Jonah had a difficult time with God being merciful to Nineveh. He had witnessed the violence and destruction wrought by the Assyrians upon the Israelites. But in those days,

[1] Rev. 17:5.
[2] Isa. 10:5, 24; 30:31.

vengeance upon one's enemies was ostensibly allowed although God was not entirely pleased with bloodshed as He demonstrated by prohibiting David from building the temple[3]. Perhaps vengeance was tolerated in those days because the Law of God did not expressly forbid it:

> LEVITICUS 19:18 '**You shall not take vengeance**, nor bear any grudge **against the children of your people**, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD.

This statute prohibited taking revenge specifically upon other Israelites but did not address vengeance against non-Israelite enemies. Because of this, it appears that the statute in Leviticus 19:18 was interpreted over time to mean:

> MATTHEW 5:43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall **love your neighbor and hate your enemy**.'

In the next verse, Jesus emphasized loving both neighbors AND enemies. But the reality is that mercy was always a core principle of the Law of God:

> MICAH 6:8 He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; and what does the LORD **require of you** but to do justly, **to love mercy**, and to walk humbly with your God?

God REQUIRES mercy from those who have received His mercy. Sadly, some in the *ekklesia* are without mercy. A month rarely goes by when I do not hear of a minister who forbids fellowship with members of other COG organizations because they are not as converted or brags he knows more truth, apparently without any regard to Jesus' warning:

> MATTHEW 7:1-2 "**[Condemn] not**, that you be not [condemned]. 2 "For **with what judgment you judge, you will be judged**; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

All should fear and tremble when reading this. Condemnation of anyone brings about a harsh judgment. When it comes from a minister, it also instills similar thoughts and behaviors in those they were given responsibility to nourish in the agape love of God.

But it does not stop there. Some ministers even condemn unconverted people who suffer tragedies or natural disasters or they show complete indifference for Protestants who are martyred in unspeakable ways in various countries. This is a grim reflection of how hardhearted some of the *ekklesia* have become. This is not the message of the parable of the Good Samaritan[4] or the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector that Jesus told "to some **who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others**" (Luke 18:9).

Having no mercy for brethren in other organizations or the sufferings of people of the world is nothing less than contempt for God's mercy for their own sins and God has a grave warning for them:

> JAMES 2:13 For **judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy**. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

[3] 1 Chr. 22:8; 28:3.
[4] Luke 10:30-37.

Even though many who suffer are unrepentant sinners, God desires mercy BECAUSE He is, in His time, CALLING them to be a part of His Kingdom:

> MATTHEW 9:13 "But go and learn what *this* means: '**I *[the LORD]* desire mercy and not sacrifice.**' For I did not come to call the righteous, but **sinners, to repentance**."

The violent and cruel Ninevites repented when they heard God's warning through Jonah but they will truly repent of their sins in the judgment to come:

> LUKE 11:29-30, 32 And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He *[Jesus Christ]* began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet. 30 "For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation. … 32 "**The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment** with this generation and condemn it, for **they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here**.

Nineveh obviously did not turn away from violence and embrace mercy at the preaching of Jonah but they will surely know mercy when they hear Jesus Christ. When Jesus spoke these verses, He was speaking to a crowd that included the scribes and Pharisees[5]. He used the example of Nineveh in contrast with them because they were even more merciless than the cruel Assyrians:

> MATTHEW 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have **neglected the weightier *matters* of the law**: justice and **mercy** and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.

The whole of chapter 23 is a declaration of the pride of the scribes and Pharisees. In fact, instead of leading people to the kingdom, they actually shut them OUT by their examples of merciless condemnation of others:

> MATTHEW 23:12-13 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. 13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For **you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men**; for you neither go in *yourselves,* nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

That is *exactly* what some do today when they forbid fellowship with other organizations or rejoice when devastation and suffering falls upon the unconverted. They are no different from the scribes and Pharisees. Denying mercy to others in the midst of their suffering is utter hypocrisy because they received undeserved mercy for their sins from God:

> EPHESIANS 2:4-5 But **God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love** with which He loved us, 5 **even when we were dead in trespasses**, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Even if suffering is a punishment from God, the victims have not yet had the veil of blindness[6] removed! They have not yet received mercy but God WILL offer them mercy:

> JOHN 3:16-17 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 "For **God did not send His**

[5] Matt. 12:38.
[6] 2 Cor. 3:14-15; 4:3-4.

Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

What is the difference between Jonah's desire to see Nineveh destroyed and those of the *ekklesia* who rejoice when 'sinners' suffer? Jonah wanted God to avenge the violence and death perpetrated by Assyria upon his people. Jonah was angry BECAUSE he felt deep mercy toward his own people.

Claiming other brethren are not worthy of fellowship or condemning people who suffer is utterly merciless and it shows contempt for God. I would guess His "thoughts" toward them are not those mentioned in Jeremiah 29:11. What baffles me is why anyone continues to fellowship with those who are merciless. Those without mercy will NOT receive mercy:

> MATTHEW 18:32-34 "Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 '**Should you not also have had compassion *[mercy]* on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?**' 34 "And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.

God did not send Jesus Christ to condemn the world. He sacrificed His Son so He can have mercy upon us; therefore, He REQUIRES mercy from us. Those who mercilessly condemn others are *not* following the example and commandments of Jesus and He clearly warns them of the consequences. But what about continuing to associate with those who are merciless? Their words and works can be deceptive and destructive influences:

> 2 PETER 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be **false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies *[false teachings]***, even denying **the Lord who bought them**, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And **many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed**. 3 By covetousness **they will exploit you with deceptive words**; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.

Merciless people might think no one sees their works but they are not hidden from God. Regardless of position or organization, Peter warns NOT to follow or fellowship with those that have unfruitful works of darkness:

> EPHESIANS 5:11-14 And **have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**, but rather expose *them.* 12 For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are **done by them in secret**. 13 But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "**Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light.**"

Only by God's great mercy will any have salvation, but He only extends it to those who are likewise merciful: "Blessed *are* the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. 5:5).

May God's grace and MERCY be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-01-11—REVEALING THE CHRIST

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Over 2,000 years ago, likely starting in earnest during the reign of Herod the Great[1], the Jews began looking for the arrival of the Man referred to as The Christ.

> NOTE: The etymology of *christ* originates in the Old Testament books as *anointed* or transliterated as *messiah*, which are both from the Hebrew word *mashiyach*. In Greek, *christos* means anointed and, although *messiah* and *christ* are very different English words, they have the same meaning.

The Jews in those days knew that the time was fulfilled for the appearance of The Christ.

> NOTE: For consistency and clarity, "The Christ" is often used even when another title is mentioned in the referenced Scripture.

How they knew is interesting. While it is impossible to pin down all that led them to that conclusion today, one factor was covenants. Abraham and King David were prominent men because they both had covenants directly with God. God's covenant with Abraham[2] was passed along to the entire nation of Israel through his sons Isaac and Jacob[3], who was renamed Israel[4]. It included the coming of The Prophet[5] (another name for The Christ) but His lineage was not specified until God established the covenant with David that The Christ would be one of his seed[6]:

> 2 SAMUEL 7:12-14 "**When your *[David's]* days are fulfilled *[AFTER his death]*** and you rest with your fathers, **I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom**. 13 "He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. 14 "I will be His Father, and **He shall be My Son**. …

Since Solomon was king before David died[7], this can only refer to The Christ. While genealogies were always significant to God and the Israelites, the ascendancy of The Christ made them all the more so. The Bible dutifully maintains numerous genealogies and their importance cannot be overstated. When God set the bloodline of The Christ, it established an important genealogical sequence of fourteen generations from Abraham to David. It is likely that the Jews understood this was key to the subsequent genealogies and it turned out that there were three divisions of fourteen generations covering the bloodlines of key figures:

> MATTHEW 1:17 So all **the generations from Abraham to David *are* fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon *are* fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ *are* fourteen generations**.

[1] Matt. 2:3-4.
[2] Gen. 17:1-10.
[3] Exod. 2:24.
[4] Gen. 32:28.
[5] Deut. 18:15, 18.
[6] Also Isa. 9:6-7; Jer. 23:5.
[7] 1 Kgs. 1:28-30.

The importance of genealogies in determining the appearance and identity of The Christ was further highlighted in the days of Isaiah, who lived around the 8th century BC. It was well after the reign of King David but before the captivity of the Jews in Babylon when God told Isaiah to "declare" (*ponder* or *consider*) the generations of The Christ:

> ISAIAH 53:8 ... who will **declare His *[the LORD's righteous Servant—v11]* generation?**

Still, I doubt that this was sufficient to determine when The Christ would come. The Jews knew that His appearance was subsequent to the generations of Abraham through David. Fourteen generations later, the evil King Jehoiachin (aka, Jeconiah, Coniah) was sitting upon the throne of David when the Jews were taken by the Babylonians into captivity. Jehoiachin was effectively the last king (Zedekiah was the last but he, too, was a prisoner of Babylon) and the throne of David had seemingly ended. Worst of all, The Christ had not yet come. However, by this time a majority of biblical prophecies—especially those of Isaiah—were known that would help identify The Christ.

Partial list of important prophecies of The Christ

He would be the Prophet[8]:

> DEUTERONOMY 18:15, 18 "**The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet** like me *[Moses]* from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, … 18 '**I *[the LORD]* will raise up for them a Prophet** like you *[Moses]* from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.

He would be the Son of David and King of the Jews[9]:

> JEREMIAH 23:5 "Behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That **I will raise to David** a Branch of righteousness; **a King** shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.

He would be the Son of Man:

> PSALM 80:17 Let Your *[the LORD's]* hand be upon **the man of Your right hand**, upon **the Son of Man** *whom* You made strong for Yourself.

He would be the Son of God:

> PSALM 2:7, 12 "I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, '**You *are* My Son**, today I have begotten You. … 12 Kiss **the Son**, lest He be angry, and you perish *in* the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.
>
> PSALMS 89:19, 26-27 Then You *[the LORD]* spoke in a vision to **Your holy one**, and said: "I have given help to *one who is* mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people. … 26 He shall cry to Me, '**You *are* my Father**, My God, and the rock of my salvation.' 27 Also **I will make him *My* firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.**

He would be the Savior and Redeemer[10]:

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[8] Also John 1:21, 25; 6:14; 7:40.
[9] Also Ps. 89:3-4, 35-36; 132:11; Isa. 11:10; John 7:42.

ISAIAH 19:20 And it will be for a sign and for a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt; for they will cry to the LORD because of the oppressors, and He will send them a **Savior** and a Mighty *[or Great]* One, and He will deliver them.

JEREMIAH 14:8 O the Hope of Israel, **His *[the LORD's]* Savior** in time of trouble, why should You be like a stranger in the land, and like a traveler *who* turns aside to tarry for a night?

ISAIAH 44:6 "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and His **Redeemer**, the LORD of hosts: 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; besides Me *there is* no God.

ISAIAH 59:20 "**The Redeemer** will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob," says the LORD.

He would be the Messiah and Anointed One:

PSALM 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against **His Anointed *[Heb.* mashiyach = *Messiah, Anointed One]***, *saying,*

HABAKKUK 3:13 You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with **Your *[the LORD's]* Anointed**. You struck the head from the house of the wicked, by laying bare from foundation to neck. Selah

He would be eternal:

PSALMS 89:19, 29, 35 Then You spoke in a vision to **Your holy one**, and said: "I have given help to *one who is* mighty; I have exalted one chosen from the people. … 29 His **seed also I will make *to endure* forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.** … 35 Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David: 36 **His seed shall endure forever**, and his throne as the sun before Me;

JOHN 12:32-34 "And I *[Jesus Christ]*, if **I am lifted up from the earth**, will draw all peoples to Myself." 33 This He said, signifying by what death He would die. 34 The people answered Him, "We have heard from the law that **the Christ remains forever**; and how can You say, 'The Son of Man must be lifted up'? Who is this Son of Man?"

He would be born of a virgin:

ISAIAH 7:14 "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, **the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel *[lit. "God with us"]***.

NOTE: A virgin birth would be difficult to establish but both Joseph and Mary heard the testimony of the angel Gabriel[11] and both were witnesses who testified of the fulfillment of this prophecy.

He would suffer and die for the sins of the world[12]:

[10] Also Job 19:25; Ps. 106:21; Isa. 44:6; Jer. 14:8.
[11] Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:26-38.
[12] Also Isa. 50:6.

ISAIAH 53:3-12 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him **stricken**, **smitten** by God, and **afflicted**. 5 But He *was* **wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities**; the chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, and by His **stripes** we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was **afflicted**, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a **lamb to the slaughter**, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For **He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken**. 9 And they **made His grave with the wicked**– but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor *was any* deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the LORD to **bruise** Him; He has put *Him* to grief. When You make **His soul an offering for sin**, He shall see *His* seed, He shall prolong *His* days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, *and* be satisfied. By His knowledge **My *[the LORD]* righteous Servant** shall justify many, for **He shall bear their iniquities**. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because **He poured out His soul unto death**, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and **He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors**.

He would be born in Bethlehem:

MICAH 5:2 "But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah *[lit. fruitfulness]*, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet **out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler** in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

MATTHEW 2:4-6 And when he *[Herod]* had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where **the Christ was to be born**. 5 So they said to him, "**In Bethlehem** of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: 6 'But you, **Bethlehem**, *in* the land of Judah, are not the least among the rulers of Judah; for **out of you shall come a Ruler** Who will shepherd My people Israel.' " *[Micah 5:2]*.

Since The Christ had to be born in Bethlehem, He would not return while the Jews were captives in Babylon. The Jews could have simply assumed that The Christ would come at the end of subsequent third division of fourteen generations; however, while in Babylon, the all-important Seventy Weeks prophecy was delivered by God:

DANIEL 9:24-26 "Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. 25 "Know therefore and understand, *that* **from the going forth of the command *[by the Persian king]* to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, *there shall be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks**; the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublesome times. 26 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; and the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it *shall be* with a flood, and till the end of the war desolations are determined.

At this point, the Jews knew of a certainty when The Christ would appear, which is why many were actively searching for Him during the apostolic days including John the Baptist; the disciples; the priests and scribes, some Greeks; et al[13].

The search for The Christ is also an interesting story that begins with John the Baptist, a prophet of God[14], who had an extremely important role in the months prior to The Christ coming on the scene. His first work was to REVEAL The Christ and identify Him by name:

> JOHN 1:29-34 The next day John *[the Baptist]* saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**! 30 "This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' 31 "I did not know Him; but **that He *[Jesus Christ]* should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water**." 32 And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and [it] remained upon Him. 33 "I did not know Him, but He *[God the Father]* who sent me to baptize with water said to me, '**Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.**' 34 "And I have seen and testified that **this is the Son of God**."

God told John that The Christ would be REVEALED through water baptism (v. 31). After Jesus' water baptism, the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, descended and REMAINED upon Jesus. Upon witnessing this, John publicly testified that Jesus was The Christ and declared Him to be the "Son of God" (v. 34) and the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world", fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 53:8, 10-12.

The other work of John the Baptist fulfilled his role as the second Elijah[15]. Notice the details of that commission:

> MALACHI 4:5-6 Behold, I *[the LORD]* **will send you Elijah the prophet** before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And **he will turn *[Heb.* shuwb*]* the hearts** of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."
>
> MATTHEW 11:10 *[Jesus speaking]* "For **this is *he [John the Baptist]*** of whom it is written: 'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face, **Who will prepare Your way before You.**'
>
> JOHN 1:23 He *[John the Baptist]* said: "I *am* 'The **voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD,"** ' as the prophet Isaiah said."[16]
>
> LUKE 1:13-17 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name **John**. 14 "And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink *[part of the Nazarite vow]*. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. 16 "And **he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God**. 17 "He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, '**to turn the hearts of the fathers** to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, **to make ready a people prepared for the Lord**."

[13] Matt. 11:2-3; John 1:37-49; Luke 22:66-67; Matt. 26:63; John 12:20-34.
[14] Luke 1:76; 7:28.
[15] Matt. 11:7-15.
[16] Isa. 40:3.

John the Baptist was the second Elijah sent to "**turn** the hearts [and] **make ready** a people prepared for the Lord". But these are not necessarily two separate works. Turning the hearts of the people was, in fact, making them ready for the arrival of The Christ. The Hebrew word for *turn* is *shuwb* and is the dominant factor in turning the hearts of the people back to God[17].

How did John accomplish these things? Through preaching the terms of the New Covenant and water baptism! John the Baptist certainly knew that The Christ was to appear because his works were for that very purpose. Part of his commission included preaching repentance as part of the terms of the New Covenant:

> MATTHEW 3:1 In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 2 and saying, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**"

Repentance of sin is turning one's heart to God[18] and repentance also requires water baptism. Both were required to prepare a people for The Christ. Water baptism BEFORE Jesus was sacrificed established two things: it was a sign of those who turned their hearts and accepted Jesus as The Christ and it prepared people to be baptized later with the Holy Spirit[19].

It is important to recognize that water baptism SET APART those who would follow The Christ. This is evident when considering one group of Jews who refused the baptism of John—the scribes and Pharisees, and that had consequences:

> JOHN 1:19-21, 24-25 Now this is the testimony of John *[the Baptist]*, when the Jews sent **priests and Levites** from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "**I am not the Christ.**" 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." **"Are you The Prophet?" And he answered, "No."** … 24 Now those who were sent were from the Pharisees. 25 And they asked him *[John the Baptist]*, saying, "**Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ**, nor Elijah, **nor The Prophet**?"

The scribes and Pharisees seemingly would only submit to baptism by The Christ. Since John denied he was either The Christ or The Prophet, they refused to be baptized at his hand:

> LUKE 7:29-30 And when all the people heard *Him [Jesus Christ]*, even the tax collectors **justified God, having been baptized with the baptism of John**. 30 But **the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the will of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him**.

Water baptism was "the will of God"; that is, it was ORDAINED by God. It was an outward sign of those who accepted God's will and that He had appointed and established the water baptism of John. Refusing the baptism of John that was ordained by God was the moment when the scribes and Pharisees REJECTED Jesus as The Christ! As a consequence, they also rejected John's message of repentance (so their hearts were NOT "turned") and his testimony that Jesus was The Christ and the Son of God!

The renown Pharisee Saul also refused to be baptized by John and he, for a time, actively persecuted all those who believed that Jesus was The Christ. However, he was later baptized by Ananias of Damascus[20] whereupon he was given the name Paul and sent unto the Gentiles.

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[17] Joel 2:12-14, 31; 3:4, 7; et al.
[18] Ps. 94:15; Jer. 24:7; et al.
[19] Matt. 3:11.
[20] Acts 22:12-16.

In contrast, Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin Council, likely was baptized by John because he was a "disciple of Jesus"[21].

So, the John the Baptist had the critical role of revealing and identifying Jesus as The Christ as well as preparing a people to receive Him. One example of the profound effect of John's works is evident with two men who would later become disciples of Jesus:

> JOHN 1:35-36, 40-41 Again, the next day, John *[the Baptist]* stood with two of his disciples. 36 And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, "**Behold the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus.** … 40 One of the two who heard John *speak,* and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He *[Andrew]* first found his own brother Simon, and said to him, "**We have found the Messiah" (which is translated, the Christ)**.

The works and witness of John the Baptist were so influential that Andrew was easily convinced that Jesus was The Christ. Once Jesus began His ministry, He quickly fulfilled many other prophecies that affirmed Him to be The Christ, and they were witnessed by the people "prepared" by John the Baptist:

> LUKE 7:22 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things you have seen and heard: **that *the* blind see, *the* lame walk, *the* lepers are cleansed, *the* deaf hear, *the* dead are raised, *the* poor have the gospel preached to them**.

This sample of Jesus' miracles fulfilled prophesies in Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; and 61:1-3. The works of John the Baptist opened people's hearts and minds to recognize that Jesus fulfilled all the biblical prophesies. They KNEW He was the Prophet, Son of David, King of the Jews, Son of God, Savior, Redeemer, Messiah, and Anointed One whom God had promised to send so long ago. John the Baptist prepared the hearts of THOUSANDS who believed.

Today, the majority of Jews still reject Jesus as The Christ. They absolutely knew when The Christ was to appear according to the genealogies and the Seventy Weeks prophecy. Sadly, however, their rejection was also prophesied—"**He *[the LORD's Servant—Isa. 52:13]* is despised and rejected by men**" (Isa. 53:3). Surely this is a significant concern within modern Judaism. Only Jesus as The Christ fulfilled the biblical prophecies. Claiming the coming of The Christ is still a future event ignores the timing of the three divisions of fourteen generations and the Seventy Weeks prophecies understood so clearly by the Jews in apostolic times. Prophecy also specified that The Christ would be born of a woman and would die for the sins of the people. That means The Christ had to be flesh and blood so the Jews cannot rationally claim that when The Christ returns in Spirit, it fulfills the old prophecies. Above all, failed prophecies would mean that God is a liar. Even though the Jews are blinded[22], how do they properly explain these things?

One last thought. There is a notion of a third Elijah who will come before the Day of the LORD[23]. John the Baptist certainly fulfilled that role but the manifestation of a third Elijah just prior to that Day is not clear in Scripture. However, the second of the two Beasts in Revelation 13 is prophesied to do signs and wonders that mirror those of the first Elijah. He is referred to as the "Beast Coming Up Out of the Earth" in verse 11.

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[21] John 19:38.
[22] Matt. 15:14; 23:16-26; John 9:40-41; 12:37-40; Rom. 11:7-10, 14-25; 2 Cor. 3:13-16.
[23] Mal. 3:2; 4:6.

> REVELATION 13:13-14 **He *[the Beast Coming Up Out of the Earth]* performs great signs**, so that **he even makes fire come down from heaven** on the earth in the sight of men. 14 And **he deceives those who dwell on the earth** by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

Calling fire down from heaven obviously mirrors the works of Elijah the Tishbite[24]. The "Beast Coming Up Out of the Earth" performs signs and wonders to deceive the people on the earth into worshipping the Image of the Beast who he then likely REVEALS to be the False Christ. John the Baptist revealed The Christ but he never called fire down from heaven, a notable difference.

Perhaps a third Elijah is not necessary in the scheme of things because John the Baptist already revealed The Christ when He came in the flesh. The next appearance of The Christ will be preceded by the sign of the Son of Man appearing in heaven[25]. After all, there will be no need to reveal Him as when He was flesh[26] since The Christ will come in brightness of Spirit[27] and the whole earth will see Him[28].

It is important to distinguish the differences of the works of Elijah the Tishbite and John the Baptist since there will be many false prophets who deceive people into following false christs:

> MATTHEW 24:4-5, 11, 23-24 And Jesus answered and said to them: "**Take heed that no one deceives you. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,'** and will deceive many. … 11 "Then **many false prophets will rise up and deceive many**." … 23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it.* 24 "For **false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive**, if possible, even the elect.

The purpose of this message was not simply to provide a prophetic and historical perspective on the revealing and identity of Jesus, The Christ. It was not to provoke the Jews out of their state of spiritual blindness. Nor was it to speculate on the end-time prophecies. All of this is intended to draw your attention to how easy it was for so many who failed to believe that Jesus IS the Prophet, Son of David, King of the Jews, Son of God, Savior, Redeemer, Messiah, and Anointed One. As Scripture says:

> JOHN 20:30-31 And truly **Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 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**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[24] 1 Kings 18:36-38; 2 Kings 1:10.
[25] Matt. 24:30.
[26] Isa. 53:2.
[27] Isa. 60:3; Hab. 3:4; 2 Thess. 2:8.
[28] Matt. 24:30; Rev. 1:7.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-01-18—ANGER PROFANES THE COVENANT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

When I began writing the weekly Sabbath Thought articles, I prefaced my first by saying, "*I thought I would try something. The idea stemmed from my wife to write down a few thoughts once in awhile. No agenda. No preaching. Just my thoughts.*" Those who publicly expose their thoughts will always have critics but they absolutely must learn peace when confronted by angry or vitriolic comments. Thankfully, most readers are kind and encouraging.

Public speaking or writing to the narrow audience of Christians is quite different from other audiences in my experience. The latter have never shown a lack of respect or inappropriate social etiquette. In contrast, I have received a few angry comments from those claiming to be Christians. Unlike a respectful audience, they:

- Are quick to anger.
- Vigorously dispute small matters.
- Deny being obviously angry and claim I have misconstrued their response; therefore, I wrongly accuse them.
- Accuse others of not comprehending God's Word but refuse to explain or 'teach' the correct understanding.
- Call it God's judgment when calamity comes upon sinners.

While population distributions will always include people of this ilk, why does it occur among Christians of the *ekklesia*? Even on the rare occasion when I encountered an opponent when speaking to a large audience for work, there was a degree of respect that kept discussions respectable and useful.

Aside from personality, I think there are two primary causal factors for anger within the *ekklesia*. First, it has been legitimized in many sermons. Ironically, my first Sabbath Thought was titled "Church Organizations," which discussed the divisions among brethren that are both self-imposed and encouraged by organizations. Many SAY that God's children are in other organizations but that is *not* what they believe because their next sentence is usually "but they are not …," and you can fill in the blank. This adversarial view has been taught within the *ekklesia* for decades and it only promotes a disdainful view of others who do not agree or associate with a particular person or group. There is no way to rationalize this 'doctrine'.

The second factor is the anonymity of communications. Unlike speaking to a live audience, most exchanges today are faceless. Those who send angry comments likely would not say some of the hurtful things if they witnessed the impact on someone. While modern communications are not a cause per se, they allow unrestrained behaviors because there is no peer pressure or fear of rebuke.

But anger is nothing new. Even some of the disciples were easily angered and quick to condemn. When they related the disaster that befell the Galileans, it was apparently in the context of receiving punishment for their sins:

> LUKE 13:1-5 There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answered and said to them, "**Do you suppose that these Galileans *['brethren']* were worse sinners than all *other* Galileans**

***['brethren'],* because they suffered such things?** 3 "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. 4 "**Or those eighteen *['brethren']* on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all *other* men *['brethren']* who dwelt in Jerusalem?** 5 "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Someone made a mistake or, perhaps, even committed a sin; therefore, every bad thing that happens to sinners is God's vengeance. Even if that were the case, no Christian should ever rejoice when someone suffers because, if for no other reason, God may turn against such a heartless person:

PROVERBS 24:16-18 For **a righteous *man* may fall seven times** and rise again, but the wicked shall fall by *evil.* 17 **Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;** 18 Lest the LORD see *it,* and it displease Him, and **He turn away His wrath from him *[unto you]***.

If you think about it, the Bible is a record of the failures of mankind, even those faithful to God. None was perfect including the standard-bearers of righteousness—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Peter, Paul, etc. They fell short of perfection at times and anyone in these modern times who thinks they are worthy of mention for their righteousness should remember most of us were called BECAUSE we were foolish, weak, base, or despised (or a combination):

1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-28 For you see **your calling**, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.* 27 But **God has chosen the foolish things** of the world to put to shame the wise, and **God has chosen the weak things of the world** to put to shame the things which are mighty; 28 and **the base things of the world** and **the things which are despised** God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are,

Jesus Christ called James and John the "sons of thunder"[1] and with good reason. Remember when James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven after Jesus was rejected by a village of Samaritans?[2] But the Holy Spirit changed them. John became the apostle of agape love and James seemed to reflect upon his own previous "thunderous" ways to emphasize peace instead of conflict:

JAMES 3:2, 5-6, 8, 17-18 For **we all stumble in many *matters***. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the entire body. … 5 So too the tongue is a little member, yet boasts greatly. See how a little fire kindles a great forest! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the world of unrighteousness. Among our members the tongue is set, the one defiling the entire body, and setting on fire the course of life, and it is set on fire by hell. … 8 But no man is able to tame the tongue. It is unruly, evil, filled with deadly poison. … 17 But the wisdom from above is first **clean, then peaceable, gentle, ready to obey, filled with compassion and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

James said, "**we ALL stumble in MANY *matters***" and I can imagine he included himself as he recalled his old "thunderous" ways. Paul, too, changed. Before his conversion, he literally

[1] Mark 3:17.
[2] Luke 9:52-56.

murdered those he saw as a threat to the worship of God. With the power of the Holy Spirit, he turned his anger into zeal above all others in service to God[3]. The difference between those who received praise from God in the Bible and some in the *ekklesia* today is that the former put aside their anger and replaced it with agape love when they received the Holy Spirit.

Offenses are the result of anger much, if not most, of the time. While thinking about this, it occurred to me that reconciled offenses, usually with a simple and sincere apology, are barely a memory. On the other hand, I can vividly recall unreconciled offenses. Perhaps memories of reconciled offenses are like sins that God forgives and subsequently forgets "as far as east is from the west."[4] Reconciliation allows us to put away offenses—at least the emotions of it.

When someone sends the occasional angry comment, there are often unrealistic expectations behind them. It could be an expectation that the author is the fullness of godly wisdom and knowledge. Who on earth can uphold such a claim? The Bible can never be fully understood in this lifetime so there is always much to learn. Angry comments sometimes assume that an author demands others to defer to their opinions. Opinions are always personal and expectations should allow someone to have them and others to agree or disagree. Humans learn and teach through discussions, not rebukes. Lastly, there is the impossibly high standard of perfection where one mistake—real or perceived—results in rejection.

Some must think they are called to right every wrong and judge every word and action. News flash—no one today has been given that position and authority. The pinnacle role of apostle, prophet, and miracle worker has not been given to anyone these days. While that is a sad state of affairs, perhaps it is partly due to a lack of humility, meekness, and agape love required to simply BE children of God.

For whatever reason, I have always used writing to capture my thoughts. My Sabbath Thought articles are so named for that reason. But let me be clear: angry comments do not upset me. They are at times hurtful but not in the way you might think. To me, they are an indication of a heart and mind that are shortsighted and lacking. God is creating a Kingdom in which no one will ever be angry. He does not want to *destroy* sinners, He wants them to CHANGE and be a part of it. No matter what punishments are coming from God, Scripture records His desire is that sinners repent and "turn" back to Him! God has wanted to be a Father to mankind from the beginning with the Old Covenant. Whether the Old or New Covenant, those who would be His children are too often angry and fight among themselves:

> MALACHI 2:10 **Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning *[defiling, staining, polluting]* the covenant** of the fathers?

Notice that this is from the book of MALACHI, not one of the New Testament writers. Malachi wrote this to the tribe of Judah, the wife of God in the Old Covenant, but it applies to an even greater extent to the *ekklesia* of the New Covenant because He has given them His Holy Spirit! Anger profanes the Covenant!

Those who so easily and quickly turn to anger are also lacking mercy and compassion. These are part of the "**weightier *matters* of the law**"[5] that are required and expected in *this* life, NOT

[3] Gal. 1:14.
[4] Ps. 103:12; Isa. 38:17.
[5] Matt. 23:23.

THE NEXT! (What need will there be for "justice, mercy, and faith" in the Kingdom of perfect agape love?) Anger, hatred, malice, etc. only grieve the Holy Spirit of those who hold on to those feelings:

> EPHESIANS 4:29-32 **Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth**, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. 30 And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 **Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.** 32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Christians driven by anger cause too many unnecessary offenses. Regardless of who gets angry—the offender or the victim of the offense—it only causes hurt. How do I know? Because I, along with everyone else, have been angry both as an offender and a victim. We are to put aside anger and become perfect in agape love. It is a hard task and requires much time and effort. Failure to do so raises the question of "Having begun in the Spirit, **are you now being made perfect by the flesh**?" (Gal. 3:3). The answer, though, is "do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**" (Rom. 12:2).

Anger is an age-old problem for mankind, including those called to become God's children. No one is called because their past works were glorious and exemplary. Quite the opposite:

> 2 TIMOTHY 1:9 *[God]* who has saved us and **called *us* with a holy calling, not according to our *[past]* works**, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

Everyone knows the fruits of God's Spirit but how many understand those fruits are manifested in our behaviors and works TOWARD OTHERS? Having the Holy Spirit means CRUCIFYING the passions and desires of the flesh:

> GALATIANS 5:22-24 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. 24 And those *who are* Christ's have **crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**.

The conclusion of the matter is simple. It always has been. Although it is a hard work, we are called to become perfect[6]:

> COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; 13 **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***. 14 But above all these things put on **love, which is the bond of perfection**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[6] Matt. 5:48.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-01-25—THE NATURAL MAN

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Instincts are innate behaviors common to the various divisions and classes of physical life such as humans, animals, birds, etc. For example, animal (mammals, birds, reptiles, etc.) have instincts usually consisting of the following:

- Survival—Drive to preserve life and promote reproduction.
- Language—Ability to communicate with their own species.
- Maternal—Drive to care for and protect their young.
- Herding—Drive to move in groups especially as a response to threats.
- Migratory—Drive to move from one place to another.

In addition to animal instincts, people have generally attributable *instinctual behaviors*:

- Anger—Response to stress, frustration, injustice, threats (situations with the potential for harm from intentional or malicious acts), etc.
- Fear—Response to harm or danger (situations with the potential for harm regardless of intent).
- Panic-Grief—Response to separation from a loved one.
- Care—Drive to connect with others out of compassion.
- Seeking—Drive to explore the environment in order to meet their needs.
- Curiosity—Drive to explore and learn without a particular need.
- Play—Drive to engage in recreational activities for enjoyment.
- Pleasure/Lust—Drive for satisfaction, enjoyment, happiness, or pain avoidance.

Animals can exhibit some of these instinctual behaviors, usually within a domestic environment that removes threats and dangers, but they are secondary to their base instincts. An example might be when the family pet dog suddenly bites its owner without provocation. Unbeknownst to the owner, something could have momentarily triggered the survival instinct. The important point is that animal instincts are inherent and consistent throughout their lives and rarely ‘unlearned’.

Human instinctual behaviors, on the other hand, can be learned or modified over their lifetimes, hence the reason I call them *instinctual behaviors*. For example, babies generally must be taught to share their toys with other children to teach them to care about others. Adults can learn to control or overcome fears as in the case of a phobia like heights or spiders. Unlike animals, humans can override their basic ‘animal’ instincts with instinctual behaviors. One example is superseding survival instinct with fear. Some soldiers lose all fear while others are overcome by fear even when they are no longer in the threat environment. (Animals rarely exhibit these behaviors outside of a threat environment. Military service dogs are trained to ignore the *sounds* of war so that they do not associate them with threats or dangers whereas human soldiers always know that the sound of a bullet being discharged correlates with a direct threat.)

Human instinctual behaviors have both positive and negative aspects. They are negative when they focus on the self to the exclusion of others. Marital intercourse seeks to please both whereas adultery is strictly selfish, and is pursued without regard to the pleasure of their sexual 'partner' or the betrayal of others. Biblically, instinctual behaviors are called "works of the flesh." Paul's list focused on the negative instinctual behaviors:

> GALATIANS 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries,** and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Instinctual behaviors are what define the "natural man" and make flesh so distinctly different from the Spirit:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14 But **the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned**.

The natural man does not "receive" the things of the spirit. While it could have been translated *accept*, accepting something requires the consent of the recipient. An award is *accepted* but a punishment is *received*. The reason the Greek is not translated *accept* is that the things of the spirit are contrary to human instinctual behaviors. In other words, people do not RECEIVE the things of the spirit since they must CONSENT to them. The "things of the Spirit of God" are so contrary to the instinctual behaviors of the natural man that they *cannot* accept them:

> GALATIANS 5:17 For the **flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another**, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

So, what exactly are the "things of the Spirit of God[1]?"

- Agape Love—Quality and trait of affection and desire for others; supplying the needs of others; longsuffering or even kindness for enemies.
- Joy[2]—Qualities and traits of cheerfulness and calm delight.
- Peace[3]—Qualities and traits of tranquility and calm.
- Longsuffering—Quality and trait of patience while under affliction.
- Kindness—Qualities and traits of friendliness, generosity, and consideration.
- Goodness—Qualities and traits of righteousness and virtuousness.
- Faithfulness—Qualities and traits of fidelity and loyalty.

[1] Gal. 5:22-23; Col. 3:12-13.
[2] 1 Pet. 1:8; John 17:13; Acts 2:28.
[3] Phil. 4:7; John 14:7.

- Meekness—Quality and trait of gentleness especially toward people.
- Self-Control—Qualities and traits of self-discipline and self-restraint.
- Compassion—Qualities and traits of sympathy and pity toward suffering.
- Humility—Qualities and traits of modesty and personal diffidence especially toward God.
- Forebearance—Quality and trait of restraint from exercising a legal right.

These are not *instincts* of the Spirit; instead, they are qualities and traits. A QUALITY is a characteristic that is a standard of excellence defined and revealed by God to mankind from the beginning. A TRAIT is an attribute of quality that must be developed or learned. They are 'qualities' of God whereas they are the intended 'traits' of those with His Spirit. The Bible calls them fruits because they begin as seeds planted in the heart and mind that must be attended in order to grow into nourishing and pleasing fruit that benefits others. All qualities of the Spirit of God benefit others.

They are also qualities of the Spirit of GOD, not spirit beings. One can assume that spirit beings (demons excepted) have these same qualities or traits after they had to make a choice when Satan rebelled but they are probably better called characteristics since they seemingly are no longer subject to change. Spirit beings might be perfect in these things but they are not the standard of excellence. Scripture says, "God is love" (1 John 4:8, 16) because He is The Standard of Excellence for agape love (and all other qualities). They come from God through His Spirit, which is the only way anyone can "[become] perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matt. 5:48):

> 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-14 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But **God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For **what man knows the things of a man except *[by]* the spirit of the man** which is in him? Even so **no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God**. 12 Now **we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God**. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But **the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him; **nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned**.

I think one of the main differences between the spirit in animals and humans[4] is the latter's ability to recognize, discern, and modify their instinctual behaviors. People can evaluate and change their behaviors to emphasize or deemphasize their emotional responses toward people and stimuli. However, achieving "things of the Spirit of God" requires His help:

[4] Ecc. 3:21.

> MATTHEW 19:25-26 When His *[Jesus Christ's]* disciples heard *it,* they were greatly astonished, saying, "**Who then can be saved?**" 26 But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, "**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**"

This, then, is the challenge before us—to have faith and believe that God will, and is, doing this in each of us. All those with the Spirit of God understand the qualities of it and recognize the high standard of excellence to which He calls us. However, the infirmities of the flesh demonstrate daily we fall far short of His glory[5].

> MATTHEW 26:41 "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. **The spirit indeed *is* willing, but the flesh *is* weak.**"

It also must be accepted that humans learn and change best with failure, duress, or affliction. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God." (Matt. 19:17). No flesh—not even the incarnate Christ—can be The Standard of Excellence. That does not mean He sinned, but rather:

> HEBREWS 2:10 For it was fitting for Him *[Jesus Christ]*, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings**.

It was not until after His resurrection that Jesus Christ became Captain and Author of The Standard of Excellence that we strive to imitate. But more than that, He attained it through SUFFERINGS. If He had lived a sinless life and then was quickly and painlessly sacrificed for our sins, He would not have been perfected. What does that mean for us? He fully understands the weakness of the flesh such that He now is the One who intercedes for us with God the Father:

> ROMANS 8:26-27 Likewise the Spirit also helps in **our weaknesses**. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 Now He *[Jesus Christ]* who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is,* because **He *[Jesus Christ]* makes intercession for the saints** according to *the will of* God.

And that is what the natural man faces in this life—the disappointment and grief that are the result of fleshly weakness to come even close to the character based upon The Standard of Excellence (God). But it is the *perfection* of Jesus Christ that offers a great hope—Jesus Christ intercedes for us *because* we CONTINUALLY STRIVE for that standard of excellence. Our Captain ensures we no longer fall far short but fall under the grace of God!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[5] Rom. 3:23.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-02-01—SACRIFICIAL LOVE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

"God is love."[1] It is His very being and character. Therefore, knowing God requires understanding agape love. This might seem obvious but agape love is very unique to the human experience since it only comes from God. So, what exactly is agape love?

The "**purpose** of the commandment is love from a pure heart" (1 Tim. 1:5)—agape love is the RESULT of keeping the Law. In one prophecy, Jesus said that "because **lawlessness** will abound, the **love of many will grow cold**." (Matt. 24:12). He spoke this to the disciples as affirmed in the next verse so it is a condemnation of believers in the end times. What is lawlessness? Lawlessness is sin and sin is transgression of the Law of God[2]. The Law deals with sin by requiring a blood sacrifice[3] but the reality is that God does *not desire* blood sacrifices:

> PSALMS 51:16 For **You *[God]* do not desire sacrifice**, or else I would give *it;* You do not delight in burnt offering.
>
> ISAIAH 1:11, 13, 15 "To **what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices** to Me?" Says the LORD. "**I have had enough of burnt offerings** of rams and the fat of fed cattle. **I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats.** … 13 **Bring no more futile sacrifices**… 15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

Instead of blood sacrifices, God pleads with people to *stop* doing evil. If keeping the Law of God produces agape love, then transgression, which is sin, is the opposite of agape love. Therefore, God desires people to put off evil works and put on agape love[4]:

> ISAIAH 1:16-17 "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; **put away the evil** of your doings from before My eyes. **Cease to do evil, 17 learn to do good**; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.

Blood sacrifices are required to atone for Evil Works but not Good Works. That is why God does not desire blood sacrifices. Even so, God does not despise *all* sacrifices—there are sacrifices that are well-pleasing to God:

> PSALMS 51:17 **The sacrifices of God *are* a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart**– these, O God, You will not despise.

The key to knowing God is understanding agape love, which is the result of keeping the Law. However, putting aside the fact that "all have sinned"[5], even perfect obedience to the Law is still insufficient if there is no agape love:

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[1] 1 John 4:8, 16.
[2] 1 John 3:4.
[3] Heb. 10.
[4] Ps. 40:6-8.
[5] Rom. 3:23.

LUKE 18:18-23 Now a certain ruler asked Him *[Jesus]*, saying, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit *be an heir to* eternal life?" 19 So Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is,* God. 20 "You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Honor your father and your mother.' " 21 And he said, "All these things I have kept from my youth." 22 So when Jesus heard these things, He said to him, "**You still lack one thing. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven**; and come, follow Me." 23 But when he heard this, he became very sorrowful, for he was very rich.

The young man kept the Law of God but knew that it was not enough to inherit eternal life as evident from his question. Jesus said he was LACKING something. What was it? SACRIFICING for others ("Sell all that you have")!

The sacrifices that God desires are not the ones done by TRANSGRESSING the Law but, rather, those done by KEEPING the Law. God wants sacrifices of *agape love*, which are Good Works. In fact, that is a perfect definition of agape love—AGAPE LOVE IS A SACRIFICIAL LOVE. This is evident in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

JOHN 3:16 "For **God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

EPHESIANS 5:2 And **walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice** to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

That one sacrifice of God and Jesus Christ was done out of love for mankind. That is why any who is a child of God in the regeneration[6] is required to BE perfected in agape love. They will all be able to say "I AM agape love". TO BE LIKE GOD REQUIRES BECOMING AGAPE LOVE AND THAT INVOLVES SACRIFICE! This is a mandate of "reasonable service":

ROMANS 12:1 I *[Paul]* beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* **your reasonable service**.

1 PETER 2:4-5 Coming to Him *[Jesus Christ] as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, 5 **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.

How does one sacrifice in or for agape love? A few examples might best describe it. The first is the Moabite widow Ruth who loved Naomi, her mother-in-law, and followed to her homeland of Judah so that she could care for her:

RUTH 1:11, 16-17 But Naomi *[mother-in-law of Ruth]* said, "**Turn back, my daughters**; why will you go with me? *Are* there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? … 16 But Ruth said: "**Entreat me not to leave you, *or to* turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people *shall be* my people, and your God, my God. 17 Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried.** The LORD do so to me, and more also, if *anything but* death parts you and me."

[6] Matt. 19:28; Titus 3:5.

Another widow, a Canaanite woman, gave food to Elijah even though she had only enough for herself and son that day; after which they would starve to death:

> 1 KINGS 17:8-13 Then the word of the LORD came to him *[Elijah]*, saying, 9 "Arise, go to Zarephath, which *belongs* to Sidon, and dwell there. See, I have commanded a widow there to provide for you." 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, indeed a widow *was* there gathering sticks. And he called to her and said, "Please bring me a little water in a cup, that I may drink." 11 And as she was going to get *it,* he called to her and said, "Please bring me a morsel of bread in your hand." 12 So she said, "As the LORD your God lives, **I do not have bread, only a handful of flour in a bin, and a little oil in a jar; and see, I *am* gathering a couple of sticks that I may go in and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die.**" 13 And Elijah said to her, "Do not fear; go *and* do as you have said, but make me a small cake from it first, and bring *it* to me; and afterward make *some* for yourself and your son.

Finally, there was a poor Israelite widow who gave all of her money to God:

> MARK 12:41-44 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. 42 Then **one poor widow came and threw in two mites**, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 "for they all put in out of their abundance, but **she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood**."

AGAPE LOVE IS AN UNQUENCHABLE DESIRE TO HELP OTHERS:

> 1 JOHN 3:17 But **whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him**?

Helping others is, generally speaking, doing Good Works. However, if that causes our own hurt, then it is also a sacrifice. Sacrifices come at a personal cost so the amount of personal hurt is a reflection of the depths of agape love. For example, laying down one's own life for another is the deepest agape love because it is greatest sacrifice of all:

> JOHN 15:12-13 "This is My *[Jesus Christ]* commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 "**Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**"

> 1 JOHN 3:14-16 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. **He who does not love *his* brother abides in death.** 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 **By this we know love, because He *[Jesus Christ]* laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren.**

Animal blood sacrifices are only offered for personal sins—never for others. They are performed to RECEIVE mercy from God. Sacrifices of agape love, on the other hand, are always FOR others. They are to GIVE mercy to others. The sacrifices of agape love are unselfish. That is why a sacrifice of agape love is greater than all animal sacrifices—blood sacrifices are about personal failures to love others whereas a sacrifice for others is a work of agape love:

MARK 12:33 "And **to love Him *God*** with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and **to love one's neighbor** as oneself, **is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices**."

While human love—brotherly, familial, or spousal—can prompt someone to sacrifice for family or friends, sacrificing for an enemy can only come from *agape love*:

ROMANS 5:7-10 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But **God demonstrates His own love** toward us, **in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us**. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we **were enemies** we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

The ultimate sacrifice of agape love by Jesus Christ was for a world full of enemies. That is why God can require and demand of those who would be His eternal children to likewise sacrifice for others, including THEIR enemies. The parable of the Sheep and Goats contrasts those with agape love and those without. The Sheep gave of their food, clothes, possessions, and time to the needy but the Goats did not sacrifice anything for anyone. Worst of all, they were too busy with their selfish lives to even *notice* that others had needs[7]. The Sheep will receive eternal life whereas the selfish Goats will be destroyed. And that is the SUM of the whole matter of salvation—sacrificial love. Those who are not willing to sacrifice for others in agape love will not have eternal life.

But agape love is important for another reason—forgiveness of sin. No one keeps the Law perfectly but God forgives those who have it[8]!

LUKE 7:47 "Therefore I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, **her sins, *which are* many, are forgiven, for she loved much**. But to whom little is forgiven, *the same* loves little."

PROVERBS 10:12 Hatred stirs up strife, but **love covers all sins**.

Agape love is an unselfish desire to do Good Works *for* others. At times, they involve personal SACRIFICE. This can also include patiently bearing personal loss, maintaining hope in afflictions, and enduring suffering[9] from *anyone*—believers, unbelievers, family, and enemies alike. God sacrificed. Christ sacrificed. They have given the greatest sacrifice of agape love so that your character—your very being—can become agape love in this life with an unending desire for Good Works and, at times, to sacrifice for others!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[7] Matt. 25:37-39.
[8] 1 Pet. 4:8.
[9] 1 Cor. 13:7.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-02-08—DO NOT BE DECEIVED – PART 1 OF 2

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Olivet Prophecy started when the disciples asked for signs of two events: 1) the return of Jesus Christ and, 2) the end of the Age:

> MATTHEW 24:3 Now as He *[Jesus Christ]* sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be? And **what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age**?"

While this prophecy details several End-Time prophetic events, the prophecy began with a message of warning against being deceived. In fact, it is the primary message because it is woven throughout the prophecy:

> MATTHEW 24:4-5, 11, 23-26 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no **one deceives**[1] you. 5 "For **many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive**[1] **many.** … 11 "Then **many false prophets**[2] **will rise up and deceive**[1] **many**. … 23 "Then **if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it.*** 24 "For **false christs**[3] **and false prophets**[2] **will rise and show great signs**[4] **and *[lying]* wonders**[5] **to deceive**[1], if possible, even the elect. 25 "See, I have told you beforehand. 26 "Therefore **if they say to you, 'Look, He *[the Christ]* is in the desert!' do not go out; *or* 'Look, *He is* in the [secret] rooms!' do not believe *it.***

This warning was the first thing Jesus said and He repeated it four more times. Deception will come from those who are false prophets or false christs. *Christ* simply means *anointed* and is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *mashiyach*, which is transliterated *messiah* and there is only "one Lord Jesus Christ."[6] THIS IS A WARNING OF BEING DECEIVED BY FALSE PROPHETS PROCLAIMING THE RETURN OF A FALSE CHRIST. To deceive those of the *ekklesia*, the false prophets and false christs will use miraculous signs and wonders.

What *miraculous signs* might they perfom? One need only use their imagination. It could be miraculous healings, plagues or droughts, turning water to blood, calling fire down from heaven, drying up the Euphrates[7], etc. There could be any number of miraculous signs that imitate those recorded in the Bible or even ones new and never before seen.

What about *wonders*? The Greek word is interesting because it not only refers to a supernatural occurrence but can also refer to a prodigy; that is, "a person, especially one who is young, endowed with exceptional abilities."[8] Perhaps it is a false prophet

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[1] G4105 *planao*.
[2] G5578 *pseudophrophetes*.
[3] G5580 *pseudochristos*.
[4] G4592 *semeion* = miraculous sign or token.
[5] G5059 *teras* = prodigy or omen.
[6] 1 Cor. 8:6. Also Matt. 23:8, 10; Rom. 5:11, 17; 1 Tim. 2:5.
[7] Rev. 16:12.
[8] Oxford dictionary.

who uses miraculous signs to identify a false christ who has amazing mental abilities and also is able to perform miracles.

The purpose of the false prophets and false christs is to DECEIVE the world but especially the *ekklesia*. They will clearly demonstrate that they have spiritual power that does NOT come from flesh and blood. How can the elect avoid being deceived? In the case of false christs, it is by knowing how the True Christ returns[9]:

> MATTHEW 24:30 "Then **the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven**, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see **the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven** with power and great glory.
>
> ACTS 1:9-11 Now when He *[Jesus Christ]* had spoken these things, while they *[the disciples]* watched, **He was taken up, and a cloud received Him** out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, 11 who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This *same* **Jesus**, who was taken up from you into heaven, **will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven**."

False christs will perform miraculous signs and wonders but they will never be allowed to replicate a false christ coming from heaven on a cloud. This is reserved only for the True Christ. A false christ will appear on earth, as it says, "here … or there" such as in the "desert" or a "secret room."

IMPORTANT: Every false christ will appear from someplace on EARTH whereas the True Christ will come from the HEAVENS on heavenly CLOUDS.

When God appeared to men, it was often in clouds[10], as happened when leading the Israelites out of Egypt, upon Mount Sinai, entering and leaving the temple, in the Transfiguration, and His return. Here are a couple of examples:

> PSALMS 18:7-13 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken, because He *[the LORD]* was angry. 8 Smoke went up from His nostrils, and **devouring fire from His mouth**; coals were kindled by it. 9 He bowed the heavens also, and came down with darkness under His feet. 10 And **He rode upon a cherub**, and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind. 11 He made darkness His secret place; His canopy around Him *was* dark waters *and* **thick clouds** of the skies. 12 From **the brightness before Him, His thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire**.
>
> PSALMS 97:2-5 **Clouds and darkness [are all around] Him *[the LORD]***; righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of His throne. 3 **A fire goes before Him, and burns up His enemies** round about. 4 **His lightnings light the world**; the earth sees and trembles. 5 **The mountains melt** like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

[9] Also 26:64; 13:26; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 21:27-28; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-16.
[10] Deut. 31:152 Chr. 5:13-14; Neh. 9:12, 19; Job 22:14; 26:9; Ps. 78:1497:2-5; 104:3; Isa. 19:1; Jer. 4:13; Lam 2:1; Ezek. 1:4-5; 10:3-4; 38:9; Dan. 7:13; Nahum 1:3; Matt. 17:1-5; Matt. 26:64; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:34-35; Rev. 1:7; 14:14-16.

Heavenly clouds are a visual identifier of God and Jesus Christ. When Satan sinned, desiring to be like God, Scripture says he wanted to ascend above the clouds that surround the mountain where the throne of God is located:

> ISAIAH 14:13-14 For you *[Satan]* have said in your heart: '**I will ascend** into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars *[angels*[11]*]* of God; **I will also sit on the mount** of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; 14 **I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.**'

NOTE: Satan wanted to "be **like** the Most High" meaning he wanted to establish himself as a third member of the Elohim along with God the Father and Jesus Christ. It is possible that the concept for the Trinity is rooted in Satan's desire to establish himself as one of the *Elohim*.

In the warnings of the Olivet Prophecy against being deceived by false prophets and false christs, coming from heaven on heavenly clouds are the singular proof of the returning True Christ.

IMPORTANT: The only biblical SIGN given for the returning True Christ is that He will come from HEAVEN on heavenly CLOUDS.

While the physical sign of the returning Jesus Christ is proof that He is the True Christ, how does one avoid being deceived in other matters? As shocking as it may sound, it involves agape love:

> 2 THESSALONIANS 2:3-4, 6-13 Let no one **deceive[12] you** by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away *[G0646* apostasia = *defection from truth; apostasy]* comes first, and **the man of sin is revealed[13], the son of perdition *[G0684* apoleia = *total destruction]***, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. … 6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed[13] in his own time. 7 For the mystery *[G3466* musterion = *secret]* of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way. 8 And then **the lawless one will be revealed[13]**, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of **the *lawless one*** is according to the working of Satan, with **all power, signs[4], and lying wonders[5]**, 10 and with all unrighteous **deception[14]** among those who perish, because **they did not receive the love of the truth**, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason **God will send them strong delusion[15], that they should believe the lie[16]**, 12 that they all may be condemned **who did not believe the truth** but had pleasure in unrighteousness. 13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning **chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth**,

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[11] Rev. 1:20; Job 38:7.
[12] G1818 *exapatao* = fully deceive or beguile.
[13] G0601 *apokalupto*.
[14] G0539 *apate* = deceit.
[15] G4106 *plane* = fraudulence.
[16] G5579 *pseudos*.

The Greek in verse 9 for *signs* and *lying wonders* is the same as in Matthew 24:24, which are what the "Man of Sin" will use to deceive people. Note that he does *not* come from heaven on clouds but is revealed from somewhere on the earth. Also called the "Son of Perdition" or "Lawless One," he is obviously a flesh and blood man. Paul gives the same warning about deception as the Olivet Prophecy but in verses 10-13 he points out WHY people are deceived—"because **they did not receive the *[agape]* love of the truth**."

> 2 PETER 2:1-2 But there were also **false prophets[2] among the people, even as there will be false teachers[17] among you**, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even **denying the Lord** who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction. 2 And **many will follow their destructive ways**, because of whom **the way of truth will be blasphemed[18]**.

Those who are not growing in and becoming agape love will follow false prophets and false teachers into destruction because they will blaspheme the Truth of God. Agape love is required to have a relationship with God and Jesus Christ. Jesus is "the Way, **the Truth**, and the Life" (John 14:6) and the Spirit from God is one "of power and **of love and of a sound mind**" (2 Tim. 1:7). Those with the Holy Spirit have agape love and "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) by which they KNOW the Truth.

IMPORTANT: Becoming AGAPE LOVE is the only way to know the TRUTH of God. Only agape love can prevent strong delusion and deception (lies).

The Truth of God is the only way to avoid being deceived! What Truths counter deception? Knowing what deceivers, false teachers, false prophets, false christs, or antichrists can or cannot do:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:3 Therefore I *[Paul]* make known to you that **no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed *[G0331* anathema = *cursed by God for destruction]***, …
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:3 … and **no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit**.
>
> 1 JOHN 4:2-3 By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, 3 and **every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the *spirit* of the Antichrist[20]**, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.
>
> 1 JOHN 1:7 For **many deceivers** have gone out into the world who **do not confess Jesus Christ *as* coming in the flesh. This is a deceiver[19] and an antichrist[20].**
>
> 1 JOHN 4:15 Whoever **confesses that Jesus is the Son of God**, God abides in him, and he in God.

[17] G5572 *pseudodidaskalos*.
[18] G0987 *blashphemeo* = revile, malign, vilify, evil-speaking.
[19] G4108 *planos* = imposter.

1 JOHN 5:5 Who is he who overcomes the world, but **he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God**?

1 JOHN 2:22 **Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist[20] who denies the Father and the Son.**

ROMANS 10:9 that **if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**.

There are Truths that deceivers cannot refute or confess. They can use Scripture out of context as Satan did when tempting Jesus[21], but they cannot confess to certain Truths about God and Jesus Christ.

IMPORTANT: Deceivers, false teachers, false prophets, false christs, and antichrists:

1) will call Jesus *anathema* (cursed by God for destruction);
2) will not confess that Jesus is Lord;
3) will not confess that Jesus is the Son of God[22];
4) will not confess that Jesus is the True Christ; or
5) will not confess that Jesus is resurrected from death to eternal life.

One way to identify deceivers, false teachers, false prophets, false christs, or antichrists is by their own words when they call Jesus *anathema* (cursed). Also, they can be challenged to confess that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, the Christ, or resurrected to eternal life by God—these are things they CANNOT do. A true believer can use these to expose them. This also applies to the Beasts of Revelation. Notice the First Beast:

REVELATION 13:1-4, 6, 8 Then I *[John]* stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a **beast rising up out of the sea**, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a **blasphemous name**. 2 Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. **The dragon *[Satan]* gave him his power[23], his throne, and great authority[24].** 3 And *I saw* one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. And all **the world** marveled and **followed the beast**. 4 So they **worshiped the dragon** who gave authority to the beast; and they **worshiped the beast**, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" … 6 Then **he *[the First Beast]* opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme[18] His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven**. … 8 **All who dwell on the earth will worship him**, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

The First Beast, the Beast Rising Up Out of the Sea, is given authority and power by Satan. At his appearance, there will be those who worship Satan and follow the First Beast (the Dragon—v. 4) as a result of seeing that he is invincible. It appears they will

[20] G0500 *antichristos* = against Christ.
[21] Matt. 4:1-11.
[22] Also Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5.
[23] G1411 *dunamis*.
[24] G1849 *exousia*.

do so voluntarily because Scripture does not say that the First Beast will use deception to cause people to worship him. He is easily identified because he has a blasphemous name. He also blasphemes the name of God, the tabernacle of God, and all those who dwell in heaven. (Only angels of God remain in heaven at this point because Satan and the demons are expelled after their defeat by Michael and the angels—Rev. 12:7-8.) Now notice the Second Beast:

> REVELATION 13:11-15 Then I saw another **beast coming up out of the earth**, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. 12 And he exercises all the authority[24] of the first beast in his presence, and **causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast**, whose deadly wound was healed. 13 **He performs great signs**, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. 14 And **he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs** which he was granted to do in the sight of the *[first]* beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to **make an image to the *[first]* beast** who was wounded by the sword and lived. 15 He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not **worship the image of the *[first]* beast** to be killed.
>
> REVELATION 19:20 Then the *[first]* beast was captured, and with him **the false prophet *[second beast]* who worked signs in his presence**, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. …

The Second Beast, the Beast Coming Up Out of the Earth, performs miraculous signs and wonders to deceive people. He is also called the False Prophet and he will perform signs "in the sight of the *[first]* beast," as noted in verse 14 and Rev. 19:20[25] where he is referred to as the False Prophet. Unlike the First Beast, he deceives people (v. 14). At his appearance, there were some who will not be worshipping Satan or the First Beast. As a result, the Second Beast uses signs and wonders to deceive more people to worship the First Beast. The Second Beast then commands all those who worship the First Beast to make an Image of the First Beast whom he miraculously causes to speak. Those who refuse to worship the Image of the Beast are murdered, presumably by the Second Beast.

NOTE: The First Beast—the Beast Rising Up Out of the Sea—likely emerges from among the population of the earth (sea = peoples[26]) when revealed by Satan. The Second Beast—the Beast Coming up Out of the Earth—is described as a lamb (a false christ) speaking like a dragon and also called the False Prophet. Could it be that the First Beast will fake a resurrection out of the earth *[G1093* ge = *soil, region]* of the Second Beast to deceive the world into believing he is the Christ so that they worship the First Beast?

Interestingly, the Second Beast speaks like "**a** dragon," which might suggest that *dragon* is the highest rank among the demons similar to that of cherub or seraph. Satan, also called that Old Serpent[27], obviously wanted to be like God—of the same

[25] Also Rev. 16:13; 20:10.
[26] Rev. 17:15.
[27] Rev. 12:9, 14-15; 20:2; Gen. 3.

rank of *Elohim* as God the Father and Jesus Christ. When he lost the rank of cherub, he become the Great Dragon[28], which implies there are 'lesser' dragons. It could be that the Second Beast speaks with the authority and power commiserate with the rank of a *dragon*.

SUMMARY: Avoiding deception requires WATCHING a few key things:

1) Knowing that the True Christ will return from the heavens on heavenly clouds;
2) Recognizing that a false christ will only appear from somewhere on earth;
3) Noting those who blaspheme God or curse Jesus Christ;
4) Challenging suspected deceivers, false teachers, false prophets, false christs, or antichrists to confess that Jesus is Lord, the Son of God, the Christ, or resurrected to eternal life by God.
5) Growing in agape love to avoid the strong deception of deceit and lies by knowing the Truth of God;

Jesus concluded the Olivet Prophecy by comparing a "faithful and wise servant" with an "evil servant" who were rulers of households tasked with WATCHING for the return of their master. The exact same warning to WATCH is given in the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). Jesus also said to WATCH for thieves:

> MATTHEW 24:42-43 "**Watch** therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. 43 "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour **the thief** would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into.

The thief represents deceivers who want to steal salvation from the *ekklesia*. How? By deceiving the elect of God. The *ekklesia* must "**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 21:34-36).

Escape what? Being deceived! The goal of being WATCHFUL is not to see prophecy fulfilled but rather to avoid deception.

IMPORTANT: There are two primary deceptions to guard against:

1) POINTS 1-2: WATCHING for the sign of the return of the True Christ. The main sources of deception are false prophets and false christs.
2) POINTS 3-5: WATCHING for deceivers (thieves of salvation). The main sources of deception are false teachers, antichrists, and the Beasts of Revelation.

Part 2 will discuss deceivers that are among the *ekklesia*.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[28] Rev. 12:3, 9.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-02-15—DO NOT BE DECEIVED – PART 2 OF 2

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Major deceptions from false prophets, false christs, and antichrists will arise in the End-Times that will turn many of the *ekklesia* from salvation. The threat from the world is real and concerning as discussed in Part 1. However, there is also a salvational peril from within the *ekklesia*—the Body of Christ:

> COLOSSIANS 2:4, 8, 18-23 Now this I *[Paul]* say lest anyone should **deceive you** with **persuasive words *[enticing words]***. … 8 Beware lest anyone **cheat *[seduce]* you through philosophy *[fallacious arguments with intent to deceive]* and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world**, and not according to Christ. … 18 Let no one **cheat *[defraud]* you** of your reward, taking delight in *false* humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, 19 and **not holding fast to the Head**, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase *that is* from God. 20 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 *[principles laid down by an authority as indisputably true]***– 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all **concern things which ~~perish~~ [are corrupt]** with the using–**according to the commandments *[authoritative warning or order]* and doctrines *[teachings]* of men**? 23 These things indeed **have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion *[counterfeit religion or false worship], false* humility, and ~~neglect~~ *[asceticism = self-inflicted physical and mental denial]* of the body**, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

How does the *ekklesia* withstand such powerful deceit from within itself? That is one responsibility given to shepherds and teachers by Jesus Christ:

> EPHESIANS 4:11-14 And He *[Jesus Christ]* Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some **pastors and teachers**, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, **for the edifying of the body of Christ**, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that **we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine *[teaching],* by the trickery *[fraud]* of men, in the cunning craftiness *[sophistry = false arguments intended to deceive]* of deceitful plotting *[fraudulent means]***,
>
> ACTS 20:28 "Therefore take heed to yourselves *[Ephesian elders]* and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has **made you overseers *[watchers],* to shepherd *[feed]* the [ekklesia] of God** which He purchased with His own blood.

A true shepherd of God watches and protects the *ekklesia* from fraud and deceit. How? By teaching God's TRUTH:

EPHESIANS 4:15-16 but, **speaking the truth in love**, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head–Christ– 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of **the body for the edifying of itself in love**.

Truth EDIFIES the Body of Christ. What does it mean to edify? The Greek noun for *edify* means *building* or *structure*. It is a compound word formed from two Greek words—*family dwelling* and *large building*. Combined, they refer to a large building in which a FAMILY resides. Paul often uses the verb form to refer to the work of BUILDING the Family Home of God—the spiritual house of God:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, *this* [tabernacle], is destroyed, we have **a building from God**, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

EPHESIANS 2:19-22 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner*stone,* 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows **into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God** in the Spirit.

But how does the *ekklesia* avoid being deceived if the deception comes from the very pastors and teachers Jesus Christ setup to protect it? Notice:

2 CORINTHIANS 11:12-15 But what I *[Paul]* do, I will also continue to do, that I may cut off the opportunity from those who desire an opportunity **to be regarded just as we are *[desiring to be apostles or elders]* in the things of which they boast**. 13 For **such *are* false apostles *[pretended preacher],* deceitful workers *[or teachers],* transforming *[disquising]* themselves into apostles of Christ**. 14 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. 15 Therefore *it is* no great thing if **his ministers also transform *[disquise]* themselves into ministers of righteousness**, whose end will be according to their works.

The worst deceit comes from pastors and teachers who use their positions to SEDUCE the minds of those in the *ekklesia*:

TITUS 1:10-11, 13-16 For there are **many insubordinate, both idle *[vain]* talkers and deceivers *[mind seducers],* especially those of the circumcision**, 11 whose **mouths must be stopped, who subvert *[overturn]*** whole households, **teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest[1] gain**. … 13 … Therefore **rebuke *[prove wrong, admonish]* them sharply**, that they may be sound in the faith, 14 not giving heed to **Jewish fables *[myths]* and commandments *[authoritative commandments or injunctions]* of men who turn from the truth**. 15 To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even

[1] G0150 *aischros* = shameful, disgraceful, base, venal (subject to bribery). Used only here.

their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 **They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him**, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.

There are MANY teachers who deceive the elect of God. There are MANY who abundantly live off of the brethren who usually have far less. What does God think about shepherds who live luxuriously off of the flock? (God answers that in Ezekiel 34:1-3, 7-10.) There are also MANY who use their positions with false authority to control the *ekklesia* with "commandments of men." That Greek phrase means authoritative injunctions not of God. Pastors and teachers have forbidden brethren to associate with any outside of their organization, banned Bible studies without a minister (usually for women), prevented people from attending services if they are not a member of their organization, established their own biblical interpretations as salvational, condemned people in and out of the *ekklesia*, etc. There are also MANY who preach God every week but deny Him in their WORKS. How? Showing preferential treatment to certain brethren and not others, withholding help from the poor and needy, not visiting the sick, rejecting those outside of their group, disfellowshipping those who disagree with them, condemning Protestants (the gospel was meant for the WHOLE world), etc.

How does one protect against the deceit of pastors and teachers? The same way one prevails against all manner of deceit—with the Truth of God:

EPHESIANS 5:6-14 Let no one **deceive you with empty words**, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not be partakers with them. 8 For you were once darkness, but now *you are* light in the Lord. Walk as **children of light** 9 (for the fruit of **the Spirit** *is* in all goodness, righteousness, and **truth**), 10 finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose *[rebuke, prove wrong, admonish] them [with the Truth of God]***. 12 For it is shameful *[improper]* even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. 13 But **all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light**, for whatever makes manifest is light. 14 Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep *[spiritually]*, arise from the dead *[spiritually]*, and **Christ will give you light**."

Truth is the light that exposes fraud and deceit. But Truth alone cannot always stand against deceit; sometimes it is too powerful, overwhelming our minds. This is especially true where there is pressure to follow along with the organization. This is one reason pastors and teachers make "commandments of men"—authoritative injunctions—to falsely claim that salvation is assured to those who belong to *their* organization. That is why Truth must be RECEIVED with agape love—to prevail against the most powerful deceit! Paul warned of being deceived without the very important component of agape love in 2 Thessalonians 2:13: "**they did not receive the *[agape]* love of the truth, that they might be saved**."

Salvation can be lost even if one knows the Truth but does not have agape love. Truth is the armor that encircles the waist (Eph. 6:14) and agape love is the breastplate (1 Thess. 5:8). Together, they protect the entire trunk of the body

against the fiery darts of fraud and deceit. A pure heart of agape love is the strength to stand in the Truth when it is attacked:

> EPHESIANS 6:11-13 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able **to stand against the wiles of the devil *[the great deceiver—Rev. 12:9]***. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but **against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness** of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places.* 13 Therefore take up **the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day**, and having done all, to stand.

When powerful deceptions come that threaten to confuse the Truth, the courage to stand firm comes from agape love in the heart. This is why the Holy Spirit is one "of **power**, of **love**, and of a **sound mind *[of Truth]***." (2 Tim. 1:7)[2].

IMPORTANT: A pure HEART of agape love is the power of God by which the *ekklesia* stand in the Truth when it is attacked by powerful and subtle fraud and deceit.

Fraud and deceit will come from the world and from within the *ekklesia*. Having the Truth in agape love is the only protection against all deceit. Truth in agape love guards the salvation of our souls. Realizing that "**evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse**, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim. 3:13) stresses the vital importance of Truth in agape love!

> ROMANS 16:17-19 Now I *[Paul]* urge you, brethren, note **those who cause divisions *[disagreements that lead to discord]* and offenses *[stumblingblocks]***, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. 18 For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and **by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the [innocent *or* unsuspecting]**. 19 For your obedience has become known to all. Therefore I am glad on your behalf; but I want you to be wise in what is good, and **simple concerning evil**.

While it may sound too simple[3] to be of any real consequence, that is the beauty of the gospel message. Truth in agape love IS "simple concerning evil" but it is the power and wisdom of God that protects and prevails against all deceit!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[2] Also John 14:17.
[3] The simplicity that is in Christ—2 Cor. 11:3.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-02-22—COMPASSION & *CHESED*

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Which would you rather have from God? His compassion or mercy? Actually, it is a trick question. *Compassion* is sympathy for the sufferings of others whereas *mercy* is taking action to alleviate that suffering. To be completely accurate, compassion is a heartfelt reaction to the plight of others that is FOLLOWED by mercy, works that relieve suffering. Do you see the connection?

SYMPATHY = Pity or sorrow toward those who suffer.

MERCY = Beneficent works.

COMPASSION = Sympathy + Mercy.

DEFINITION: Compassion is heartfelt sympathy for people who suffer, followed by works of mercy to relieve the suffering. Compassion *without* mercy is merely sympathy because compassion, by definition, includes works of mercy.

In the end, all desire God's compassion from which come works of mercy that relieves our burdens. God's compassion is His motivation for His mercy to relieve our afflictions, but many Bible translations do not properly translate compassion and mercy. The English words are either used interchangeably or swapped. Notice one example comparing the KJV with The Scriptures (2009)[1]:

> [KJVN] PSALM 103:8 The LORD *is* **merciful *[rachuwm]*** and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in **mercy *[chesed]***.
>
> [TS2009] PSALMS 103:8 [The LORD] is **compassionate *[rachuwm]*** and showing favour, patient, and great in **loving-commitment *[chesed]***.

The KJV almost always mistranslates the two Hebrew words *racham* (H7356) and *chesed* (H2617) and their various forms. (This is a little technical, but bear with me.) *Racham* means *compassionate*, not *merciful* and most of the time one should mentally insert 'compassionate' when reading Scripture. The other word, *chesed*, does not translate into English well at all. The KJV usually translates it mercy, goodness, lovingkindness, etc. However, this does not give a proper sense of the meaning of *chesed*.

The TS2009 translates *chesed* as the hyphenated word *loving-commitment*, indicating it has components of love and fidelity. There is no single word in the English for *chesed*, which conveys the idea of covenant loyalty and devotion[2].

[1] The TS2009 is an excellent translation with better literal accuracy than the KJV while maintaining readability. This is particularly true with subtleties like compassion and mercy. However, it uses Hebrew names such as יהוה (YHWH). These have been changed to match the KJV for readability.

[2] For more information, refer to the Sabbath Thought 2023-04-15 - Hesed = Covenant Loyalty & Devotion.

Devotion covers the range of love, affection, faithfulness, and fidelity. This is what the TS2009 is trying to convey with *loving-commitment* and why the meaning of *chesed* is completely lost when it is translated *mercy* in the KJV. It is important to understand the meaning of *chesed* because God's COMPASSION and *CHESED* are founded in every covenant with Him. Notice this verse:

> [TS2009] LUKE 1:72 *[God spoke]* to show **compassion** toward our fathers and to remember His [holy] **covenant**,

God's purpose behind all of our prayers is *CHESED*—loyalty and devotion to His covenant. Translating *chesed* simply as *mercy* is inadequate because there is no connection to a COVENANT with God. *Chesed* has everything to do with a covenant because God's loyalty and devotion is the basis for fulfilling it. When His people cry out to Him for help, they seek His COMPASSION, which is His motivation to show mercy and fulfill His covenant promises. Most often our hope is to receive His mercy NOW and there is absolutely nothing wrong with that; however, God's covenant loyalty and devotion—His *chesed*—govern His response to our supplications. He is *always* compassionate but His response—His merciful WORKS to alleviate our suffering—is dependent upon His greater purpose of bringing eternal children into His Kingdom:

> 2 PETER 3:15 and consider *that* **the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation**–as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

In other words, He is always compassionate toward our prayers but His merciful response may be delayed, come from an unexpected place, or be something unrelated. Why? Because "we must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). If His response is not what or when we had hoped for, know of a certainty that whatsoever He does is to make "all things work together for good"[3] for the greater purpose of fulfilling His covenant by changing us from the physical to spiritual. This is evident in these verses:

> [TS2009] ROMANS 9:15, 23 For He *[God]* says to [Moses], "I shall favour whomever I favour, and **I shall have compassion on whomever I have compassion**." … 23 and that **He might make known the riches of His esteem *[or favor]* on vessels of *[His]* compassion**, which He had prepared beforehand for esteem *[or favor]*,

God assesses our spiritual needs in this physical life because "we are His **workmanship**" (Eph. 2:10). The WORK He is doing in each of us is to create eternal children. Eternity influences His decisions of how and when our prayers are answered. God's vision is from the eternity past to the eternity to come so His *chesed*—covenant loyalty and devotion—is EVERLASTING:

[3] Rom. 8:28.

[TS2009] PSALM 136:1 Give thanks to [the LORD], for He is good! For **His loving-commitment *[chesed]* is everlasting**.

God's *chesed*—covenant loyalty and devotion—will never fail. Likewise, God's "**compassions *[racham]* fail not**" (Lam. 3:22). Together, His compassion and *chesed*—covenant loyalty and devotion—are for the purpose of eternal life:

[TS2009] PSALM 103:4 ***[The LORD]* redeems your life from destruction, who crowns you with loving-commitment *[chesed]* and compassion**,

DEFINITION: God's compassion leads to His MERCY, which is rooted in His *chesed*—covenant loyalty and devotion—because His ultimate purpose is "bringing many sons *[and daughters]* to glory *[or favor]*."[4]

But *chesed*—covenant loyalty and devotion—is what God also desires from US:

[TS2009] HOSEA 6:6 "For I *[God]* delight in **loving-commitment *[chesed]*** and not slaughtering, and in the knowledge of Elohim more than ascending *[burnt]* offerings.

God also desires compassion from all who are in covenant with Him:

[TS2009] 1 TIMOTHY 1:16 But because of this I *[Paul]* received **compassion**, so that in me first, [Jesus Christ] might display all patience, **as an example to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life**.

[FV] 1 JOHN 3:17 But whoever has this world's goods, and **sees his brother in need, and shuts up his feelings of compassion from him**, how can the love of God be dwelling in him?

God demands both compassion and *chesed*—covenant loyalty and devotion—among all those of the *ekklesia*. Why? Because everyone under the same New Covenant with God has received compassion and *chesed* for their sins:

[TS2009] PSALMS 51:1 Show me favour, O Elohim, according to Your **loving-commitment *[chesed]***; according to the greatness of Your **compassion**, blot out my transgressions.

Jesus Christ suffered and died for our sins because of His compassion and *chesed*. The depths of His agape love is unsearchable:

EPHESIANS 3:17-19 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded **in love**, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints **what *is* the width and length and depth and height– 19 to know the love of Christ** which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

[4] Heb. 2:10.

The is why Jesus Christ commanded that we have agape love for one another as HE loves us[5]. Although Scripture says this is a "new commandment," it has actually existed from days of old in the form of compassion and *chesed*:

> [TS2009] ZECHARIAH 7:9 "Thus said [the LORD] of hosts, 'Execute true right-ruling, **show loving-commitment *[chesed]* and compassion everyone to his brother**.

All of this is why it is *chesed* is not simply *mercy*. Notice how the correct translation changes one of the most well-known verses of the Bible:

> [TS2009] MATTHEW 5:7 "Blessed are the **compassionate**, because they shall obtain **compassion**.

Works of mercy without compassion or sympathy are done for selfish purposes. Many these days donate money to charitable organizations but they do not actually care for those who need the help—they do it for tax write-offs. To truly be merciful requires compassion and God BLESSES those who are compassionate AND merciful.

Compassion is not just a feeling. It ALWAYS responds with works of mercy. When Jesus encountered people who were suffering, Scripture says "He was **moved** with compassion."[6] Why does it say He was MOVED? Because He ACTED with works of mercy to alleviate the suffering He saw. Notice the case when He fed the 5,000:

> MATTHEW 14:14-16 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and **He was moved with compassion** for them, and healed their sick. 15 When it was evening, His disciples came to Him, saying, "This is a deserted place, and the hour is already late. Send the multitudes away, that they may go into the villages and buy themselves food." 16 But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

Not only did He heal the sick, but He also fed them. He was MOVED with compassion to DO works of mercy. Agape love produces compassion toward those who suffer, compassion results in mercy, and mercy produces Good Works. This is the full circle of the agape love of God in us!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[5] John 13:34; 15:12.
[6] Matt. 9:36; 14:14;18:27; Mark 1:41; 6:34.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-03-01—GOOD WORKS GLORIFY GOD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the sole means by which a person is cleansed of sin and forgiven by God who then imputes or ascribes to him or her His perfect righteousness. The person is then seeded with agape love by indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the motivation behind Good Works. Such people are completely rare and unique in this world, and understandably so. They are HOLY to God and He sets them apart[1] for His special purpose. They are not to stand around on display like ornaments on a shelf. They are the WORK of God who is CHANGING them to fulfill His PURPOSE for them in this *physical* life:

> EPHESIANS 2:10 For **we are His *[God's]* workmanship**, created in Christ Jesus **for good works, which God prepared beforehand** that we should walk in them.
>
> TITUS 2:13-14 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might **redeem us** from every lawless deed and **purify *[cleanse]* for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works**.

God's children are holy because He has dedicated them for Good Works. Did this hit you? It is CRITICAL to understand. Notice that verse 14 says that Jesus Christ's sacrifice REDEEMS people for Good Works. This is why Good Works are salvational.

It is easy to imagine many ways we can apply ourselves to Good Works. Several are mentioned in the parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25. Good Works can be donations of time, labor, communication, comfort, encouragement, teaching, money, etc. Everyone who has agape love growing in them also has a growing desire to help others. This even brings its own rewards:

> LUKE 6:38 "**Give, and it will be given to you: good measure**, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For **with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you**."

Giving, the act of doing Good Works, results in receiving from God. Notice that one must give FIRST before receiving. When God gives, He does so abundantly:

> MATTHEW 25:29 'For to everyone who has, **more will be given, and he will have abundance**; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away.

That abundance from God allows one to do even greater Good Works. But every Good Work requires a RECIPIENT—someone in need of help. Unless there is someone grieving, afflicted, suffering, lacking, etc., Good Works are nothing more than a mutual pat on the back. Two people who are *not* in need but do good to each other are simply trading niceties. Obviously, someone who is poor, sick, suffering, lacking, or grieving plays a very important role because Good Works would not exist without them.

Those with the means to give are ALWAYS better off than those who suffer. As Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." (Acts 20:35). Who would not rather give than be the one in need? However, the RECIPIENT of Good Works is also a GIVER. In fact, someone in need can offer something that is *impossible* for a giver. The one receiving help gives *back* by responding

[1] 2 Cor. 6:17.

in meekness, thankfulness, gratefulness, appreciation, and gratitude. What is the result? Increasing agape love among each other!

> JAMES 1:25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it,* and is not a forgetful hearer but **a doer of the work, this one will be blessed** in what he does.

Doers of Good Works are both the giver and recipient. I'll say it again: Good Works require both the giver and recipient to be DOERS. One who gives and the other receives. This is the circle of God's perfect work in us. God imbues us with His agape love. To some, He also gives abundance and, to others, trials. Within this framework are the Good Works that are for the perfecting of agape love:

> HEBREWS 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up **love and good works**,
>
> HEBREWS 13:21 ***[Now may God]*** **[perfect you] in every good work** to do His will, ***[God]*** **working in you** what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.
>
> 2 TIMOTHY 3:17 *[All Scripture is given]* that **the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**.

But there is another outcome of Good Works that involves both the giver and recipient. Remember the story of the ten lepers?

> LUKE 17:12-14 Then as He *[Jesus Christ]* entered a certain village, there met Him **ten men who were lepers**, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up *their* voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 So when He saw *them,* He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, **they were cleansed**.

The ten lepers were recipients of the Good Works (healings) of Jesus Christ. But givers and recipients of Good Works can respond with something that is very pleasing to God. Continuing:

> LUKE 17:15-18 And **one of them**, when he saw that he was healed, **returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on *his* face at His *[Jesus Christ's]* feet, giving Him thanks**. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where *are* the nine? 18 "Were there not any found **who returned to give glory to God** except this foreigner *[the Samaritan]*?"

Good Works glorify God! In the story, nine lepers, who were likely Jews, did not return to give thanks and glory to God. (Is that the case among the *ekklesia* today? Those who receive help in time of need but do not glorify God? I certainly hope not.) But without those in need, even Jesus could do no Good Works. This is the reason that Lazarus became sick and died:

> JOHN 11:3-4 Therefore the sisters sent to Him *[Jesus Christ]*, saying, "Lord, behold, he *[Lazarus]* whom You love is sick." 4 When Jesus heard *that,* He said, "**This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God**, that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

A giver is obviously more blessed (not always with money!) since they are able to help those in need that suffer or lack (again, not always money!). Through Good Works they both GLORIFY

God: the giver out of the abundance from God and the recipient as their suffering or poverty[2] is eased or lifted. That is one meaning of the following:

> ROMANS 5:3-5 And not only *that,* but **we also glory in tribulations**, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because **the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit** *which* was given to us.

Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see **your good works and glorify your Father in heaven**." (Matt. 5:16). Do only givers have light to shine while recipients are in darkness? I think not. Is not "light" a picture of Jesus Christ[3] living in ALL God's people whether they are givers or receivers? Both the giver and receiver of Good Works of glorify God!

Through "tribulations"—afflictions, burdens, sufferings, lack, troubles—Good Works not only connect a giver with someone in need, but they also GIVE glory to God because "we must **through many tribulations** enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22). But Good Works affect more than the just the giver and the recipient:

> LUKE 18:35-43 Then it happened, as He *[Jesus Christ]* was coming near Jericho, that a certain blind man sat by the road begging. 37 So they told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. 38 And he cried out, saying, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" 39 Then those who went before warned him that he should be quiet; but he cried out all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" 40 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be brought to Him. And when he had come near, He asked him, 41 saying, "What do you want Me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, that I may receive my sight." 42 Then Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well." 43 And immediately he received his sight, and followed Him, glorifying God. And **all the people, when they saw *it*, gave praise to God**.

Good Works cause givers, recipients, *and* witnesses to give thanks, praise, and glory to God! Good Works affect many people:

> LUKE 19:37-40 Then, as He *[Jesus Christ]* was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, **the whole multitude** of the disciples began **to rejoice and praise God** with a loud voice **for all the mighty works they had seen**, 38 saying: " 'Blessed *is* the King who comes in the name of the LORD!' Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" 39 And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." 40 But He answered and said to them, "**I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.**"

The crowd that lined the street as Jesus Christ entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey CRIED OUT and gave glory to God for the "**mighty works** they had seen." When the Pharisees demanded the Jesus put a halt to their rejoicing, He responded by saying that God would be glorified even if it required the very stones to cry out. Glorifying God is not something that should or can be squelched. Glorifying Him is THE response of those involved in the Good Works of God!

To glorify God is to praise, worship, give thanks, adore, venerate, honor, reverence, and exalt the Most High God. God redeemed His people for the very PURPOSE of doing Good Works in this physical life. They are, perhaps, the greatest GLORY anyone can offer unto God and Jesus Christ!

[2] Mark 12:41-44.
[3] John 8:12.

God works in His people for the purpose of creating children who will share in His agape love, joy, peace, and eternity! That is why, in this life, "... **whatever you do, do all to the glory of God**." (1 Cor. 10:31). Is that true in your life? Do you do ALL things to glorify God? Scripture says, "all have sinned and fall short of **the glory of God**." (Rom. 3:23). While this compares sinful man to the unimaginable glory of God, I think it is also a case where *sin* causes us to fall short of GIVING glory to God because Scripture also says:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20 For **all the promises of God** in Him *[Jesus Christ] are* Yes, and in Him *[Jesus Christ]* Amen, **to the glory of God through us**.

All—not some, but ALL—the promises of God are given to us so that we might glorify Him! In fact, it is not just His promises:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:15 For **all things *are* for your sakes**, that grace, having spread through the many, **may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God**.

EVERYTHING that God has done, is doing, and will do is so that we can glorify Him and Jesus Christ. Obviously, Good Works are a major contributor but when Scripture says God does "**all things**" so that we may abound in glory to Him, does that not also include the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of sins, begettal by the Holy Spirit, promise of eternal life, promise of unspeakable peace and joy, *and* Good Works? This cannot be over emphasized—ALL of it is for one purpose:

> ROMANS 15:6-7 that you may **with one mind *and* one mouth glorify the God** and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore **receive one another**, just as Christ also received us, **to the glory of God**.

What does it mean to "receive" one another? It is literally to take hold of to oneself. We are to take hold of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Whether God has provided one the abundance to give or has put another under the "pressure" (the meaning of the Greek word for affliction, tribulation, or trouble) of trials, we are to take hold of each other and be ONE with each other in all things:

> ACTS 2:44-46 Now **all who believed were together**, and had all things in common, 45 and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, **as anyone had need**. 46 So **continuing daily with one accord** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

And what was the result of this unity? Read the next verse:

> ACTS 2:47 **praising God** and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the *ekklesia* daily those who were being saved.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-03-08—KEEP THE FEAST WITH SINCERE SINCERITY

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

God has purposed and desires a family of eternal children. Everything He has done is for that singular purpose, including the creation of angels, the heavens, and the earth with all its forms of physical life. Have you ever wondered why God decided upon this particular plan? Man was obviously made flesh so that He could destroy the rebellious before they were made eternal spirit beings. That suggests that spirit beings can never be destroyed. Certainly the Bible gives every indication that spirit beings are not subject to death, but can they be destroyed? It is hard to imagine that God does not have the power to destroy spirit as well as flesh, but will He? Is there an unrecorded promise that He will never destroy evil spirit beings? The Bible never says that, although it does say this about Satan the Devil:

> REVELATION 20:10 **The devil *[Satan]***, who deceived them, **was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone** where the beast and the false prophet *[were]*. And **they will be tormented *[tortured]* day and night forever and ever**.

The Bible clearly states that Satan will be tormented in the Lake of Fire and Brimstone "forever and ever." And there is a plurality in "**they** will be tormented," which seemingly is a reference to demons having the same fate as implied here:

> MATTHEW 8:28-29 When He *[Jesus Christ]* had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two **demon**-possessed *men,* coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way. 29 And suddenly **they cried out**, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here **to torment *[torture]* us** before the time?"

Whatever torment or torture awaits Satan and the demons is significant enough to cause them unknowable fear:

> JAMES 2:19 *[James wrote]* You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even **the demons** believe–and **tremble**!

This raises some questions. If Satan and the demons are tortured for eternity, how does that fit into the compassion and *chesed* mercy[1] of God? At some point, their torment will exceed the time of their existence before their punishment began. Perhaps, the eternity of their torture reflects the eternity lost to those humans who were deceived by them. While the compassion and *chesed* mercy of God is never in question, these are mysteries that will not be resolved in this age.

But it does bring to mind some thoughts. It is hard to imagine that God created angels and did not know (or even count on) 1/3 of them rebelling. If that is the case, why did He create them as spirit beings and not flesh and blood so that Satan and the demons could be destroyed instead of tormented for eternity? Their wickedness influences the hearts and minds of humans, but they could have done that whether they are spirit or flesh, although eternal wicked beings ensures a continual maximum evil influence throughout the age of flesh. However, from what I have glimpsed of the evil that

[1] Refer to the Sabbath Thought 2025-02-22 - Compassion & *Chesed*

humans alone are capable of doing, they do not require any assistance from the more powerful demons.

While all this will not be resolved in my lifetime, it was prompted by thoughts about the various types or categories of sin. The following list mentions seventy of them and is not even comprehensive:

1) Abomination (detestable, disgusting)
2) Adultery
3) Anger (violent passion)
4) Backbiting
5) Bitterness
6) Blasphemy (evil-speaking)
7) Boasting
8) Clamor (pandemonium, uproar)
9) Coarse jesting (sarcasm)
10) Condemnation
11) Contention (quarrels, strife)
12) Covenant breaking (untrustworthy)
13) Covetousness (avarice, extortion, fraud, greed)
14) Cowards
15) Deceit
16) Devising evil
17) Disobedient
18) Dissension (sedition)
19) Drug sorcery (witchcraft)
20) Drunkenness
21) Effeminate
22) Envy (ill will)
23) Evil desire
24) Extortion (exploitation, predatory, swindlers, violent greed)
25) Filthiness (obscene)
26) Filthy language
27) Foolish (undignified) talking
28) Fornication
29) Gossip
30) Greed
31) Hatred (hostility)
32) Heresy (factions, denominations, disunions)
33) Idolatry
34) Impious (God-haters)
35) Incest
36) Jealousy
37) Kidnapping
38) Lewdness (lasciviousness, licentiousness)
39) Lying (deceit)
40) Lust
41) Malice
42) Meddling (busibodies)
43) Mischievousness (bad character)
44) Murder
45) Perjury
46) Pride
47) Prostitution
48) Quarrels
49) Revelry (carousing)
50) Reviling (abusers, criticism)
51) Rivalry (emulation)
52) Selfish ambition
53) Sexual immorality
54) Slander
55) Sodomites (homosexuals)
56) Spiteful (insulting)
57) Strife (wrangling debate)
58) Talebearing (tattlers)
59) Theft
60) Unbelievers (untrustworthy)
61) Uncleanness (satanic)
62) Undiscerning
63) Unforgiving
64) Unloving
65) Unmerciful
66) Unrighteousness (treachery, injustice, wickedness)
67) Wantonness
68) Wickedness (depravity)
69) Whispering
70) Wrath

I doubt much on this list[2] comes as a surprise to anyone. One interesting point is that all sin seems to be universal; that is, it can be committed by spirit beings as well as flesh and blood. (While sexual sins are not directly attributable to demons, the motives behind them certainly apply.)

Of greatest importance is how each of us individually views sin in our lives. With the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread drawing near, having an acute awareness of sins is vital. Most likely do not give a second thought about sins such as witchcraft,

[2] Rom. 1:29-31; 13:13; Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 4:29-31; 5:3-5; Col. 3:5, 8; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; 3:1-5, 11; 5:13 and Rev. 21:8.

incest, fornication, and murder. These have a grave level of evil attached to them and they likely apply to very few, if any, of the *ekklesia*. Some of the more common sins are anger, contention, lust, lying, et al.

The struggle against sin is often hampered by self-imposed blindness; that is, intentional ignorance. It is difficult to examine our own weaknesses and admit our sins, especially to ourselves. Hopefully, most at the very least repent to God but that does not completely fulfill the commandment for many sins. Why? Look at that list again. All sin is against God[3] but many bring evil upon people. Even sins such as idolatry, that are usually considered to be only against God, can tempt or offend others as well. When sin affects others, it results in offenses whether or not they were intentionally directed at them.

And that is the stumblingblock (pun intended[4]) for overcoming many personal sins. Offenses are some of the worst sins as emphasized by Jesus when He said, "It is impossible that no **offenses** should come, but **woe *to him* through whom they do come**! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, **than that he should offend** one of these little ones." (Luke 17:1-2). This is why God's children are commanded to reconcile ALL offenses[5, 6].

But there is a misperception about sin. How many pay serious attention to sin? Some of the *ekklesia* truly believe they have repented of all their sin. Let that sink in. Aside from offenses, many of which never seem to be reconciled, complacency can set in. With each sin that is overcome, we feel liberated. It is wonderful when there is victory over a sin. The problem is that overconfidence can completely blind us to 'less' significant sins.

Think of it this way. Upon your death, will you be completely sinless? I doubt most believe they will. Obviously, that is one reason we must always be under God's grace, compassion, and *chesed* mercy. You will never run out of sins even if you spend a lifetime overcoming them. Look at the list again. A very common sin today is heresy. Really? Yes, many think heresy refers to false or contrary teachings; however, the Greek word actually describes factions, denominations, and disunions such as Paul addressed:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:11-13 For it has been declared to me *[Paul]* concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's *household*, that **there are contentions among you**. 12 Now I say this, that **each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." 13 Is Christ divided?** Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

These days Paul might put it this way: "Each of you says, "I am of UCG," or "I am of LCG," or "I am of COGWA," or "I am of CBCG."" These are, according to the Bible, heresies, which cause *contentions* according to Paul. What is the outcome of

[3] Ps. 51:4; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 3:4 ("sin is the transgression of ***[God's]* law**").
[4] *Offense* literally means *stumblingblock* in the Greek.
[5] Matt. 18:21-22; Luke 17:3-4.
[6] For more information, refer to the booklet "Offenses—Ordinances of God" on the website.

contentions? Division and offenses[7]. Heresy is separation of brethren by organization, 'doctrines', etc., whether in thought or deed.

But there are sins in the list one might have and not give much thought to the harm they cause. Consider the sins of gossip, meddling, sarcasm (coarse jesting), and foolish or undignified talking. (Yes, according to the Bible, all four are sins!) These are typically considered to be 'less' egregious than others in the list, but are they? The Bible is clear that stumbling in one point of the law makes us guilty of all[8].

The expectation of God's work in us is not that we are to overcome all 'major' sins and ignore the continual eking out of perfection by scrubbing out the 'minor' ones that remain. No one should work hard on their big sins and then sit back and say, "Soul, you have *[overcome many sins these]* many years; take your ease; eat, drink, *and* be merry." (Luke 12:19 paraphrased). As long as there is sin, our struggle must continue. That includes looking back on past sins to reveal any unreconciled offenses, which can result from many of those sins in the above list. Offenses require more than going to God. Reconciliation must happen between an offender and victim as well.

All of this is to say, never stop examining yourself for sins. This is the greatest and, perhaps, hardest, part of keeping your vow to the New Covenant everyone makes with God. So, do not lose hope because salvation is in the overcoming—not in the number of sins over which you have been victorious or in the number of those remaining. It is in continuing to overcome—large or small. One. By. One.:

> GALATIANS 6:8-9 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And **let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart**.

Sincerity and truth expose all sin, which is why they are the foundation for keeping the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread. But they require examining ourselves and being sincere and truthful with OURSELVES as well as God:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:7-8 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore let us **keep the feast**, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but **with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth**.

The last part is literally, "with the **unleaven of sincerity** and truth." But the Greek word for *unleaven* figuratively means to be *sincere*. Now it reads, "let us keep the feast … with **sincere sincerity** and truth." Sincere sincerity and truth—exactly what is required to overcome!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[7] Rom. 16:17.
[8] James 2:10.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-03-15—NONBELIEVERS & UNBELIEVERS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

There are a few titles used in Scripture that, perhaps, could use some explanation:

> ACTS 5:14 And **<u>believers</u>** were increasingly added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,
>
> 1 TIMOTHY 4:12 Let no one despise your *[Timothy's]* youth, but be an example to the **<u>believers</u>** in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

In the minds of the apostles, Believers are those who have been "added" as members of the Body of Christ and conduct themselves in the Law of God (the "word"), agape love, the Holy Spirit, faith, and purity (spiritual cleanness). In all sense of the word, Believers are begotten children of God and they are unique:

> JOHN 15:18-19 If the world hates you *[speaking to Believers]*, you know that it hated Me *[Jesus Christ]* before *it hated* you. 19 "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because **<u>you are not of the world</u>**, but I chose **<u>you out of the world</u>**, therefore the world hates you.
>
> JOHN 17:14-15 "I *[Jesus Christ]* have given them *[speaking to Believers]* Your *[God's]* word; and the world has hated them because **<u>they are not of the world</u>**, just as I am not of the world. 15 "I do not pray that You should **<u>take them out of the world</u>**, but that You should keep them from the evil one.
>
> [FV] 1 CORINTHIANS 5:10 And *yet, you [speaking to Believers] can* not altogether *avoid contact* with the sexually immoral of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since **<u>you would then have to go out of *[exit]* the world</u>**.

When Jesus compared Believers to others in the world, He described them as living IN the world but not OF the world, meaning they no longer follow the ways of the world although God does not literally take them OUT of the world. The distinction is they are physically present but their thinking and character is influenced by God, who is *not* in this world. One way Jesus highlighted the uniqueness of Believers is by contrasting light and darkness:

> MATTHEW 5:14-16 "**<u>You *[speaking to Believers]* are the light of the world.</u>** A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 "Let **<u>your light so shine before men *[of the world]*</u>**, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Another distinguishing feature of Believers is that they are clean whereas sinners are unclean:

> JOHN 13:10-11 Jesus said to him *[Peter]*, "He who is bathed needs only to wash *his* feet, but is completely **<u>clean; and you are clean</u>**, but not all of you." 11 For He knew who would betray Him; therefore He said, "You are **<u>not all clean</u>**."
>
> 1 JOHN 1:7 But if we walk in the light as He *[God]* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **<u>cleanses us from all sin</u>**.

But why are they called *Believers*?

JOHN 2:22 Therefore, when He *[Jesus Christ]* had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they *[the disciples]* **believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said**.

JOHN 4:42 Then they *[Samaritan men]* said to the woman, "Now we **believe**, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard *Him* and we know **that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world**."

JOHN 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you **believe in Him *[Jesus Christ]* whom He *[God]* sent**."

JOHN 6:69 "Also we *[the disciples]* have come to **believe and know that You *[Jesus Christ]* are the Christ, the Son of the living God**."

Those who are *not* Believers fall under two categories: a Nonbeliever and Unbeliever[1].

[FV] 1 CORINTHIANS 14:22-24 Consequently, *gifts of* languages are a sign—not for those who believe, but for those who do **not believe *[Nonbelievers]***. But prophecy *is* not for the **unbelievers**, but for those who believe. 23 Therefore, if the whole *ekklesia* is assembled together in one place, and all are speaking in *unknown* languages, and **unlearned persons *[Nonbelievers]*** or **unbelievers** come in, will they not say that you have lost your minds? 24 But if all prophesy, and an **unbeliever** or **unlearned person *[Nonbelievers]*** comes in, he is convicted by all, *and* he is discerned by all.

There are deeper spiritual aspects when it comes to a full reckoning of the titles of Believers, Nonbelievers, and Unbelievers but the primary biblical emphasis can be summarized as follows:

BELIEVER = Believes Jesus: 1) fulfilled prophecy, 2) is the Son of God, 3) is The Christ (anointed by God), 4) was sent by God, and 5) is The Savior of the world. Believers are of "**The Faith** which was once for all delivered." (Jude 1:3).

NONBELIEVER (or UNLEARNED) = Is ignorant of the tenets of a Believer because they are untrained or unschooled but responds positively to facts.

UNBELIEVER = Is biased and prejudiced against The Faith of a Believer and even rejects any evidence, no matter how well-substantiated.

The importance of understanding the difference between Nonbelievers and Unbelievers is reflected in this Scripture:

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-16 **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.** For what fellowship has righteousness with **lawlessness**? And what communion has light with **darkness**? 15 And what accord has Christ with **Belial**? Or what part has a believer with an **unbeliever**? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with **idols**? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

Scripture says Believers are not to be "unequally yoked together" with Unbelievers. Remember, a Believer has an unwavering belief and faith in the existence and roles of God the Father and

[1] Also Luke 12:46; Acts 14:2; 1 Cor. 6:6; et al.

Jesus Christ. An Unbeliever is actively angry, hateful, and spiteful toward God the Father and Jesus Christ. This makes a Believer and Unbeliever completely incompatible.

Note also that Unbelievers are not simply aethistic (disbelief in the existence of God) or even agnostic (denies the existence of God); they are antagonistic toward God the Father, Jesus Christ, *and* all who are Believers. Unbelievers do not simply disagree with Believers, they aggressively war against them.

However, these verses do *not* give the same warning against Nonbelievers. Why? Because Nonbelievers are very different from Unbelievers. A Nonbeliever is mainly ignorant of those things established in the mind of a Believer. They do not hold animosity toward those who are faithful toward God the Father and Jesus Christ. Over time, they might be convicted and called to become Believers, but even if they are not, they are tolerant or accepting of the tenets of a Believer. Nonbelievers are not as compatible with a Believer as other Believers, but they are not completely INCOMPATIBLE as is the case with Unbelievers. That is why several scriptures indicate Nonbelievers are those who have not yet had their ears opened to hear the gospel:

> ROMANS 10:13-14 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him *[God]* in whom they have **not believed *[Nonbelievers]***? And how shall **they believe *[become Believers]*** in Him *[Jesus Christ]* of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?
>
> [FV] ROMANS 11:30-31 For just as you once did **not believe *[Nonbelievers]*** God, but have now been shown mercy through their unbelief *[Unbelievers!]*, 31 In the same way also, they have **not believed *[Nonbelievers]* at this time *[but later become Believers]*** in order that through the mercy shown to you, they also may have mercy shown *to them*.
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 10:27 If any of those who do **not believe *[Nonbelievers]*** invites you *to dinner,* and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake.
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 4:4 whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do **not believe *[Nonbelievers]***, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

This last verse shows Nonbelievers are often blinded but that does not mean their minds will reject the Gospel. An Unbeliever, on the other hand, actually has a defiled mind:

> TITUS 1:15-16 To the pure all things are pure, but **to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. 16 They *[might even]* profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work.**

Unbelievers poison others against Believers, have defiled minds and consciences, deny God, and are abominable, disobedient, and disqualified.

> NOTE: Some Scriptures mention those who are Nonbelievers ("unlearned") but attached other condemnations such as "unstable" (2 Pet. 3:16) or "foolish" (2 Tim. 2:23). In those cases, the reference is to Unbelievers, not someone who is simply ignorant, i.e., a Nonbeliever.

At worst, the conscience of some Unbelievers, especially those who were once of The Faith (a Believer), can become seared:

> 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having **their own conscience seared with a hot iron *[branded]***,

Although one can always hope that they will eventually repent, Unbelievers with defiled minds and consciences are condemned to the Lake of Fire and Brimstone:

> REVELATION 21:8 "But the cowardly, **unbelieving**, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars **shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death**."

Believers and Unbelievers are always "unequally yoked together" unless or until their hardened hearts change. This is why Paul wrote this about married couples:

> [FV] 1 CORINTHIANS 7:12-15 Now to the rest, I, not the Lord, say *this*: If any brother has an **unbelieving wife**, and she consents to dwell with him *[a Believer]*, let him not divorce her. 13 And *if* a woman has an **unbelieving husband**, and he consents to dwell with her *[a Believer]*, let her not divorce him. 14 For the **unbelieving husband** is sanctified in the wife, and the **unbelieving wife** is sanctified in the husband; otherwise, your children would be unclean, but now they are holy. 15 But **if the unbelieving *husband or wife* separates, let him *or her* separate. The *believing* brother or sister is not bound** in such *cases*; for God has called us to peace.

These well-known verses can be misunderstood when there is no distinction between Nonbelievers and Unbelievers. Paul says that divorce is necessary when a spouse who is an Unbeliever breaks the marriage covenant by "not consenting to dwell with [him or her]." Paul does not say this about a Nonbeliever because they are more equally "yoked" and do not actively war against the Believer's faith, unlike the Unbeliever. (Note: The marital covenant can be betrayed and broken by many factors aside from spiritual matters of faith including abuse, etc. Paul is *not* addressing those here.[2])

Finally, it has been taught that Believers should avoid having real relationships with people of the world. This is partly a result of not distinguishing between Nonbelievers and Unbelievers as well as improper exegeses of John 15:18-19; 17:14-15; 1 Cor. 5:10; Rom. 16:17, and others. Believers live IN the world but are not OF it. This is not suggesting complete isolation FROM the world. Yes, avoid the Unbelievers who actively cause divisions and offenses[3]. However, how can the Gospel be preached if Believers are hidden and secluded from Nonbelievers? "Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners**" (1 Tim. 1:15) and that requires wise[4] engagement with the world. Believers cannot avoid the darkness of this world. But, then, is not darkness why Jesus said to "Let your light so shine before men?"

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[2] For more information, refer to the booklet "Marriage & Divorce – Understanding the Marital Covenant."
[3] Rom. 16:17.
[4] Matt. 10:16.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-03-22—A NEW & LIVING WAY

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

In this universe, everything is controlled by physical laws. These are, as far as we know, immutable for all things physical. Among the more well-known laws are gravity, electromagnetism, and thermodynamics. But the physical laws of the universe also affect something completely unexpected—information. Information is simply data (raw facts) that is created, organized, and used for a specific purpose. What is not obvious is that information itself is PHYSICAL, if for no other reason than because it only exists within something that is physical.

For example, information on a computer is stored as binary digits (bits) on a physical hard drive or as writing on a piece of physical paper. Something not as obvious is that information is also contained within every biological cell, whether it is a zygote (impregnated egg) that produces a baby or a simple bacterium. The genetic information in cells is stored in chemical strands called DNA.

Information is also found in the smallest elements of the universe—atoms—in the form of quantum particles (quarks, gluons, and muons). These are the building blocks of electrons, protons, and neutrons, which give an atom its physical properties. For example, iron, lead, nitrogen, oxygen, etc. all have electrons, protons, and neutrons but their number and structure differ. The 'information' in the quantum particles differentiates iron from lead and nitrogen from oxygen.

The biggest surprise may be that THOUGHTS are also information, which is created, organized, and stored within our physical *brains*. Since thoughts cannot exist outside of a brain, they are, at least in that sense, physical themselves. This also includes emotions because they likewise exist within a physical being. They are not only "thoughts of the heart"[1] but also biochemical processes that affect the mind and body. Therefore, emotions are information that is created and stored inside a physical being. The fact that information is physical has only recently been established[2].

While this is likely a sleep aid for most, it provides a better perspective of the vast differences between physical and spirit beings. Understanding that thoughts are information and information is a physical property is one way to think about our spiritual relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ *through* the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The theory that thoughts are physical can be seen in the drastic changes that occur to thinking within the brain of a dementia patient and why thoughts perish upon the death of someone:

> PSALM 146:4 His *[man's]* spirit departs, he returns to his earth; **in that very day his [thoughts] perish**.

The Bible provides a vague description of the vast gulf between the thoughts of physical and spirit beings:

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[1] Gen. 6:5; 1 Chr 29:18; Job 17:11; Ps. 33:11; Jer. 23:20; et al.

[2] Information Theory is the study of the quantification, storage, and transmission of information. The Rolf Landauer principle states that all "information is physical," which is an extension of the collaborative ideas of scientists James Maxwell, Alan Turing, and Claude Shannon.

PSALMS 92:5-6 O LORD, how great are Your works! **Your thoughts** are very deep. 6 **A [brutish] man does not know, nor does a fool understand this.**

ISAIAH 55:8-9 "For **My thoughts *are* not your thoughts**, nor *are* your ways My ways," says the LORD. 9 "For ***as* the heavens are higher than the earth**, so are My ways higher than your ways, and **My thoughts than your thoughts**.

MICAH 4:12 But **they *[mankind]* do not know the thoughts of the LORD, nor do they understand His counsel**; for He will gather them like sheaves to the threshing floor.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:19-20 For **the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God**. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their *own* craftiness"; 20 and again, "**The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.**"

The spiritual realm is so vastly different from the physical that it really cannot be understood by physical beings. For example, from a human perspective one might think that compassion and mercy are *characteristics* of God, but that falls far short. Scripture says, "God *is* **Spirit**" (John 4:24) and "God **is** love" (1 John 4:8, 16). Agape love is not just His character, it is the essence or nature of His Spirit—His Being. On the other hand, thoughts of humans reside in a physical brain, which limits our intelligence and is influenced by emotions as well as chemical and biological effects that vary with age, experiences, and health. And that, I think, is why Paul wrote:

1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-16 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 10 But **God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For **what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him**? Even so **no one knows the things of God except *[by]* the Spirit of God**. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit that is from God, that we might know the things** that have been freely **given to us by God**. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which **the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual**. 14 But **the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God**, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. 15 But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is *rightly* judged by no one. 16 For "**who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him**?" But **we have the mind of Christ**.

Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God, the thoughts of God cannot be discerned. This is reflected in the strange statement in Romans 8:26 that says the Holy Spirit "makes intercession for us with **groanings** which cannot be uttered." No human can understand the complexity of groanings "**that cannot be uttered.**" What are those groanings and utterances? God only knows but they are much more than simple 'aids' to our communications with Him.

And this is why "**we are His *[God's]* workmanship, created** in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:10). For humans to have any comprehension of God, His spirit existence, His thoughts, or His agape love requires being able to think spiritually. So, bridging the gap of between the spiritual and physical with all its limitations cannot be done without God. His work

in us is not simply to change the thoughts of His children; it requires CREATING totally new ways of thinking:

> EPHESIANS 4:24 and that you **put on the new man which was created according to God**, in true righteousness and holiness.

David realized this when he said, "**Create** in me a clean heart, O God." (Ps. 51:10). He did not say, "give me a clean heart" or "change my heart;" he asked God to CREATE a "clean heart." But the new creation God is working requires implanting a spirit element within physical humans so they can have even a basic understanding of the thoughts, emotions, and agape love of God:

> COLOSSIANS 3:10 and have put on the new *man* who is **renewed in knowledge *[thoughts]* according to the image of Him who created him**,

The word *renewed* means to make something *brand new*. The workmanship of God is not repainting an old wall; it is tearing it down and rebuilding it with new construction materials. It is a completely NEW creation:

> ISAIAH 43:7 Everyone who is called by My *[the LORD's]* name, whom **I have created** for My glory; **I have formed him, yes, I have made him.**

God puts His Holy Spirit in His children because that is the only way a physical mind can think spiritually. The mind of God and Jesus Christ are purely spiritual. The Holy Spirit bridges the gap between the physical and God so we can have SPIRITUAL thoughts of God, His agape love, and the faith of Jesus Christ. Spiritual thoughts CANNOT reside in a physical brain without the Holy Spirit.

One analogy that might help get this across is to think of a dog that has been trained to sniff out illicit drugs. The dog knows how to find them but the dog cannot comprehend the PURPOSE for doing so. It is incapable of knowing of the harm drugs can do or that they are a crime—a violation of a higher moral law. In that sense, humans without the Holy Spirit can keep the Law of God but they cannot begin to understand the *spiritual* purpose, meaning, and thoughts underpinning it.

This helps explain why "the law is **spiritual**" (Rom. 7:14). Physical people cannot understand God's SPIRITUAL Law without the Holy Spirit. The ancient Israelites received that Law but could not go beyond simple obedience even though the spiritual Law is intended to PRODUCE agape love: "Now the purpose of the commandment *[the Law]* is *[agape]* love from a pure heart …" (1 Tim. 1:5).

God's Law may seem like a list of "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" directives but they are actually a primitive instruction set of God's very Being. And it is not possible for physical humans to understand the Law and become agape love without a SPIRIT brain or "mind":[3]

> JEREMIAH 31:33 "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

[3] Also Ps. 37:31; 40:8.

That is the work of God in us. The Holy Spirit IS the spirit mind of God[4] that allows us to develop the SPIRITUAL thinking necessary to begin to understand His Law, purpose, agape love, and mind. The 'mind' of a spirit being is not just a repository of thoughts like our physical brains; they ARE those thoughts just like God IS love. Only when our thinking becomes more spiritual is our souls permanently changed.

This happened to Abraham who was willing to sacrifice his son Isaac because his thinking was "spiritually minded."[5] He knew God and His promises were eternal and that God could resurrect Isaac from death.[6] Because Abraham's thinking had a spiritual foundation, God could say, "**now I know** that you fear God" (Gen. 22:12) because his very soul had become the eternal mind of God. This is God's workmanship—CREATING a spiritual mind in physical beings that never changes because they BECOME like God:

> JOHN 16:13 However, when that one has come, *even* **the Spirit** of the truth, it will lead you into all truth because it shall not speak from itself, but **whatever it shall hear, it shall speak. And it shall disclose to you** the things to come.

Scripture says "… **the word** of God ***is* living** …" (Heb. 4:12). His word is His thoughts. However, they are not simply *about* life; His thoughts are LIVING; there is a vast difference. Hopefully, this leads to a deeper appreciation of scriptures such as this:

> HEBREWS 10:19-20 Therefore, brethren, having boldness **to enter the Holiest** by the blood of Jesus, 20 **by a new and living way** which He consecrated for us, **through the veil**, that is, His flesh,

For many, entering before God "**by a new and living way**" is mostly a metaphor. Entering before God by a NEW and LIVING way is much more than having the veil of mental dullness or blindness removed. The Holy Spirit is the spirit element that implants the spirit mind of Christ into a physical brain so that our very souls can think spiritually.

Jesus said, "**The words** that I speak to you **are spirit**, and *they* **are life**." (John 6:63). His words are LIVING, not simply instructions or directives to follow. The gulf between the physical and spiritual cannot be fully understood because the thoughts of humans are physical, residing in a physical brain. As a result, physical beings are unable to comprehend that the thoughts of God are LIVING because they are spiritual thoughts. But those with the Holy Spirit HAVE the mind of Christ and His words are LIVING in us!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[4] 2 Cor. 2:16.
[5] Rom. 8:6.
[6] Heb. 11:17-19.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-03-29—FELLOWSHIP IN SUFFERINGS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Ananias, in a vision from Jesus Christ, was told to go and anoint Saul of Tarsus to heal the blindness that He had laid upon him. Because Saul was going around persecuting many Christians, Ananias expressed concerns about helping him. Jesus told him that Saul, soon after renamed Paul, was chosen to take the name of Jesus to the Gentiles but then added this statement:

> ACTS 9:16 "For I *[Jesus Christ]* will show him *[Paul]* how many things **he must suffer** for My name's sake."

Did Jesus simply want to punish Paul for persecuting the followers of Christ? Perhaps, but that is not the whole reason since all who would enter into the Kingdom must suffer:

> 1 PETER 5:9 Resist him *[Satan]*, steadfast in the faith, knowing that **the same sufferings are experienced by your [brethren] in the world**.

The Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ paid the penalty for the sins of those who repent, but the PURPOSE of that singular sacrifice was something much greater than simply providing a way to deal with the sins of mankind. The Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the pivotal beginning of a completely NEW creation:

> ISAIAH 65:17-19 "For behold, **I *[the LORD]* create new heavens and a new earth**; and **the former shall not be remembered or come to mind**. 18 But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem *as* a rejoicing, and her people a joy. 19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people; the voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

God told Isaiah that *everything* will become a New Creation and the Old Creation will be forever forgotten. It may sound strange, but the Passover sacrifice of Jesus Christ makes the New Creation possible. This is because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ establishes the centerpiece of the New Creation: eternal spirit CHILDREN of God.

> REVELATION 21:1-5 Now I *[John]* saw a **new heaven and a new earth**, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "**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.** 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He *[God the Father]* who sat on the throne said, "**Behold, I make all things new.**" And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

There will be a New Heaven and New Earth but the New Kingdom of God will also have newly created citizenry. The Kingdom of God exists right now, but never in the entirety of its existence has there been a family of God's children in it! It is the birth of spiritual children that make the New Kingdom of God a truly NEW creation! In fact, the New Creation is a place FOR the spiritual children of God:

HEBREWS 2:5-8 For He *[God]* has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. 6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him? 7 You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and **set him *[mankind]* over the works *[the NEW Kingdom]*** of Your hands. 8 You have put all things in subjection under his feet."[1] 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.

Even if nothing in this universe changed, it will be a completely New Kingdom because there will be children of God. But the New Kingdom of God comes with a cost—the ransom paid by Jesus Christ for the lives of those children. While His sacrifice took care of sins, the ultimate purpose for the suffering of Jesus Christ was so that God could create a New Kingdom with children:

HEBREWS 2:9-10 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**. 10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in **bringing many sons to glory**, to make the **Captain of their salvation** perfect through sufferings.

Jesus Christ is now the Captain of Salvation, *perfected* through sufferings in His role of "bringing many sons to glory." The sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the hands of His Father is absolute *proof* of the depths of Their desire for children:

HEBREWS 2:11-13 For both He *[God]* who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He *[Jesus Christ]* is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying: "**I will declare Your *[God the Father's]* name to My *[Jesus Christ's]* brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.**"[2] 13 And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "**Here am I *[Jesus Christ]* and the children whom God has given Me.**"[3]

Jesus' deep love for His Father motivates Him to declare God's name and sing praises to Him. These verses record Jesus' own love for the children of God who will be His brothers and sisters. As the Captain of Salvation, He is the mediator and protector of those children:

JOHN 17:11-12 "Now I *[Jesus Christ]* am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. **Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are.*** 12 "While I was with them in the world, **I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost** except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

God placed His children into the hands of His Son for safekeeping and protection. The Captain of the salvation of those chosen by God plays a vital role in the success of the New Creation. As such, Jesus had to be perfected through sufferings:

HEBREWS 2:14-18 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself *[Jesus Christ]* likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For indeed He *[Jesus Christ]* does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His*

[1] Ps. 8:4-6.
[2] Ps. 22:22.
[3] Isa. 8:18.

brethren, that He *[Jesus Christ]* might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For **in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted**.

Jesus Christ overcame all temptations and endured the torments of a blood sacrifice not simply to be the propitiation for sins but to become the Captain of Salvation for all God's children. Likewise, all who would be children in the New Kingdom of God must also be perfected through sufferings. This is the price of admission into the Family of God:

1 PETER 4:12-14 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning **the fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but **rejoice to the extent that you partake of *[share in]* Christ's sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.

1 PETER 5:10 But may the God of all grace, **who called us to His eternal glory** by Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a while**, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*.

Paul, too, talked about suffering for the New Kingdom:

PHILIPPIANS 3:7-9 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed I also **count all things loss** for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom **I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish**, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which *is* from the law, but that which *is* through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;

The "loss" Paul mentioned involved great suffering. He used the same word when he prophesied of the "great loss" to the ship that would result if they sailed from the city of Lasea in Crete[4]. Paul's ministry cost him everything and it came by terrible sufferings. But he counted his losses as dung or "rubbish" so that he might "gain Christ." What he said next is entirely contrary to a rational human mind:

[TS2009] PHILIPPIANS 3:10-12 **to *[absolutely]* know Him *[Jesus Christ]*, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death**, 11 if somehow I might attain to the resurrection from the dead. 12 Not that I have already received, or already been perfected, but I press on, to lay hold of that for which Messiah [Jesus] has also laid hold of me.

The KJV and others translate it as, "**may know** Him," but this gives a sense that knowing Christ is not certain or has little depth. It falls far short of the Greek word, which is a certain and absolute, intimate knowledge. Moreover, verse 10 is translated as list of four things that Paul wanted: 1) to know Christ, 2) the power of His resurrection, 3) the fellowship of His sufferings, and 4) to be conformed to His death. However, this is a case where the Greek is more subtle.

However, the first "and" in verse 10 is not a conjunction connecting two phrases but an epexegetical adjective, which indicates the phrase that follows clarifies or explains the leading phrase. While this sounds complicated, it simply means that Paul says that *knowing* Christ, absolutely and deeply, is the RESULT of two things: 1) the power of His resurrection, and 2) fellowship (or participation) in His sufferings. It makes more sense when worded as, "to

[4] Acts 27:10, 21.

intimately know Jesus Christ through the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, by being conformed to (or becoming like Him in) His death."

The point that Paul is making is that a deep knowledge of Christ can only be had through the power of His RESURRECTION and fellowship in His SUFFERINGS! As Scripture says, "if we have been united together in the **likeness of His death *[through sufferings]***, certainly we also shall be ***in the likeness* of *His* resurrection**." (Rom. 6:5).

The resurrection of children has always been the ultimate purpose for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who said:

> JOHN 11:25-26 Jesus said to her, "**I am the resurrection and the life.** He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. 26 "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Why does Jesus say He IS the resurrection and He IS the life?

> MATTHEW 22:31-32 "But **concerning the resurrection of the dead**, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob' ? **God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.**"

Jesus IS the resurrection and He IS the life because it is through His Passover sacrifice that children of God will exist! And this is a large part of the reasons the Passover is a memorial and remembrance[5]. We keep the Passover so that we may KNOW Christ by "**the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings**"[6].

> ROMANS 6:8-11 Now **if we died with Christ**, we believe that **we shall also live with Him**, 9 **knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead**, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For *the death* that He died, He died to sin once for all; but *the life* that He lives, He lives to God. 11 **Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

The Passover sacrifice prepares the core element of the New Creation—spiritual children of God. The Passover sufferings of Jesus perfected Him as the Captain of Salvation for all who would have life through the power of His resurrection from the dead. Without the Passover, the new heavens and new earth would just be a makeover of the existing universe. With it, the New Kingdom of God will be a New Creation in which God will be "all in all"[7] with "everyone who is called by My *[God's]* name, whom I have created for My glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him."[8]

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[5] Exod. 12:14; 1 Cor. 11:23-26.
[6] Phil. 3:10.
[7] 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:23.
[8] Isa. 43:4.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-04-05—THE FIFTH COMMANDMENT & PASSOVER

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Of the Ten Commandments, the first four are generally accepted as pertaining to mankind's relationship with God whereas the last six are directed toward our fellow man. While true in some regards, the Fifth Commandment really points to a relationship with God more so than with physical people because of the PROMISE attached to it:

> EPHESIANS 6:2 "Honor your father and mother," which is **the first commandment with promise**:

The Fifth Commandment demands giving honor to one's father and mother that comes with a promise of a long life in the land for doing so:

> EXODUS 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, **that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God** is giving you.

Notice, however, that the promise of long days is in a land from GOD not the parents. This is key to understanding why this commandment relates to God more than people. At the core of it, the Fifth Commandment is one of many laws, statutes, and precepts that Jesus came to fulfill:

> MATTHEW 5:17-18 "Do not think that I *[Jesus Christ]* came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. **I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.** 18 "For assuredly, I say to you, **till heaven and earth pass away**, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law **till all is fulfilled**.

The Law of God will not be completely fulfilled until the destruction of the existing heavens and earth. But on the heels of that destruction is something brand new:

> 2 PETER 3:12-13 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which **the heavens will be dissolved**, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, **according to His *[God the Father's]* promise**, look for **new heavens and a new earth** in which righteousness dwells.

God promises a New Heavens and a New Earth after the old heavens and old earth are destroyed, which is when Jesus said that the Law will be fulfilled. The Law of God cannot be fulfilled physically because God is spirit and must be worshipped (and honored) in spirit[1]. For this reason, the Fifth Commandment is less about honoring physical parents than God, making the first five of the Ten Commandments about God and the last five about mankind. The promise of the Fifth Commandment is "that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you." Clearly, the new spiritual creation is the PROMISE of the Fifth Commandment!

In fact, the Fifth Commandment has already been partially fulfilled because Jesus Himself kept the Fifth Commandment. He said, "I honor My Father" (John 8:49). For His

[1] John 4:23-24; Phil. 3:3.

obedience, God delivered on His promise of the Fifth Commandment by resurrecting Jesus to ETERNAL life (long days) and giving Him a KINGDOM (land). The following parable describes God fulfilling the promise of the Fifth Commandment to His Son:

> LUKE 19:12-15 Therefore He *[Jesus Christ]* said: "A certain **nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom** and to return. 13 "So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.' 14 "But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, 'We will not have this *man* to reign over us.' 15 "And so it was that when he returned, **having received the kingdom**, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

"Nobleman" is an obvious reference to Jesus Christ who left to RECEIVE a kingdom ('land'). The Fifth Commandment, along with all the Law of God and all the promises, was given to mankind. Jesus was, of course, flesh and blood so the Law AND its promises applied to Him just as it does to all humans. For His obedience to His Father, God bestowed ETERNAL life and a KINGDOM upon Jesus:

> JOHN 10:17-18 "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I *[Jesus Christ]* lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 "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.**"
>
> LUKE 22:29-30 "And I bestow upon you **a kingdom**, just as **My Father bestowed *one* upon Me *[Jesus Christ]***, 30 "that you may eat and drink at My table in **My kingdom**, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

Jesus was utterly without sin. He was never in need of the Passover blood to cover His sins. Therefore, receiving the Fifth Commandment promises of eternity in the Kingdom was for His perfect obedience to God, as Jesus said, "I have **kept My Father's commandments** ..." (John 15:10).

The Fifth Commandment is the promise of the New Covenant! But fulfilling that promise for the rest of mankind who have all sinned[2] required the sacrifice of Jesus on the Passover so that God the Father can forgive sins[3]. The blood of Jesus provides the means for God to fulfill the promise of the Fifth Commandment for all mankind. The Passover is the foundation for fulfilling the Fifth Commandment because it replaces sin with God's righteousness[4]. This is necessary because only the righteous will enter into the Promised Land of the Fifth Commandment:

> PSALMS 118:16-20 The right hand of **the LORD *[God the Father]* is exalted**; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. 17 I *[Jesus Christ]* shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. 18 The LORD has chastened me severely, but He has not given Me over to death. 19 **Open to me the gates *[of the Kingdom]* of righteousness; I *[Jesus Christ]* will go through them**, *and* I will praise the LORD. 20 **This is the gate of the LORD *[God the Father],* through which the righteous *[saints]* shall enter.**

[2] Rom. 3:23.
[3] 1 John 2:2.
[4] Rom. 4:6.

The promise of the Kingdom is upon all who honor (exalt) God the Father and who are made righteous through the sacrifice of His Son. For that sacrifice, God has extended the Fifth Commandment to include honoring His Son:

> JOHN 5:23 "that **all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father** who sent Him.

The Fifth Commandment requires honoring both God the Father AND Jesus Christ. Jesus gave His life to extend the promise of eternity in the Kingdom to the whole of mankind, so the Passover memorial and remembrance of His sufferings, crucifixion, death, and resurrection obviously *honors* Jesus Christ. But that sacrifice led to another requirement:

> LUKE 22:28 "But you are those who have **continued with Me *[Jesus Christ]* in My trials**.
>
> 1 PETER 2:21 For to this **you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**:

Partaking in sufferings after the manner of Jesus Christ *honors* God the Father[5]:

> 1 PETER 4:12-14, 16 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the **fiery trial which is to try you**, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that **you partake of Christ's sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but **on your part He *[God the Father]* is glorified**. … 16 Yet **if *anyone suffers* as a Christian**, let him not be ashamed, but **let him glorify God** in this matter.

The Passover memorial honors Jesus Christ and partaking of Christ's sufferings honors God the Father whereby the promise of the Fifth Commandment is fulfilled—eternity in a Kingdom FROM Jesus Christ:

> LUKE 22:29-30 "And I *[Jesus Christ]* bestow upon you **a kingdom**, just as **My Father bestowed *one* upon Me**, 30 "that you may eat and drink at My table in **My kingdom**, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."
>
> COLOSSIANS 1:12-13 giving thanks to **the Father** who has qualified us to be partakers of **the inheritance of the saints** in the light. 13 He *[God the Father]* has delivered us from the power of darkness and **conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son** of His love,

Jesus said, "it is your Father's **good pleasure to give you** the kingdom."[6] He also said that the Kingdom is His JOY:

> JOHN 15:10-11 "If you **keep My *[Jesus's]* commandments**, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you, **that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full**.

The joy in Jesus was fulfilled for Him at His resurrection and He wants all to have it:

[5] Also 2 Thess. 1:3-5; 1 Pet. 5:10.
[6] Luke 12:32.

> MATTHEW 25:21 "His lord said to him, 'Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. **Enter into the joy of your lord.**'

The Fifth Commandment has only been fulfilled for Jesus Christ and He is the only one of flesh and blood who truly knows "unspeakable joy."[7] It is what will transform the sorrows of the Passover and the physical sufferings of our trials:

> JOHN 16:20 "Most assuredly, I *[Jesus]* say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but **your sorrow will be turned into joy**.

There is no joy in our present sufferings[8] but keeping the memorial of Jesus' Passover sacrifice and having a FELLOWSHIP in His sufferings[9] lets us inherit the promise of the New Heavens and New Earth. However unimaginable, joy is promised to all who honor the Father and Son when all will be ONE with Them in the Kingdom:

> JOHN 17:11, 13, 20-23 "Now I *[Jesus Christ]* am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be **one as We *are***. … 13 "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, **that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves**. … 20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "that they all **may be one**, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one just as We are one**: 23 "**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.

The memorial of the Passover sacrifice HONORS Jesus Christ. Partaking of His sufferings HONORS God the Father. The promise for obeying the Fifth Commandment is eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven! And THAT, is the heavenly treasure[10] that brings pure JOY!

> MATTHEW 13:44-46 "Again, **the kingdom of heaven is like treasure** hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and **for joy over it** he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 "Again, **the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls**, 46 "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[7] 1 Pet. 1:8.
[8] Rom. 8:18-21.
[9] Phil. 3:10; Sabbath Thought 2025-03-29 Fellowship in Sufferings.
[10] Matt. 6:20.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-04-12—DESPISING THE PASSOVER

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Offenses occur frequently because too many are easily angered even with small matters. One recent example was someone who told me that I would end up in the Lake of Fire because they became angry over my *opinion* about physicians. A desire to inflict a horrible death upon someone over such a minor topic is beyond irrational—it is unrighteous anger and hatred.

Every offense involves anger, which many times leads to condemnation. All should "judge with righteous judgment,"[1] but that is not the same thing as condemnation. Judgment simply means assessing something as true or false, good or bad, based upon one's own understanding. Condemnation, on the other hand, is pronouncing punishment on someone.

Even if a judgment is correct, there is no place for condemnation among the *ekklesia*. Vengeance (condemnation) belongs to God[2]. There is also no such thing as "righteous anger"[3] except with God. Anger is the result of pride and too many are so filled with pride that they love to find fault in others, usually to demonstrate how 'religious' or 'converted' they are compared to everyone else. They think that being baptized decades ago or knowing a prominent preacher makes them more godly. This was the issue with the Pharisees "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and **despised others**." (Luke 18:9-14).

Offenses are a worldwide epidemic that has infected the *ekklesia*. Unreconciled offenses among the Body of Christ have affected everyone whether they are an offender or victim. In fact, they are the cause for the many separate denominations among the Churches of God—every single one was formed out of unreconciled offenses. Ironically, the very names of some organizations are, many times, the exact opposite of *how* they were formed. By one estimate, there are 36,000 of them today (all COGs, not just WCG splinters). Unreconciled offenses are a terribly sad statement of the 'unlove' within the *ekklesia*.

Resolving offenses requires reconciliation between the offender and victim. In the Hebrew, reconciliation is covering (same as atonement) whereas the Greek means to change or transform. And THAT is the purpose of the Passover[4]. God the Father put the offenses the world upon His beloved Son and then subjected Him to terrible suffering and death by crucifixion[5] to RECONCILE offenses:

> [TS2009] ISAIAH 53:6-12 We all, like sheep, went astray, each one of us has turned to his own way. And [the LORD] *[GtF]* has laid on Him *[JC]* the crookedness of us all. 7 He *[JC]* was oppressed and He *[JC]* was afflicted, but He *[JC]* did not open His *[JC]* mouth. He *[JC]* was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its

[1] John 7:24.
[2] Deut. 32:35, 41; Rom. 12:19.
[3] Refer to the article, "Righteous Anger."
[4] Rom. 4:24-25; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-21; Heb. 2:17.
[5] JC = Jesus Christ; GtF = God the Father.

shearers is silent, but He *[JC]* did not open His *[JC]* mouth. 8 He *[JC]* was taken from prison and from judgment. And as for His *[JC]* generation, who considered that He *[JC]* shall be cut off from the land of the living? For the transgression of My *[GtF]* people He *[JC]* was stricken. 9 And He *[JC]* was appointed a burial-site with the wrong *[wicked]*, and with the rich at His *[JC]* death, because He *[JC]* had done no violence, nor was deceit in His *[JC]* mouth. 10 But [the LORD] *[GtF]* was pleased to crush Him *[JC]*, He *[GtF]* laid sickness on Him*[JC]*, that when He *[JC]* made Himself *[JC]* an offering for guilt, He *[JC]* would see a seed, He *[JC]* would prolong His *[JC]* days and the pleasure of [the LORD] *[GtF]* prosper in His *[JC]* hand. 11 He *[GtF]* would see the result of the suffering of His *[JC]* life and be satisfied. Through His *[JC]* knowledge My *[GtF]* righteous Servant *[JC]* makes many righteous, and He *[JC]* bears their crookednesses. 12 Therefore I *[GtF]* give Him *[JC]* a portion among the great, and He *[JC]* divides the spoil with the strong, because He *[JC]* poured out His *[JC]* being unto death, and He *[JC]* was counted with the transgressors, and He *[JC]* bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

The Passover has been the centerpiece of the Bible from the beginning. It is the singular act of God the Father and Jesus the Lamb by which offenses can be reconciled. Both gave everything to reconcile with mankind, so imagine the fierce anger of God toward anyone who despises that sacrifice. But that is *exactly* what every unreconciled offense among the *ekklesia* is doing—despising the Passover sacrifice of God the Father and Jesus the Lamb:

ROMANS 2:1-5 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for **in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself**; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or **do you despise the riches of His *[God the Father's]* goodness**, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that **the goodness of God leads you to repentance**? 5 But **in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath** and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

The "riches of His goodness" is a beautiful phrase that pictures the abundance, peace, and joy of the New Kingdom without offenses. But these verses are primarily a warning. The goodness of God covers our sins with the blood of His Son, forgives our sins, and reconciles our offenses. The goodness of God IS the Passover!

EPHESIANS 2:4-7 But God, who is rich in mercy, **because of His great love** with which He loved us, 5 even **when we were dead in trespasses *[sins]***, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, 7 that in the ages to come He might **show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus**.

But the riches of God's grace through the Passover are not to be taken lightly:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-31 For I *[Paul]* received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 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." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. 27 Therefore **whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord**. 28 But **let a man examine himself**, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in **an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself**, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For **if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged**.

It is ironic when you consider how "examin[ing]" oneself to partake of the Passover in a "worthy manner" has been made out to be something hard to understand, when the reality is that it is simply about reconciling offenses. Anyone who finds it hard to understand that unreconciled offenses are a failure to examine oneself and that unreconciled offenses are an unworthy manner of keeping the Passover, then there is a serious problem because unreconciled offenses DESPISE the Passover.

The humility (toward God) and meekness (toward brethren) required to reconcile an offense comes from examining oneself and understanding that what God the Father and Jesus the Lamb sacrificed to reconcile offenses can *never* be repaid. From that perspective, who are WE, then, to refuse to reconcile with each other. Even if an offender refuses to repent to a victim or a victim refuses to forgive an offender, all must be sincerely WILLING to repent or WILLING to forgive at the very least. No offense is so grave that it cannot be reconciled to this extent. There is also no shame in reconciling offenses! Think past this temporary existence and imagine the eternity to come in the New Kingdom in which *all* wounds—including anger, shame, and the hurt of offenses—will be healed[6].

Partaking of the Passover with unreconciled offenses despises the goodness and riches of God. Again, can you imagine the fierce anger of God toward anyone who despises the sacrifice of His SON? What stands in the way of reconciling offenses? Pride and anger. How hard is it (really!) to say, "I'm sorry" and "I forgive you?" Move past the shame. Jesus bore your shame, my shame, and everyone's shame to the grave along with the sins of our offenses. Read Psalm 69. Jesus foretells of HIS reproach, HIS shame, and HIS dishonor that HE bore (v. 19) but that WE caused. Reconciling offenses is about cherishing the riches of God's goodness and grace through the Passover sacrifice:

EPHESIANS 1:7-8 **In Him *[God the Father]* we have redemption through His *[Jesus Christ]* blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace *[God the Father]*** 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

[6] Rev. 22:1-5.

All have caused offenses[7] and all will die without that Passover sacrifice. It is nothing more than pride to think we no longer sin because we were baptized 30, 40, 50, or more years ago. Or that we are such biblical scholars and obedient children of God that we are perfect. If we were humble and contrite[8] enough to admit and repent of our offenses (sins) before baptism, why would we no longer be humble and meek enough to ask forgiveness for our offenses today? Baptism is not a badge of pride; it is humble recognition of GOD'S righteousness upon us after we were reconciled to Him for our offenses through repentance and baptism[9]:

> ROMANS 5:8-10 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from *[God the Father's]* wrath through Him. 10 For if **when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved** by His *[Jesus Christ's]* life.
>
> 2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-21 Now all things *are* of God, **who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ**, and has given us **the ministry of reconciliation**, 19 that is, that **God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself**, not imputing their trespasses *[i.e., offenses]* to them, and has committed to us **the word of reconciliation**. 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, **be reconciled** to God. 21 For He *[God the Father]* made Him *[Jesus Christ]* who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Taking a cue from Ecclesiastes 3:2-8, when it comes to offenses among the *ekklesia*, Passover is a time to *plant*, a time to *heal*, a time to *build up*, a time to *gather*, a time to *embrace*, a time to *seek*, a time to *cast away*; a time to *mend*; a time to *speak*; a time to *love*; and a time of *peace*. The riches of God's goodness and grace are not a byproduct of the Passover; they ARE the Passover—HIS forgiveness and reconciliation of OUR offenses. Passover is a time to repent, a time to forgive, a time to reconcile!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[7] Rom. 3:23.
[8] Isa. 57:15.
[9] Also Col. 1:20-21.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-04-19—WHY THE MIND OF CHRIST?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The first Great Commandment is to love God:

> MARK 12:30 'And **you shall love the LORD your God** with all your heart, with all your soul, **with all your mind**, and with all your strength.' This *is* the first commandment.

Love toward God must come from every fiber of our being: the heart, soul, strength, and MIND. But how does one have a mind with the thoughts and THINKING that can love God who sacrificed His Son[1]. It begins with WHY Jesus Christ came into the world:

> 1 JOHN 4:9-10 In this **the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him *[Jesus Christ]***. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins.

While the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is absolutely necessary for the remission of sins, God's *main* purpose for sending Jesus Christ in the flesh was so that "we might **live *[eternally]*** through Him." That is a tall order because the gift of eternal life requires much more than being forgiven of sins. Really? How can that be?!? Eternal life is dependent upon BECOMING agape love. To "love the LORD your God with **all your mind**" is MUCH more than forgivness of sin; it is a new way of THINKING. It requires a MIND (in addition to the rest of our being) that fulfills the Great Commandment. To even begin keeping that Commandment with our minds requires the Holy Spirit:

> 2 TIMOTHY 1:6-7 Therefore I *[Paul]* remind you to stir up **the gift of God** *[the Holy Spirit]* which is in you through the laying on of my hands. 7 For God has not given us **a spirit** of fear, but of power and **of love** and **of a sound mind**.
>
> EPHESIANS 4:23-24 and be renewed in **the spirit of your mind**, 24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

The Holy Spirit is given to CHANGE our minds and thinking. Forgiveness of sin is a primary focus for Christians, especially during the Passover and days of Unleavened Bread, but how many consider the vital importance of having a SOUND mind? And what does that mean exactly? The Greek defines it as having a mind that is disciplined and controlled; one that is being trained to THINK a certain way! Where does that mind come from?

> 1 CORINTHIANS 2:16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" **But we have the mind of Christ.**

[1] John 3:16.

A "sound mind" IS the mind of Christ. It is the standard for THINKING. Jesus was not focused on His sacrifice for forgiveness of sin in the beginning of His ministry but rather all that which is necessary for eternal life. Most Christians tend to concentrate on the Passover sacrifice for sins rather than on the GOSPEL message of Jesus Christ living in us. This is why He said He IS The Way and The Life[2]. Ask yourself, *how* is that He is The Way and The Life? Jesus spent His entire physical life in perfect submission to God, service to Him, and loving Him. As a result, only He possessed the "**words of eternal life**" as Simon Peter said[3].

Scripture does not say to have the mind of *God* in us, but the mind of CHRIST. Does that surprise you? There are several important reasons for this. First of all, there is only one God Most High. Jesus said, "God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:24). Without the mind of Christ, who has ever WORSHIPPED God in spirit and truth? Only Jesus knows *how* to worship God.

Jesus is the Son of God but even He says His Father is greater[4]; therefore, none will ever be equal to the authority, power, and wisdom of God the Father. Neither Jesus Christ nor the children of God will be the equal of God; instead, we are to be like Jesus Christ who is a SON of God. In fact, that is exactly what Scripture says:

> ROMANS 8:28-30 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. 29 For **whom *[those who are called]* He *[God the Father]* foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son**, that He *[Jesus Christ]* might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He *[God the Father]* predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

To be "conformed to the image of His Son *[Jesus Christ]*" requires having HIS mind in us so that *our* thinking can be CHANGED in order to worship and love God. Jesus Christ REVEALED the Father. He knew God *before* His days in the flesh, so revealing God the Father from the perspective (mind) of Jesus as the Son allows us to know God the Father as CHILDREN—sons and daughters of God:

> MATTHEW 11:27 "All things have been delivered to Me *[Jesus Christ]* 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*.**
>
> JOHN 17:3, 6-8 "And this is eternal life, that **they may know You, the only true God**, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. … 6 "**I have manifested Your name to the men** whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. 7 "Now **they have known that all things which You have given Me are from You**. 8 "For **I have given to them the words which You have given Me**; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me.

[2] John 14:6.
[3] John 6:68.
[4] John 14:28.

It makes perfect sense that the SON reveals the Father because that is the same relationship the saints will have as children of God. Therefore, Jesus, as the *only* Son (for the time being), is the perfect One to reveal God the Father to His other potential children.

Jesus' mind was perfect thinking and, thereby, perfect in worship and love of His Father as the Son. His mind in us changes our thinking so we can have a relationship with God the Father based upon agape love. But what was Jesus' relationship with God the Father?

> PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11 **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus**, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of **no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant**, *and* coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, **He *[Jesus Christ]* humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of* death**, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

During His life, Jesus' had the discipline and control—a SOUND mind—necessary to love God in accordance with the Great Commandment. As previously mentioned, Jesus was not focused on forgiveness of sins as much as He was in teaching and being the example of righteous THINKING toward God. How did He exemplify perfect agape love toward God?

> JOHN 16:33 "These things I *[Jesus Christ]* have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world **you will have tribulation**; but be of good cheer, **I have overcome the world**."

Jesus overcame—conquered, prevailed, got the victory over—this sinful world. But that has a depth of discipline and control that is far beyond simple repenting and asking God to forgive our sins. It is, in all regards, a way of thinking that OVERCOMES sins and has agape love. You see, God cannot be tempted:

> JAMES 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for **God cannot be tempted** by evil, **nor does He Himself tempt anyone**.

But JESUS was most certainly tempted:

> HEBREWS 4:15 For we do not have **a High Priest *[Jesus Christ]*** who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but **was in all *points* tempted as *we are***, *yet* without sin.

A deaf and blind person has no concept of a bird. In that sense, God cannot be tempted so it falls to Jesus Christ to teach us how to change our thinking so we can overcome temptations. We need the sound mind of CHRIST to overcome this world. Jesus' mind was pure and undefiled agape love toward God the Father. He was perfect in obedience to the LAW of God and the WILL of God because His thoughts were always in submission to God, service to Him, and love for Him. In fact, Jesus LEARNED obedience because He *was* tempted:

HEBREWS 5:8-9 though He *[Jesus Christ]* was a Son, *yet* **He learned obedience by the things which He suffered**. 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

The sufferings of Jesus Christ immediately bring thoughts about His sacrifice. However, many of His sufferings were the constant temptations of evil men throughout His ministry. He obeyed God and overcame their temptations, especially those of the priests and scribes. His mind is what WE require to receive eternal life, which is how we live through Him and why He is the Captain of our salvation. He was made perfect through sufferings[5] so His sound mind is exactly what we need:

HEBREWS 2:10, 14-18 For it was fitting for Him *[Jesus Christ]*, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, **in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings**. … 14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, **He Himself *[Jesus Christ]* likewise shared in the same**, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and **release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage *[of the mind]***. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, **in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God**, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 **For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.**

The OT story of the days of Unleavened Bread is about leaving Egypt, which is symbolic of carnal, evil thinking. Even though the ancient Israelites rebelled and spent 40 years wandering until that generation died in the wilderness, there is also a lesson for us. We, too, will not reach the Promised Land until we have spent a lifetime escaping a world of carnal thinking. To change our THINKING requires having the sound mind of Jesus Christ. Forgiveness of sins is the first step in salvation but that is simple compared to the real battle for our minds:

[TS2009] ROMANS 7:21-24 I *[Paul]* find therefore this law, that when I wish to do the good, that the evil is present with me. 22 For I delight in the [law of God] according to the inward man, 23 but I see another [law] in my members, **battling against the [law] of my mind**, and bringing me into captivity to the [law] of sin which is in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from this body of death?

Without the mind of Christ, humans only have a reprobate mind, which is incapable of loving God the Father and fulfilling the Great Commandment. In fact, a carnal mind is not just incapable of loving God; it is HOSTILE toward God:

ROMANS 8:5-7 For those who live according to **the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh**, but those *who* ***live*** **according to the Spirit, *[set their minds on]* the things of the Spirit**. 6 For **to be carnally minded *is* death, but to be spiritually**

[5] Heb. 2:10.

minded *is* life and peace. 7 Because **the carnal mind *is* enmity *[hostility]* against God**; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.

God "sent His own Son **in the likeness of flesh of sin**"[6] for the very purpose that Jesus would BECOME The Way to change our *thinking* by having His sound mind in us. Without it, we cannot learn obedience (as Jesus Christ did) or overcome the temptations of the world (as Jesus Christ did). Without His mind and his Way of THINKING, there is no salvation because He IS The Life. Without His mind in us, God will literally reject ours:

ROMANS 1:28 And even as **they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge *[in their minds]*, God gave them over to a debased *[reprobate, worthless, REJECTED]* mind**, to do those things which are not fitting;

The Passover sacrifice aside, Jesus primary purpose and ministry was a message and example of a new way of THINKING so "that we might **live** through **Him**":

1 PETER 2:21 For to this you were called, because **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**:

And the only way to have the mind of Christ is by becoming a living sacrifice ACCEPTABLE to God in the manner and example of Jesus:

ROMANS 12:1-2 I *[Paul]* beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you **present your bodies a living sacrifice**, holy, **acceptable to God**, *which is* your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind**, that you may prove what *is* that good and **acceptable and perfect will of God**.

Only the mind of Christ is acceptable to God! If our minds are not changed and become like the mind of Christ, there will be NO eternal life. His mind in us is how we overcome the thinking of this sinful world, His mind is how we "lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily entangles us,"[7] His mind is how we learn obedience though suffering, and His mind is how we fulfill the Great Commandment. Without the mind of Christ, we will not be ACCEPTED by God. The hard battle of this life is overcoming carnal and reprobate THINKING. To have the mind of Christ means we must "put on the [Lord Jesus Christ], and **make no provision** for the lusts of **the flesh**."[8] Putting on the mind of Christ is the goal of the days of Unleavened Bread.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[6] Rom. 8:3. Also Phil 2:7.
[7] Heb. 12:1.
[8] Rom. 13:14.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-04-26—SUFFERING IS A GIFT OF GRACE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Some are reluctant to ask for prayers for healing, whether of brethren or elders. Others do not ask because they are resigned to their disease, illness, or sickness that was not healed in the past. What lies behind this, I believe, is confusion and a misunderstanding about the faith required for healings.

The Bible records many stories of healings by Jesus and the apostles; however, they are unique because they all happened before the Holy Spirit was given on that notable Pentecost day. During His ministry, Jesus healed many, many people. Crowds followed Him around just to be healed. What *was* common to all those stories is faith as in the story of the two blind men:

> MATTHEW 9:27-29 When Jesus departed from there, two blind men followed Him, crying out and saying, "Son of David, have mercy on us!" 28 And when He had come into the house, the blind men came to Him. And Jesus said to them, "**Do you believe** that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29 Then He touched their eyes, saying, "**According to your faith let it be to you.**"

Having faith was *required* for healing. Even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, could not heal anyone without faith:

> MARK 6:5-6 Now **He *[Jesus Christ]* could do no mighty work** there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed *them*. 6 And He marveled **because of their unbelief**. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

But faith was not only required for healing, it was intimately tied to the earthly ministry of Jesus. His main purpose for coming in the flesh was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God:

> LUKE 4:18 "**The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me *[Jesus Christ]*, because He has anointed *[sanctified, set apart]* Me to preach the gospel** …

Jesus obviously came to be the Passover sacrificial Lamb for the sins of the world, but that was only necessary for God to have children in His Kingdom. His primary purpose was to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom and He was even ANOINTED by God for that reason. In fact, the first recorded words of Jesus after His baptism when He began His ministry were His 'mission statement':

> MATTHEW 4:17 From that time **Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**"

Preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was also the mandate of Jesus to the disciples on their 'training runs':

> LUKE 9:1-2 Then He *[Jesus Christ]* called His **twelve disciples** together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases. 2 **He sent them to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.**

They were told to heal people as they preached the Gospel of Jesus. Why? Word of miraculous healings spread far and wide, drawing many with that hope. That was when they also heard the Gospel. Miraculous healings were "signs and wonders" that gave legitimacy to those who preached the Gospel. The people knew that God was the One with power to heal ("I *am* the LORD who heals you."—Exod. 15:26). The authority of those who healed the people was the same authority behind the Gospel message. In short, healings were signs that the Gospel was from God:

> MARK 16:20 And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with *them* and **confirming the word *[of the Gospel]* through the accompanying signs**.
>
> HEBREWS 2:3-4 how shall we escape if we neglect so great **a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken *[the Gospel of the Kingdom]* by the Lord *[Jesus Christ]***, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, 4 **God also [testifying] *[of that Gospel]* both with signs and wonders, with various miracles**, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?
>
> ACTS 14:3 Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was **bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders** to be done by their hands.

So what does faith sufficient for healing have to do with the Gospel? Everything. Those who had the faith to be healed later became followers of Christ because they already faith by which they believed the message of the Gospel. In a large sense, Jesus and the apostles sought out those who had the faith to be healed because they were also prepared to receive the Gospel. Just as healings do not happen without faith, those without faith are blind and deaf to the Gospel message:

> HEBREWS 4:2 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.*

When the Gospel of the Kingdom of God was first preached, people were attracted to it because they were initially drawn to the miracles of healing. But things flipped around after the Holy Spirit was given. Before the Holy Spirit, healings drew people to the message of the Gospel. Nowadays, most hear the Gospel before they have need of healings. In all cases, however, the faith required for healing is the faith required to believe the Gospel.

Today, there is an assumption that there were more healings in biblical times. That is true in the days of Jesus and the apostles when the Gospel was FIRST preached. What many do not consider is that healings likely changed after the Gospel started spreading in earnest. Not understanding this is why some think they lack the faith required for healing. Because the Bible records many healings by faith, they assume they do not have enough faith when they are not healed today. However, they often overlook something—the Bible does not mention healings after the Gospel really spread into the world. It is likely that healings fell dramatically at that point and were similar to today. There is not only evidence of that, but there are reasons for it. The evidence comes from Paul himself. No one questions Paul's faith and, yet, he was not healed:

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-9 And lest I *[Paul]* should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, **a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me**, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.**" …

Paul's example is evidence that God does not always miraculously heal those who *have* the Holy Spirit. But his answer also provides the REASON—perfection. Those with the faith to hear and receive the Gospel are given the Holy Spirit. Why? For the purpose of perfecting eternal children. The hard reality is that perfection only comes through suffering, just as Paul told us. Notice:

1 PETER 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, **after you have suffered a while, perfect**, establish, strengthen, and settle *you.*

Suffering is the tool that God uses to perfect everyone, including JESUS CHRIST:

HEBREWS 2:10 For it was fitting for Him *[Jesus Christ]*, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, **to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings**.

The sufferings of Christ were the crucible in which God proved that Jesus, who always perfectly submitted to and obeyed God, continued to do so even under the most extreme sufferings and temptations:

HEBREWS 5:8 though He *[Jesus Christ]* was a Son, *yet* **He learned obedience by the things which He suffered**.

HEBREWS 2:18 For in that **He Himself *[Jesus Christ]* has suffered, being tempted**, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Obedience under duress is the standard by which God tests the heart of all flesh and blood, without exception:

JAMES 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various **trials**, 3 knowing that **the testing of your faith** produces patience. 4 But let patience have ***its*** **perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing**.

If Christ was tested through sufferings, would God require less of us? Not at all:

1 PETER 2:21 For to this you were called, because **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps**:

1 PETER 4:1-2, 12-13 Therefore, since **Christ suffered for us** in the flesh, **arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin *[are perfected]***, 2 that he no longer should live the rest of *his* time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. … 12 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the **fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing

happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that **you partake of Christ's sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

Sufferings are the standard for achieving perfection AND the Kingdom of God:

2 TIMOTHY 3:12 Yes, and **all** who desire to **live** godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer** persecution.

ROMANS 8:17 and if children, then heirs–heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed **we suffer with *Him***, that we may also be glorified together.

COLOSSIANS 1:24 I now rejoice in **my sufferings** for you, and **fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ**, for the sake of His body, which is the [*ekklesia*],

2 THESSALONIANS 1:3-5 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because **your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds** toward each other, 4 so that we ourselves boast of you among the [*ekklesia*] of God for your patience and **faith in all your persecutions and tribulations** that you endure, 5 *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**;

Sufferings are the "**manifest evidence**" of being worthy of the Kingdom of God; therefore, partaking of the sufferings of Christ is not given to just anyone:

PHILIPPIANS 1:29 For **to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ**, not only to believe in Him, but also **to suffer for His sake**,

The Greek word translated "it has been granted" is a form of the word for *grace* (Gk: *charizomai*). The TS2009 translates it as, "it has been granted as a **favor**." What this says is that sufferings are A GIFT OF GOD'S GRACE because we are to partake of the sufferings of Christ so that we are perfected in His image[1]! Understanding this provides a new perspective. Although no one wants to suffer, it is now apparent why Paul said of his affliction:

2 CORINTHIANS 12:9-10 … Therefore **most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 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.**

But just as Paul asked God for healing three times, God's people should continue to pray for healing while also recognizing that suffering is a gift of God's grace and The Way[2] of perfecting His children in the likeness or image of His Son[3]:

[1] Sabbath Thought 2025-04-19 Why the Mind of Christ?.
[2] John 14:6.
[3] Rom. 8:28-30.

> ROMANS 8:28-30 And we know that **all things *[including sufferings]* work together for good *[perfection]*** to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. 29 **For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Hopefully, it is now clear that everyone who attains unto the Kingdom of God MUST partake of Christ's sufferings and they are upon us by the grace of God. Afflictions increase faith and agape love. A godly life is one of suffering. The premier example of godliness was Jesus Christ who lived a life of suffering. Overcoming this world requires enduring suffering. Jesus overcame this world[4] and so must we. If this life is not one of suffering, then what is the appeal of the Kingdom?

Faith is usually not the issue when someone is not healed. Those with faith sufficient to believe the Gospel and have the gift of the Holy Spirit certainly have faith for healing. Can everyone benefit from more faith? Absolutely. Rather than reflecting a lack of faith, NOT being healed is most often a sign of those who are being perfected in the image of Christ by the grace of God! Sufferings test whether we are worthy of the Kingdom of God as we imitate Christ's obedience through sufferings. This is why James wrote:

> JAMES 5:13, 14-16 Is anyone among you **suffering? Let him pray**. … 14 Is anyone among you **sick**? Let him **call for the elders** of the [*ekklesia*], and let them **pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord**. 15 And 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**. 16 Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and **pray for one another, that you may be healed**. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

This is a message that the saints "**always ought to pray and not lose heart**."[5] That includes praying for healings but with the realization we are partaking of Christ's sufferings by which He was perfected. James was focused on TOTAL healing—physical and spiritual—but his message is heavily weighted on spiritual perfection through sufferings: faith, forgiveness of sin, reconciling offenses ("confess your trespasses to one another"), agape love, and salvation. These matters are salvational and WHY sufferings are by the grace of God!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[4] John 16:33.
[5] Luke 18:1; 21:36.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-05-03—NO ONE WHISPERS IN OUR EARS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Judgment is something that everyone does everyday, many times without even thinking about it. Judging occurs when determining the best-looking produce in the grocery store, assessing a biblical message, or, a very common one, pointing out the flaws in others. One particular judgment that I dare say is not thought about often enough is God's judgment upon us.

After God rescued the ancient Israelites, He gave responsibility for judging the people to Moses along with some respectable and honorable men to help him:

> EXODUS 18:20-22 "And you *[Moses]* shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and **show them the way in which they must walk** and the work they must do. 21 "Moreover you shall select from all the people **able men, such as fear God, men of truth**, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 "And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* **every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge**. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

God tasked Moses with showing the people "the way in which they must walk." This phrase is repeated by God to the ancient Israelites over and over and over again[1]. It does not say the way they must GO, but the way they must WALK. It reflects the fact that God does not judge people by their intentions but their WORKS—what they actually do. This is because, as I have discussed numerous times, keeping the Law of God requires *doing* good works[2]. This is why God uses that phrase—"the way in which they must walk"—because works are evidence of love and obedience:

> DEUTERONOMY 26:16-17 "This day **the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments**; therefore you shall be careful to observe them **with all your heart and with all your soul**. 17 "Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that **you will walk in His ways** and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice.

But the story of the ancient Israelites is a sad tale of constant failure because the people did NOT walk in the ways of God. In a general sense, God spent the first 2,000 years many times directly engaged with mankind—from Adam and Eve down to Noah. The next 2,000 years were more indirect as God interacted through judges and prophets. Still, the story was the same:

[1] A small sampling includes Deut. 5:32-33; 8:6; 11:22; 19:9; 28:9; 30:16; Josh. 22:5; Judg. 2:22; 1 Kings 8:57-58; Jer. 42:3; et al.
[2] Matt. 25:14-46; Luke 13:6-9; John 15:16; 2 Cor. 9:6-15; Gal. 3:5; 6:2-10; Eph. 2:8-10; 4:15-16, 28; Phil. 2:2, 4, 12-13; 2 Tim. 3:17; Titus 1:16; Heb. 6:1, 10, 14; 10:24; Jas. 1:27; 4:17; 1 Pet. 1:17; Rev. 2-3; 14:13; 22:12.

JEREMIAH 10:23 O LORD, I know the way of man *is* not in himself; ***it is* not in man who walks to direct his own steps *[in the ways of God]***.

But today is an age that is quite distinct. Instead of (directly or indirectly) imploring people to obey Him, God has drastically changed how He interacts with people. In the final 2,000 years of mankind, God has put the mind of His Son, Jesus Christ, INSIDE people. This approach is completely different and unique:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:5-10 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has **given us the Spirit** as a guarantee. 6 So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For **we walk by faith, not by sight**. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. 9 **Therefore we make it our aim**, whether present or absent, **to be well pleasing to Him**. 10 For **we must all appear before the judgment seat** of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

Walking in the ways of God is no longer by sight as was the case in the first 4,000 years. Now it is by FAITH which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1). In these last 2,000 years God commands us to:

GALATIANS 5:25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also **walk in the Spirit**.

Walking IN, *not* BY, the Spirit is powerful; much more so than by sight. Why? Because the Holy Spirit actually influences a person in the core of their being—their heart, mind, and soul. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit CONVICTS the world of righteousness:

JOHN 16:5-10, 13 "But now I *[Jesus Christ]* go away to Him *[God the Father]* who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' 6 "But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. 7 "Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send [it] to you. 8 "And when [it] has come, [it] will **convict the world** of sin, and **of righteousness**, and of judgment: 9 "of sin, because they do not believe in Me; 10 "**of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more**; … 13 "However, when [it], **the Spirit of truth**, has come, [it] will guide you into all truth; for [it] will not speak on [its] own *authority*, but **whatever [it] hears [it] will speak**; and [it] will tell you things to come.

Righteousness is keeping the Law of God[3]. Those without the Holy Spirit are convicted of sin but those with it are convicted of righteousness. What is fascinating about the Holy Spirit in a person it is the motivation to SEEK God in order to *know* "the way in which they must walk."

[3] Ps. 119:172.

PSALM 143:8 Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness *[*chesed = *covenant loyalty and devotion]* in the morning, for **in You do I trust *[have faith]*; cause me to know the way in which I should walk**, for I lift up my soul to You.

No longer does a person need to seek out a particular leader, judge, or prophet to understand how to love and obey God. Now people are drawn to Him by a Spirit of Love in them. They have the mind of Christ[4] who IS The Way[5].

But this also means that there is no judge or prophet to warn people when they deviate from the path to eternal life. But they are still being judged nonetheless. Walking by faith means people with the Holy Spirit in them are still being judged each and every day—it just happens in a more subtle way:

1 PETER 4:17 For the time *has come* **for judgment to begin at the house of God**; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

I do not think everyone with the Holy Spirit wakes up each morning and says, "I am being judged. I need to watch every step I take." There are many who strive to draw close to God each day but few think about the daily, personal judgment that is upon the begotten children of God:

ACTS 17:30-31 "Therefore, since **we are the offspring of God**, we ought not to think that the [Godhead] is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. 30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, **but now commands all men everywhere to repent**, 31 "because **He *[God the Father]* has appointed a day on which He *[God the Father]* will judge the world in righteousness by the Man *[Jesus Christ]*** whom He *[God the Father]* has ordained. He *[God the Father]* has given assurance of this to all by raising Him *[Jesus Christ]* from the dead."

As in times past, God judges according to works (*walking* in the way):

ROMANS 2:13 (for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but **the doers of the law will be justified**;

But His judgment has also been elevated to a higher standard. No longer is it simply works that are judged, but also every word that is spoken:

MATTHEW 12:36-37 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you that **for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment**. 37 "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Those who have the Holy Spirit of God inside them are truly blessed. It transforms the heart, mind, and soul of people who can then truly know and follow "the way in which they must walk." The result is:

[4] 1 Cor. 2:16.
[5] John 14:6.

1 JOHN 4:17 Love has been perfected among us in this: **that we may have boldness in the day of judgment**; because as He is, so are we in this world.

The last 2,000 years are unique from the first 4,000 years of God's relationship with mankind. They are also distinct from the next 1,000 years commonly referred to as the Millennium. During that age, God will reign on earth:

MICAH 4:1-2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. 2 Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; **He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths**." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

The people once again be taught directly by God how to walk in His ways[6]. What is different from this present age, however, is that the people will also have teachers who whisper in their ears, reminiscent of the days of the judges and prophets:

ISAIAH 30:20-21 And *though* the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner *[hidden]* anymore, But your eyes shall see your teachers. 21 **Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, "This *is* the way, walk in it,"** whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.

This speaks of "hidden" teachers. Perhaps that is a reference to the Holy Spirit 'hidden' inside people in the last 2,000 years. Who knows? Regardless, people during the Millennium will be taught by God AND the children of God! Until then, our Teacher has placed His mind inside the future children of God so they can truly walk in The Way of our Teacher. With that in mind:

1 PETER 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, **conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay *here* in fear**;

So never forget—every single day is a day of judgment in this life. Even though no one whispers in our ears these days, our "walk" is directed by Jesus Christ Himself whose mind is in us!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[6] Also Isa. 2:2-3.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-05-10—THE DAY THE PRIESTS WERE UNSEATED

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

As the time for Jesus' crucifixion drew near, the Bible records several important events including His glorious entrance into Jerusalem as Savior and King, cleansing the Temple (of the moneychangers), and parables prophesying of His return. All of these were an important part of preparing the world for a coming new King, Temple, and Kingdom. But there was one other notable event.

Before getting into that particular event, imagine you are a manager at a company. One day your boss comes to you and says, "I know that you have been abusing everyone under you by forcing them to work under unbearable conditions and you refuse to help them at all. You go around wearing expensive suits and demand everyone treat you as if you were the president of the company. You even get away with extorting money from your staff because they are afraid of you. Moreover, I found out that your father was a convicted murder, something you actually brag about. But worst of all, you completely ignore all the rules and regulations of this company and even force your staff to break the rules. Because of all this, I am turning you over to the court judges and will make your life hell!"

After all that do you think you would have a job any longer? Unlikely. But that is a picture of what happened to the scribes and Pharisees. To fully appreciate the encounter the scribes and Pharisees had with Jesus Christ requires understanding their role and position over the people:

> MATTHEW 23:1-2 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: "**The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat.**"

Jesus said that the scribes and Pharisees have the same authority as Moses. What was Moses' responsibility?

> EXODUS 18:19-22 "Listen now to my voice; I *[Jethro, Moses' father-in-law]* will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20 "And **you *[Moses]* shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do**. 21 "Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them *to be* rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 "And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be *that* **every great matter they shall bring to you *[Moses to judge]***, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear *the burden* with you.

Moses was given a responsibility to the nation of Israel by God to TEACH the Law, exemplify KEEPING the Law, and rightly JUDGE matters pertaining to the Law. That is the same position that the scribes and Pharisees held—they were to teach, keep, and judge the Law of Moses. However, Jesus said that they utterly failed to do these things as they proved by their own works:

MATTHEW 23:3-7 "Therefore whatever they *[scribes and Pharisees]* tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but **do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."** 4 "For **they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders**; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 "greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'

This kind of hypocrisy has existed throughout history—as the saying goes, "Rules for thee but none for me." The scribes and Pharisees bound heavy burdens above and beyond the Law of Moses upon the people that were oppressive but did nothing to ease their suffering. In contrast, Jesus said:

MATTHEW 11:29-30 "Take My *[Jesus Christ's]* yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 "For My yoke *is* easy and **My burden is light**."

According to Jesus, the Law of God is *not* a heavy burden but the scribes and Pharisees made it so. But they did much more than subject the people to burdensome rules and fail to keep it themselves—they actually ANNULLED the Law:

MATTHEW 15:6 "… **you *[scribes and Pharisees]* have made the commandment of God of no effect *[nullified]* by your tradition**."

Jesus said in no uncertain terms that the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees NULLIFIED the Law of Moses. Given that, it is no surprise that Jesus told them:

MATTHEW 23:13-15, 25-33 "**But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For **you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men**; for you neither go in *yourselves,* nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. 14 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore **you will receive greater condemnation**. 15 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a **son of hell as yourselves**. … 25 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of **extortion and self-indulgence**. 26 "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. 27 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but **inside are full of dead *men's* bones and all uncleanness**. 28 "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but **inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness**. 29 "**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!** Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 "and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' 31 "Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 "Fill up, then,

the measure of your fathers' *guilt.* 33 "**Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?**

Jesus reviled, denounced, and castigated the scribes and Pharisees for their words and works. In no small way, Jesus FIRED them from "Moses' seat" forever and then He replaced them.

> MATTHEW 23:8-12 "But you *[the multitude & disciples]*, **do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher *[or Master]*, the Christ**, and you are all brethren. 9 "**Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven.** 10 "And **do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ**. 11 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus completely rejected and ousted the scribes and Pharisees in their position of authority from the seat of Moses. Jesus then told the *people* that they are to look to Him as their only TEACHER and to God in heaven as their only FATHER.

Technically speaking though, Jesus did not immediately fire them. He was not yet the Passover sacrificial Lamb nor would He setup His Kingdom upon this earth for years to come. Instead of firing them, He simply took away their jobs by destroying the Temple in 70 A.D. so the scribes and Pharisees no longer had a position of authority, which achieved the same thing. But it was imperative that the priesthood was removed so that RIGHTEOUS authority over people was restored. Now, the true and righteous[1] eternal High Priest teaches and judges The Way, The Truth, and The Life. He is the only true source of undefiled and incorruptible power, authority, teaching, and judgment.

But there is still something puzzling about Matthew 23:3. Read it again and pay particular attention to the first part:

> MATTHEW 23:3 "Therefore **whatever they *[scribes and Pharisees]* tell you to observe, *that* observe and do**, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

Given His severe judgments and condemnations, why would Jesus tell the people to do everything that the scribes and Pharisees SAY? One source that sheds some light on the question is a Hebrew version of the book of Matthew, which was preserved as an appendix in a 14th century Jewish polemical attack against Catholic oppression, written by Shem Tov Ibn Shaprut. Research into this particular Hebrew text was done by a Karaite (Hebrew scripturalist) Jew named Nehemiah Gordon[2]. In his book *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. The Greek Jesus*, he explains the seeming incongruity of Matthew 23:3 by referring to the Hebrew translation, which says:

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[1] Rev. 19:11.

[2] Nehemiah Gordon's book *The Hebrew Yeshua vs. The Greek Jesus* can be found by going to https://sabbathreflections.org/resources/books-references/ or https://sabbathreflections.org/resources/documentaries/.

> [Shem Tov] Matthew 23:2-3 Saying, the Pharisees and sages sit upon the seat of Moses. 3 Therefore all that **he *[Moses]*** says to you diligently do, but according to their *[Pharisees and scribes]* reforms and their precedents do not do, because they talk but they do not do.

The Shem Tov Hebrew Matthew records Jesus saying to diligently do "all that **[he] *[Moses]*** says to you," NOT the scribes and Pharisees. That makes much more sense, both within the context of the judgments and condemnations against the scribes and Pharisees and since the Law of God came through Moses. Instead of "they" in the Greek translations, substituting "he" reflects this:

> MATTHEW 23:2-3 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 "Therefore whatever **[he] *[Moses]*** tells you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their *[the scribes and Pharisees]* works; for they say, and do not do.

Whether the Greek word for *they* (Gk. *εἴπωσιν*) in Matthew 23:3 is incorrect or not, the whole of the chapter (excluding the last three verses) in no uncertain terms warns against both the words and works of the scribes and Pharisees. Keeping the Law as recorded by Moses is what is required. But also, removing the authority of the scribes and Pharisees restored the people back to God the Father and the Master and Teacher (Rabboni[3]) Jesus Christ. People are now under Their authority, leadership, teaching, and judging of the Law. No more does a human have the authority of "Moses' seat" and that includes all those who are ordained as a minister, pastor, or elder. As the Psalmist said:

> PSALMS 123:1-2 **Unto You *[LORD]* I lift up my eyes**, O You who dwell in the heavens. 2 Behold, as the eyes of servants *look* to the hand of their masters, as the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress, so **our eyes *look* to the LORD our God**, until He has mercy *[favor]* on us.

The *ekklesia* are to look to the heavenly throne for leadership, teaching, and judgment. After all, that is from where our salvation will come, not from men:

> LUKE 21:27-28 "Then they will see **the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power** and great glory. 28 "Now when these things begin to happen, **look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near**."

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[3] Rabboni = Master or Teacher. Only used in Mark 10:51 and John 20:16.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-05-24—WOE TO THOSE WHO ARE ANGRY

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Jesus had a difficult task during His ministry. He lived in a world that did not understand the purpose for the existence of mankind. People were (and still are) primarily concerned with power and wealth. It took time (as well as the Holy Spirit) for even the disciples to look beyond this physical existence to an eternity as children of God. This is captured a very touching moment during Jesus' ministry:

> MATTHEW 18:2-3 Then **Jesus called a little child** to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me.

Being the greatest is not in the sense of being more important or of a higher rank. That, in fact, contradicts the whole context of being a humble child. Rather, humility is the greatest TRAIT of God's children. The young child represented how both God and Christ saw mankind—as little children—humble and contrite before Them. But the whole idea of becoming God-children was hard even for the disciples to grasp. This is apparent in the arguments between themselves as to who was greatest and their bias against the Gentiles. In the end, however, they saw the awesome potential for all mankind.

The family structure—husband and wife, parents and children—modeled what God the Father is creating. The intent and purpose of families is children. They are part of the cycle of birth, life, and death so that the family continues through the generations that follow. While every member is unique, the foundation of love in familial relationships is intended to be enduring even though there are times when there are disagreements. Parents may get angry with their children, but they do not stop loving them. Children may get angry with each other, but they do not stop loving each other. But this is not the case with many so-called brothers and sisters in the Family of God—they get angry with each other and STOP loving each other.

Hate is sustained and ingrained anger. Brethren who stop loving each other begin to hate one another. And I do mean hate. It is hate among the African tribes, the Chinese and Japanese, the Sunnis and Shias, and the Irish and the English that drove them to murder each other. That same hate is in the hearts of the begotten children of God. Think that is an exaggeration? If so, then what is the difference between hatred that leads to the murder of entire villages and hatred that leads to the spiritual murder of brethren? Just because a brother or sister in Christ does not take a machete to someone does not mean their hatred is any different. Jesus said:

> MATTHEW 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.' 22 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you that **whoever is angry *[or enraged]* with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment**. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of *[being judged by]* the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of *[being judged and sentenced to]* hell fire.

Whoever thinks that there is any form of anger or hatred acceptable to God do not understand that "… **out of the heart** proceed evil thoughts, murders …" (Matt. 15:19). They do not understand being a part of a FAMILY requires love. They do not understand that hatred CANNOT exist within a family. That is not an opinion either. These verses record a judgment reserved for those who are angry with their brother or sister and it was directed to the first converts of the *ekklesia*. Family is about loving, caring, and reconciling with each another. There is a dangerous judgment for simply angry and it also applies to hatred.

Some might argue that being angry is allowed if there is a CAUSE; however, this seems to be an added phrase. Many manuscripts and early Bible editions do not include this phrase. They simply say, "**whoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment.**" There are no mitigating circumstances that allow for anger in all other NT scriptures. Read Colossians 3:8, Psalm 37:8, Galatians 5:19-20, Ephesians 4:31, Proverbs 19:11, James 1:20, and Romans 12:19 if you do not believe me.

The single most common sin among the *ekklesia* is unreconciled offenses, which are always the result of anger, and they come with a very stern warning:

> MATTHEW 18:6-7 "But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me *[Jesus Christ]* to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 "**Woe to the world because of offenses!** For offenses must come, but **woe to that man by whom the offense comes!**

What does it mean to pronounce a woe upon someone? It is a declaration of pending judgment upon a person who knowingly commits a sin[1]. Jesus proclaimed a woe upon Judas Iscariot for his betrayal and the scribes and Pharisees for their hypocrisy[2]. Jesus Christ Himself pronounced a woe upon all those who cause OFFENSES. But simply being angry with a brother or sister in Christ is as bad, or worse, than an offense. Really? Yes, read again what Jesus said:

> MATTHEW 5:22 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you that **whoever is angry** with his brother **shall be in danger of the judgment**. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' **shall be in danger of *[being judged by]* the council**. But whoever says, 'You fool!**'** **shall be in danger of *[being judged and sentenced to]* hell fire**.

Being angry with a brother or sister puts one in danger of judgment. Calling someone *raca* puts one in danger of judgment. Labeling them a *fool* puts one in danger of judgment. *Raca* is similar to *Belial*, an epithet (nickname) for Satan. The Greek for *fool* basically means *moron*.

Do "strain at a gnat"[3] with this—whoever is ANGRY with a brother or sister with or without a cause is in danger of JUDGMENT. A *woe* is a declaration of pending judgment upon a person so the judgments in Matthew 5:22 are actually *woes*. Jesus pronounced woes upon anyone who is angry with a brother or sister! Not just one, like for offenses, but THREE! Where else does the Bible mention three woes? Revelation 8:13—the three woes are the 5th, 6th, and 7th Trumpet plagues coming upon the

[1] NOTE: The 'woe' mentioned in Matt. 24:19 it is used in the sense of sorrow or distress, i.e., "alas."
[2] Matt. 26:24; Matt. 23.
[3] Matt. 23:24.

world for its abominations. Why does Jesus give such a stern warning against anger? Because anger destroys Family. God the FATHER and Elder Brother[4] Jesus sacrificed everything to create a Family. No one will be a part of that Family if they are angry with the other children. Paul said that anger and hatred are traits of UNCONVERTED people:

> TITUS 3:3 For **we ourselves were also once** foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, **living in malice** and envy, **hateful and hating one another**.

In simple terms, anyone who has unresolved anger or hate toward a brother or sister in Christ should stop pretending they are converted. There is NO agape love where there is anger or hatred. Evil works of unconverted flesh in all its forms—hatred, contentions, jealousies, wrath, dissensions, envyings, and murders[5]—must be destroyed:

> COLOSSIANS 3:5-7 Therefore **put to death** your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these things **the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, 7 in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.**

Who are the "sons of disobedience?" Do you think they are only unconverted people without the Holy Spirit? If so, you are deluded. ALL evil, as a good friend said, comes from a reprobate mind:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 13:5-7 **Examine yourselves** *as to* whether you are in the faith. **Test yourselves.** Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?–**unless indeed you are [reprobates]** ***[rejected]***. 6 But I trust that you will know that we are not [reprobates]. 7 Now I pray to God that **you do no evil**, not that we should appear approved, but that you should do what is honorable, though we may seem [reprobates].

Who is a reprobate? Everyone who intentionally does EVIL. Reprobate means *rejected*. This is why it is vital to "examine yourselves." This should bring to mind the Passover admonition—eating and drinking the Passover in an unworthily manner that brings The Judgment of God[6]. Examining ourselves for all traces of evil (which includes anger and hatred) is a requirement for the Passover AND eternal life.

This past week both my parents died. It may sound romantic that their death was days apart after 68 years of marriage; however, as they fell 'asleep' I thought, "I wonder how many of God's people will die with unresolved anger in their hearts?" My parents will have another life but those with the Holy Spirit whose hearts are angry with a brother or sister in Christ may not. I grieve for my parents but more so for brethren who carry around anger because they are in "danger of the judgment."

The sad part is that the most common cause of anger is disagreements over so-called doctrines. One person gets *angry* with someone who does not agree on a biblical topic. How absurd! Instead of anger, where is the love that "turns a sinner from the error of his way?"[7] Anger accomplishes nothing except the loss of a brother or sister. It

[4] Rom. 8:29.
[5] Gal. 5:19-21.
[6] 1 Cor. 11:27-29.
[7] Jas. 5:19-20.

comes from pride whereby someone believes they have "greater" understanding, which is arrogant and hateful. Anger is also a sign of those who cannot love enough to DESIRE someone else to be in the Family of GOD regardless of circumstances. Being angry just proves they have no love. As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, you can be the most gifted, talented, wisest, faithful, and giving person in the entire world but you are absolutely NOTHING without agape love. Now imagine what God thinks of those who are angry with their brothers and sisters.

Becoming like God and Jesus Christ by growing in agape love is hard. Putting aside anger is hard. Loving an enemy is hard. But loving brothers and sisters in the *ekklesia* should NOT be hard. If brethren cannot love one another, how can they even love God or their enemies?

> 1 JOHN 3:10 **In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest *[publicly exposed]***: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor *is* **he who does not love his brother**.

Who is the father of angry people? SATAN! But those who think they are converted and are angry are also liars because they stand by their own 'righteousness'. It is a lie to claim to love God and be angry with a brother or sister. All liars are, again, children of Satan, the father of all lies[8]:

> 1 JOHN 4:20 If someone says, "I love God," and **hates his brother, he is a liar**; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?

The death of my parents reminded me that physical lives are short and that what follows is an eternal judgment for all who are gifted with the Holy Spirit:

> 1 PETER 4:17-18 For **the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God**; and if *it begins* with us first, **what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God**? 18 Now "**If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?**"

Anger "[tramples] the Son of God underfoot"[9] whose blood was shed for ALL, even those who might be a cause of anger. But Jesus said (figuratively) "Woe, woe, woe" to those who are angry at a brother or sister with OR without a cause. PLEASE, dear brethren, I beg you—put aside anger and be about "**exhorting *one another***, and so much the more as you see the Day *[of your physical death]* approaching."[10]

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[8] John 8:44.
[9] Heb. 10:29.
[10] Heb. 10:25.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-06-07—HEARERS & DOERS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Jews all knew Scripture, from the least to the greatest. Old Testament Scripture was the foundation of their society, government, education, and worship. All were taught Scripture from childhood, so why was it that Jesus had to "open the minds of the disciples to understand?"

> [TS2009] LUKE 24:44-45 And He *[Jesus Christ]* said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all have to be filled that were written in the [Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms] concerning Me." 45 Then **He opened their minds to understand *[G4920* suniemi *= put together]*** the Scriptures,

Jesus opened their minds so that they could understand scriptures in the context of God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Kingdom; that is, He gave them the ability to grasp their meaning and purpose within the plan of God. The Bible above all is both simple and yet highly complex. Simplicity is in Jesus Himself—obedience to the Law, His sacrifice for sin, agape love, and good works. The complexity is that Scripture was written over thousands of years by many different authors addressing a variety of topics and under a diversity of geopolitical and religious influences. Simply stated, biblical knowledge is here a little and there a little[1]. Given all this, it is one thing to learn Scripture but a completely different matter to UNDERSTAND it. That was the dilemma of the Ethiopian eunuch:

> ACTS 8:30-31 So Philip ran to him *[the eunuch]*, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you **understand *[know; have intimate knowledge]* what you are reading**?" 31 And he said, "**How can I, unless someone guides me?**" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.

Education is a process of learning—first gaining knowledge and then, by putting it to use and practice, understanding how to use that knowledge. The most effective method involves a teacher, student, and reference sources (i.e., books). Books provide both an outline for the teacher and a source of knowledge for the student. A student learns knowledge under the tutelage and guidance of a teacher. This system works very well and has been used for thousands of years. But a teacher guides a student into knowledge—NOT understanding. Even the Holy Spirit is simply a *guide*:

> JOHN 16:13 "However, when it, the Spirit of truth, has come, it will **guide *[show the way; teach]* you into all truth**; for it will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever it hears it will speak; and it will tell you things to come.

Knowledge is facts and information, concepts and principles; whereas, understanding is the ability to comprehend the meaning, purpose, and usefulness of the knowledge. A student can be taught knowledge but not understanding—that is something the student acquires through practice and experience. Without understanding, knowledge has limited use. Knowledge is necessary to build a house or bridge but understanding how, when, where, and why that knowledge applies is vital to successful construction. Knowledge is the possession of facts and information; whereas understanding is the

[1] Isa. 28:10.

ability to grasp the meaning or significance of those facts. Knowledge is knowing the *what*; whereas, understanding is knowing *why* and *how*. Knowledge is ascertaining truth; whereas, understanding is the application of it.

This might seem obvious but some in the *ekklesia* rely too heavily upon 'teachers'. All they know is what the teacher taught them. However, a student is responsible for reading the source of knowledge (the Bible) and then putting that knowledge to use. As God said, "**Prove *[test]*** Me." (Mal. 3:10).

In my experience, there are two types of students: those that listen to the teaching, diligently search the Scripture, and then put it into practice but there are those who listen to the teaching and do nothing more. The Bible has names for both of them:

> JAMES 1:22-25 But **be doers** of the word, and **not hearers only**, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it,* and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

Doers are those that learn from a teacher, study the Bible, and practice what they know. Hearers ignore the last two steps. Ideally, there is nothing wrong with either type of student. IDEALLY. The reality is risky for hearers. No single teacher, no matter how long he has studied the Bible, is an expert on Scripture. Part of the challenge is time; it has been 2,000 years since the source of knowledge and understanding was here on earth[2]:

> COLOSSIANS 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that **you may be filled with the knowledge of His *[Jesus Christ's]* will** in all wisdom **and spiritual understanding**;

A lot has been lost over time which causes a gap in knowledge because of the original languages, cultures, and practices. Throw in intentional corruptions by deceptive men and the problem gets worse.

All people are influenced by pride, life experiences, and even how they were raised as children. They can cause us to be blind or deaf in certain things. How many times have you looked at a verse in the Bible and said, "I have read that dozens of times but I never saw that before?" It is hard enough to be a teacher who sincerely tries to be humble and unbiased but those who are arrogant and prideful are a danger to all. They can usually be recognized by their boasting of their knowledge and condemnation others with different teachings. (NOTE: This is not referring to knowledge of doctrines pertaining to the "simplicity in Christ.")

The best recourse to avoid the natural bias and failings of teachers is to be a DOER. Those who are only HEARERS face several pitfalls. Religious topics above all others—math, science, history, etc.—generally evoke deep emotions. Hearers can easily be enticed to follow one particular teacher, usually someone who boasts of his knowledge and disparages other teachers (sometimes even if they have the same teachings). The hearers are reticent to 'defy' such teachers because they lack understanding.

[2] Also Col. 2:1-3.

Hearers are also fearful when their knowledge is questioned. Anger is a common response when their beliefs are threatened because they have knowledge but lack understanding. Doers, on the other hand, will listen to a teacher, go to the source of Truth, and evaluate it through their experiences and practices. A doer is very much at peace and calm when confronted with different teachings because they are an opportunity to gain knowledge and establish a deeper understanding. In fact, doers are much more likely to allow others to hold differing beliefs because they do not feel vulnerable. Knowledge of opposing views can even provide a deeper understanding of one's own beliefs. Anger simply breeds, and shows, ignorance.

Hearers often respond to questions by saying, "My minister said …;" whereas, doers will say, "The Bible says …." This is an important distinction because the Bible is the source of knowledge, not the teacher. No human teacher has full or perfect knowledge of the Bible. Ministers used to say, "Do not believe me, read the Bible for yourself." Great advice; however, that is not what a hearer does.

Perhaps, the classic example of the difference between hearers and doers happened decades ago when a COG organization changed their teaching that Pentecost occurred on Monday to Sunday. Some rejected that idea because they only knew what a minister told them while others recognized the error because they listened and then proved it from Scripture.

Why all this talk about hearers and doers? Because hearers are the number one source of anger and offenses. They are too easily offended or they become angry. Going back to the example of the Monday Pentecost, many died keeping it that way before the change to Sunday. Are they condemned to eternal death? Some hearers might be inclined to think so because they only know what they have been told by teachers and have completely overlooked what is in Scripture.

My question for the hearers who get angry and offended is: WHY is it so important to you that others believe exactly as you do? Christ is the judge of all[3] and says, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you." (Matt. 7:1-2). Hearers who get angry with those who have different beliefs are in effect gambling that their salvation is dependent upon their knowledge being absolute Truth. Really? Yes! What was the conclusion of Jesus when He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees? They should keep the Law but also heed "**the weightier *matters* of the law: judgement and mercy and faith**." (Matt. 23:23). Judgment, mercy, and faith are not given by someone who is angry.

Jesus said that is it a blessing to be HUMBLE, a blessing to be MEEK, a blessing to be MERCIFUL, and a blessing to be a PEACEMAKER[4]. But in my experience, very few hearers bestow these things upon those who believe differently. That makes hearers, as Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites[5].

Only the apostles taught perfectly. Every teacher since is further from that perfect knowledge. This is why perfection is not through the keeping of the Law, knowing prophecies, or a minister; it is through humility and meekness:

[3] Rom. 2:3.
[4] Matt. 5:1-9.
[5] Matt. 23.

> EPHESIANS 4:31-32 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. 32 And **be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another**, even as God in Christ forgave you.

Perfection is not about knowledge and understanding but from agape love:

> ROMANS 12:9-10 *Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 ***Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another**;

Scripture is overflowing with verses commanding us to "love one another"[6]. We are to be kind to one another, whether or not others are members of a particular organization. We are to be tenderhearted to one another, whether or not others keep a different calendar. We are to forgive one another, whether or not others offended us or committed sins. We are to love one another whether or not others hold the same beliefs or are even baptized. We are to love with ALL our heart because THAT is perfection. IF YOU ARE NOT DOING THESE THINGS, THEN:

> [TS2009] ROMANS 2:1-2 Therefore, O man, **you are without excuse, everyone who judges, for in which you judge another you condemn yourself**, since you who judge practice the same *wrongs*. 2 And we know that the judgment of [God] is according to truth against those who practice such *wrongs*.

If agape love is perfection, if agape love is the heart of all that Jesus said and the apostles wrote, why is it so few talk about it or do good works for others? People discuss ad nauseam biblical history, prophecy, dates, the two witnesses, what is work on a Sabbath, etc. but rarely agape love. When was the last time YOU talked with someone about love and good works?

There is not a single person on earth that is even close to perfect knowledge and understanding of anything in the Bible. NO ONE. That applies both to 'students' as well as elders or teachers. Doers will "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess. 5:21). Even if the teacher is wrong, anger has no place in education and learning. Instead, Scripture says YOU must prove what is taught and keep that which is good. Instead of anger, "**fear** of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom; **a good understanding have all those who do *His commandments***." (Ps. 111:10).

All are under God's GRACE, not under His Law[7]. If the awesome and fearful Creator God Most High gives grace to the weak, foolish, and ignorant children He has called, why is anyone angry toward others and withhold from them the same mercies He has shown any who are also seeking to be a child of the Father?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[6] John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 12:10; 13:8; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 4:21 Thess. 3:12; 4:9; Heb. 10:24; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 1 John 3:11, 23; 4:7, 11-12; 2 John 1:5; et al.
[7] Rom. 5:20; 6:14-15; Gal. 2:21; 5:4.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-06-14—OUT OF THIS WORLD, OUT OF THEIR MINDS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

One of the worst doctrines of WCG was the separation and isolation of its members from family, friends, and the world. The organization preached a message that everyone must come OUT of the world—literally. They did not want members to associate with anyone who was not part of their church. This was done for the subjection and control of its members and it was accomplished by quoting the Scripture "... **you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world**, therefore the world hates you." (John 15:19). On the face of it, there is certainly a sense of separation and isolation particularly with the threat that members would be hated. However, it was not only taken out of context, but the meaning was misconstrued. Here is the full text of what Jesus said:

> JOHN 15:18-19 "If the world hates you *[the 12 disciples]*, you know that it hated Me *[Jesus Christ]* before *it hated* you. 19 "**If you were of the world, the world would love its own.** Yet because **you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you**.

The last phrase, "I chose you out of the world," can mean two different things. It can be understood as "I chose you [to come] out of the world" or "I chose you [from among] the world." Both the Greek and English can be interpreted either way. So, which one is correct?

The fact that the world hates them means that they were still present in the world. Obviously, the world cannot hate those it does not know about; therefore, those who are "**not of the world**" are clearly NOT separated or isolated from it. Therefore, the phrase "**not of the world**" can only mean NOT of the same mind.

Aside from it being biblically false, the Doctrine of Separation and Isolation also had awful consequences. It literally quenched the commission from Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. Back then, not even the elders were allowed to go about preaching the Gospel outside of the organization—it was the sole responsibility of one man. While he did reach many, he also made the ridiculous claim that preaching to the leader of a nation was the same as preaching to every citizen of that nation. That was absurd and certainly not biblical. The result was that the Gospel was literally and intentionally withheld from the world:

> ROMANS 10:12-15 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? **And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent?** As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who **preach the gospel** of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

The impact of the Doctrine of Separation and Isolation in numbers of lost potential Firstfruits cannot be fully realized. Understanding that "**not of the world**" means NOT of the same mind eliminates the confusion of what Jesus said prior to His sacrifice:

> JOHN 17:6, 11, 14-19 "I *[Jesus Christ]* have manifested Your *[God's]* name to the men whom You have given Me **out of the world**. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. … 11 "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are **in the world**, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are*. … 14 "**I have given them Your word**; and the world has hated them because **they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world**. 15 "**I do not pray that You should take *[remove]* them out of the world**, but that You should keep them from the evil one. 16 "**They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.**" 17 "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. 18 "**As You sent *[lit. send out on a mission]* Me into the world, I also have sent *[lit. send out on a mission]* them into the world.** 19 "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth."

Jesus gave God's Word to the apostles and God sanctified them with His Word of Truth. This is what made them "not **of** the world," meaning that their minds were filled with Truth, not the lies and deceit of the world. But why were they set apart? So that they could PREACH the Gospel to the world. They could not do that if they were separated or isolated from the world. Jesus literally sent them on a mission (the meaning of the Greek) which is why He did not want God to "take them **out of the world**." Paul also clarifies this in his epistle to the Corinthians:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 5:9-10 I *[Paul]* wrote to you in my epistle **not to keep company with** sexually immoral people. 10 Yet ***I* certainly *did* not *mean* with the** sexually immoral **people of this world**, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, **since then you would need to go out of the world**.

Being "**of** the world" means having a MIND capable of speaking and understanding worldly things, as John explained:

> 1 JOHN 4:4-6 You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because **He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. 5 They are of the world. Therefore they speak *as* of the world, and the world hears them. 6 We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error *[delusion].***

The world and the *ekklesia* have completely separate and distinct MINDS. The world cannot understand the things of God while the *ekklesia* have mind of Christ[1] to know God's Word of Truth that also gives discernment of the deceit and delusion that is the basis of thinking throughout the world.

[1] Sabbath Thought articles "The Mind of Christ" and "Why the Mind of Christ?"

Perhaps the worst consequence of the Doctrine of Separation and Isolation was that it made the *ekklesia* FEARFUL. Many of the *ekklesia* in this day and age are afraid to speak about God, Jesus Christ, or the Gospel of the Kingdom. They are afraid to tell an employer about keeping the Sabbaths and holydays; they are afraid to tell family they are keeping the Feast of Tabernacles (instead, they are going on 'vacation' or to a 'church conference'); they are afraid when a neighbor tells them of a trial to ask if they would like prayers on their behalf; they are afraid to have 'unconverted' friends; they are afraid to tell the waiter why they do not eat pork or shellfish; they are afraid to tell the clerk at the store, "Have a blessed day!" or "May God bless you!"; they are afraid to tell the repairman not to come on the Sabbath (instead, no one is 'available' on Saturday). I know these to be true because these are all things that I and other brethren said and did.

The Doctrine of Separation and Isolation has also caused many to miss out on countless opportunities to be what we are all meant to be:

> MATTHEW 5:13-16 "**You are the salt of the earth**; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 "**You are the light of the world.** A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 "**Let your light so shine before men *[of the world]***, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

Some of those missed opportunities are Good Works, which are required for salvation[2]:

> 1 PETER 2:12 having your conduct honorable **among the Gentiles *[of the world]***, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by ***your* good works which they observe, glorify God** in the day of visitation.

Have you noticed that the world most enjoys escaping from itself? They go on vacations to escape their lives; they get drunk to escape their problems; they have parties to escape their boredom; they watch sports to escape from the ordinary; they watch movies to escape their own thoughts. In many regards, they are unknowingly searching for something beyond this world and this life. For this reason, some of them would "**gladly** receive [the] Word" (Acts 2:41) if they heard it. But all they hear is silence from a frightened *ekklesia*. The Gospel has been withheld from them because of the fear instilled in those who HAVE received it—you and me.

Something that is upsetting to contemplate is that God CANNOT WORK in those who hide away from the world—those who hide their light "under a basket." Light in a dark place is only useful if it is *exposed*. The "light of the Gospel" (2 Cor. 4:4) is given to the *ekklesia* so that the world may glorify God for His works in us:

[2] Sabbath Thought articles "Good Works," "What Are Good Works," and "Good Works Glorify God."

> PHILIPPIANS 2:13, 15 for **it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure**. … 15 that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, **among whom you shine as lights in the world**,

The fear that was instilled through the Doctrine of Separation and Isolation was a false and heretical biblical doctrine. If the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus prior to His sacrifice had that same fear, imagine the horror she would experience when she heard that the WHOLE WORLD would know about her:

> MATTHEW 26:12-13 "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My *[Jesus Christ']* body, she did *it* for My burial. 13 "Assuredly, I say to you, **wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial *[record]* to her**."

Above all, fear is an enemy of salvation:

> REVELATION 21:8 "**But the cowardly *[fearful]* … shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.**"

Fear of 'exposing' one's faith and God's Word of Truth for most involve trivial and petty things such as losing a job, family, or friends; of being criticized or labeled; etc. It is ironic because those who preach a Doctrine of Separation and Isolation also malign Protestants who willingly and alone proclaim the name of Jesus to complete strangers on the street or in front of a pro-Muslim mob or to a gang with machetes threatening them to convert to Islam.

It is far past time to put away any fear of facing the world. God can and *will* unleash the POWER within all who have God's Word of Truth in them:

> 2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For **God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind**.

That power of the Spirit from God is for the telling of a story of Truth and Light and Life by those who HAVE the His Word of Truth:

> JOHN 3:16, 21 "**For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** … 21 "But **he who [is practicing] the Truth comes to the Light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God**."

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-06-21—WHO WERE THE APOSTLES?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Who were the apostles? What makes an apostle? Are there apostles today? Some of those answers may seem obvious, but who they were and what was required of them is both interesting and inspiring.

THE APOSTLES

The names of the 12 apostles[1] were Simon Peter son of Jonas, Andrew son of Jonas, James son of Zebedee, John son of Zebedee, Philip, Bartholomew (Nathanael), Matthew (Levi), Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus (Judas or Labbaeus) son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Matthias (who replaced Judas Iscariot).

> LUKE 6:13-15 And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself;* and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: 14 **Simon**, whom He also named Peter, and **Andrew** his brother; **James** and **John**; **Philip** and **Bartholomew**; 15 **Matthew** and **Thomas**; **James** the *son* of Alphaeus, and **Simon** called the Zealot; 16 **Judas** *the son* of James, and **Judas Iscariot** who also became a traitor.
>
> The order in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts differ slightly. Compared with Luke, Matthew is before Thomas in the book of Matthew, Andrew before James in the books of Mark and Acts, and Thomas before Bartholomew in Acts.
>
> Brothers included Simon Peter and Andrew sons of Jonas; James (the Great) and John, sons of Zebedee; and likely Matthew and James (the Lesser), sons of Alphaeus. Jesus called the brothers James and John "sons of thunder."[2] James was also the half-brother of Jesus Christ through Mary and likely older than John. Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Zebedee were fishing partners. Matthew (Levi) was a tax collector.

Judas Iscariot, both rejected and dead, was replaced by Matthias:

> ACTS 1:15-17, 20-26 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of **the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty)**, and said, 16 "Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David **concerning Judas *[Iscariot]***, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; 17 "for he *[Judas Iscariot]* was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry." … 20 "For it is written in the Book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, and let no one live in it'; and, '**Let another take his office.**' 23 And **they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed**

[1] Also Matt. 10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Acts 1:13; 1 Pet. 1:1; 2 Pet. 1:1.
[2] Mark 3:17.

Justus, and Matthias. 24 And **they prayed** and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, **show which of these two You have chosen 25 "to take part in this ministry and apostleship** from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." 26 And they cast their lots, and **the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles**.

NOTE: The ~120 disciples had some or all of the qualifications for an apostleship (Acts 1:15); however, only 12 were appointed.

Paul also was an apostle:

ROMANS 1:1 Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, **called *to be* an apostle**, separated to the gospel of God

There was one more—Jesus Christ is the Head Apostle:

HEBREWS 3:1 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider **the Apostle** and High Priest of our confession *[profession]*, **Christ Jesus**,

Others had the title of apostle including Andronicus (a Jew) and Junia[3] (who was, interestingly, a Roman woman) and Barnabas (Joses)[4]. They were likely of the ~120 and maybe even the 70; however, they were not given the same recognition and authority as those Jesus referred to as "the twelve"[5] for unknown reasons.

APOSTOLIC QUALIFICATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

REQUIREMENT: Apostles were APPOINTED by God and CHOSEN by Jesus Christ:

Jesus Christ prayed all night, discussing with God the Father those who He would choose from among the ~120 disciples:[6]

LUKE 6:12-13 Now it came to pass in those days that **He *[Jesus Christ]* went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God**. 13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself;* and from them **He chose twelve whom He also named apostles**:

Matthias was APPOINTED by God the Father and CHOSEN by Jesus Christ:

ACTS 1:24-26 And **they *[the 11 apostles]* prayed** and said, "You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, **show which of these two You have chosen 25 "to take part in this ministry and apostleship** from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place." 26 And they cast their lots, and **the lot fell on Matthias. And he was numbered with the eleven apostles**.

[3] Rom. 16:7.
[4] Acts 4:36; 14:14.
[5] Mark 6:7; 9:35; et al.
[6] Also Mark 3:13-14; Acts 1:2; Rom. 1:5.

Paul was APPOINTED by God the Father and CHOSEN by Jesus Christ:[7]

1 CORINTHIANS 1:1 **Paul, called *to be* an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will *[decree]* of God**, …

1 TIMOTHY 1:1 **Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment *[decree]* of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ**, our hope,

REQUIREMENT: Apostles were with Jesus during His entire ministry, which made them witnesses of the Gospel and Jesus Christ to the world:

ACTS 1:21 "Therefore, of these **men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 "beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us** of His resurrection."

REQUIREMENT: Apostles were taught directly (and privately at times[8]) by Jesus:[9]

JOHN 18:19-21 The high priest then **asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine**. 20 Jesus answered him, "**I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple**, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. 21 "Why do you ask Me? **Ask those who have heard Me** what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said."

JUDE 1:17 But you, beloved, remember **the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ**:

GALATIANS 1:11, 15-18 But **I *[Paul]*** make known to you, brethren, that **the gospel** which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, **nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ.** … 15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called *me* through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, **I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but I went to Arabia**, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then **after three years *[with Jesus Christ]*** I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

REQUIREMENT: Apostles were witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

ACTS 1:21-22 "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 "beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, **one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.**"

[7] Also Acts 9:10-11, 15, 17; 14:14; Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 9:1-2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1; 1:11; Titus 1:1.
[8] Matt. 20:17.
[9] Also Mark 9:31; 12:35; John 7:14, 28; 8:20, 28.

ACTS 4:33 And with great power **the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus**. And great grace was upon them all.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-8 For I *[Paul]* delivered to you first of all that which I also received: **that Christ died** for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that **He rose again** the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that **He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve**. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that **He was seen by James, then by all the apostles**. 8 Then **last of all He was seen by me** also, as by one born out of due time.

1 CORINTHIANS 9:1 Am **I *[Paul]*** not an apostle? Am I not free? **Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord *[after He was resurrected]?*** Are you not my work in the Lord?

REQUIREMENT: Apostles were partakers of the last Passover with Jesus Christ:

LUKE 22:14-15 When the hour had come, **He *[Jesus Christ]* sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him**. 15 Then He said to them, "With *fervent* desire I have desired to **eat this Passover with you** before I suffer;

NOTE: Matthias was an exception because he replaced Judas Iscariot. Also Paul was not at last Passover with Jesus Christ but he certainly would have partaken of it during the three years he was with Him:

GALATIANS 1:17-18 nor did I *[Paul]* go up to Jerusalem to those *who were* apostles before me; but **I went to Arabia**, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then **after three years *[with Jesus Christ]*** I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

REQUIREMENT: Apostles were tested when Jesus sent them to do signs and wonders and to preach the Gospel or a warning to those who rejected them:

MATTHEW 10:5-8 These **twelve Jesus sent out** and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 "But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7 "And as you go, **preach *[the Gospel]*, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'**

LUKE 10:1, 9-11 After these things **the Lord appointed seventy others** also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go. … 9 "And **heal the sick there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'** 10 "But whatever city you enter, and they **do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 11 'The very dust of your city which clings to us we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near you.'**

NOTE: It is reasonable to assume that the 70 sent out by Jesus were of the group of ~120 disciples.

APOSTOLIC POWER & AUTHORITY

POWER: Apostles were given power to cast out unclean spirits, heal sickness and disease, and perform signs and wonders:[10]

> LUKE 9:1-2 Then **He *[Jesus Christ]* called His twelve disciples together and gave them power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases**. 2 He sent them to preach the kingdom of God **and to heal the sick**.

POWER: Apostles were given power to do signs and wonders as proof that their authority came from God to preach the Gospel and witness (testify) of Jesus Christ:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 12:12 Truly **the signs of an apostle** were accomplished among you with all perseverance, **in signs and wonders and mighty deeds**.
>
> ACTS 1:8 "But you *[the apostles]* shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and **you shall be [My witnesses]** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."
>
> ACTS 2:43-44 Then fear came upon every soul, and **many wonders and signs were done through the apostles**. 44 Now **all who believed *[the Gospel]*** were together, …
>
> ACTS 4:33 And **with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus**. And great grace was upon them all.
>
> ACTS 5:12, 14 And **through the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were done** among the people. And they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch. … 14 And **believers were increasingly added** to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,
>
> [TS2009] 1 CORINTHIANS 4:9 For I *[Paul]* think that **[God] has exhibited us**, the [apostles], last, **as appointed to death *[lit. doomed to death],* because we became a spectacle to the world**, both to [angels] and to men.
>
> Even their deaths were a public witness (testimony).

AUTHORITY: Apostles were given authority to PREACH THE GOSPEL:[11]

> NOTE: The Gospel is always PREACHED (proclaimed, announced) whereas the Word of God is TAUGHT.
>
> MARK 16:14-15 Later **He *[Jesus Christ]* appeared to the eleven** as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen. 15 And **He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.**

[10] Also Matt. 10:1, 5-8; Mark 3:13-15; 6:7, 12-13.
[11] Also Mark 3:13-14; 6:7, 12; Luke 9:1-2, 6; 1 Cor. 1:17; 9:16.

AUTHORITY: Apostles were given authority to TEACH THE WORD OF GOD (the Law and Prophets):

ACTS 1:1-2 The former account I *[Luke]* made, O Theophilus, of all that **Jesus** began both to do and **teach**, 2 until the day in which He was taken up, after **He through the Holy Spirit had given commandments *[teaching the Word of God]* to the apostles** whom He had chosen,

ACTS 2:42 And they *[the people]* continued steadfastly **in the apostles' doctrine *[teaching the Word of God]*** and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

EPHESIANS 2:20 having been built on **the foundation *[teaching the Word of God]* of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself** being the chief corners*tone*,

2 PETER 3:2 that you may be mindful of **the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us *[teaching the Word of God]*, the apostles of the Lord and Savior**,

JUDE 1:17 But you, beloved, remember **the words which were spoken before by the apostles *[teaching the Word of God]* of our Lord Jesus Christ**:

AUTHORITY: Apostles were given authority to "bind and loose":

Under that unique authority, they pronounced doctrines (teachings) that established and set judgments for certain matters according to the Word of God. This was especially important for the Gentiles. Initially, Peter alone was given the authority to bind and loose but later all 12 apostles received it.

MATTHEW 16:18-19 "And I *[Jesus Christ]* also say to you that **you are Peter**, and on this rock I will build My *ekklesia*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. 19 "And **I will give you *[singular = Peter]* the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you *[singular]* bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you *[singular]* loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**."

MATTHEW 18:18 "Assuredly, I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you *[plural = the twelve disciples—v1]*, **whatever you *[plural]* bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you *[plural]* loose on earth will be loosed in heaven**.

NOTE: The authority to "bind and loose" is why certain matters were brought to Peter (and the other disciples) for judgments. Examples include accepting Paul[12] as an apostle and the circumcision of the Gentiles[13]. Paul also had authority to "bind and loose" because he distinguishes between teachings he "received of the Lord" (1 Cor.

[12] Acts 9:27.
[13] Acts 15:1-29.

11:23) and those that were his own judgments—"I have no commandment from the Lord; yet **I give judgment**" (1 Cor. 7:25).

APOSTOLIC RESPONSIBILIY

RESPONSIBILITY: The original 12 apostles were sent to the 12 Tribes:[14]

> MATTHEW 10:5-6 These **twelve Jesus sent out** and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 "But **go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**.

RESPONSIBILITY: Paul was sent to the Gentiles:[15]

> ROMANS 11:13 For **I *[Paul]*** speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch **as I am an apostle to the Gentiles**, I magnify my ministry,
>
> GALATIANS 2:7-9 But on the contrary, when they *[the 12 apostles]* saw that **the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me *[Paul]*, as *the gospel* for the circumcised *was* to Peter** 8 (for He *[Jesus Christ]* who worked effectively **in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me *[Paul]* toward the Gentiles**), 9 and when **James, Cephas, and John,** who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave **me and Barnabas** the right hand of fellowship, that **we *should go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised**.

CONCLUSION

There were only ever thirteen apostles with the full set of qualifications and requirements and who received their appointment and selection directly from God the Father and Jesus Christ along with the requisite power and authority. Anyone claiming to be an apostle today is speaking heresy or is a false christ.

However, Jesus Christ is the head Apostle so there was a total of 14 apostles. Fourteen is a significant number that points to The Christ—the three groups of 14 in the lineage of Jesus Christ[16] and the date of the Passover sacrifice (Nisan 14). It is also an indication that there are no other apostles after them.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[14] Also 1 Pet. 1:1.
[15] Also 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11.
[16] Matt 1; Luke 3.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-06-28—I CANNOT IMAGINE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

There are things about God that are just impossible to comprehend. It is particularly apparent for humans who cannot see, hear, or talk with God. The creation is a product of His brilliance. It is one that interests and challenges even the most exceptional minds. A South Korean man named Younghoon Kim has the highest recorded IQ of 276, much higher than Einstein, but even he will go to his grave without satisfying his thirst for knowledge. No one ever will. And that is why intellect and knowledge cannot bring peace to one's soul—the mysteries of God never cease. Job and his four friends Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite were brilliant men but they, too, recognized the insuperable gulf between man and God:

> JOB 11:7-9 "**Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? 8 *They are* higher than heaven– what can you do? Deeper than Sheol– what can you know? 9 Their measure *is* longer than the earth and broader than the sea.**

Then there is the fact that physical life ends in death, which raises the question, "Why bother?" This is exactly why Solomon said that knowledge is vanity[1]. But he was wrong about one thing: humans NEED God to be vastly greater than anything our minds can dream up or ever search out. Our limitations become *motivation* to seek God, worship Him, fear Him, and strive to be like Him because that is the only way our souls will ever be satisfied. Doing these things feeds the hope that this life leads to a more abundant one[2] that escapes the limitations of this physical life.

NO BEGINNING: Some things are just not possible for humans to grasp but what eludes our thinking above all is an ever-living Being; that is, One who had no beginning. EVERYTHING that we know has a beginning. It is utterly impossible to comprehend that God has no beginning.

> ECCLESIASTES 3:11 He *[God]* has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, **except that no one can find out** the work that God does **from beginning** to end.

Solomon wrote this subsequent to his soliloquy on "To everything *there is* a season, a time for every purpose under heaven." (Ecc. 3:1). The thoughts of the wisest man on earth were constrained by time. I doubt it is possible even for the angels to understand the eternity of God. The reason "no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end" is because God had no beginning. His works began before any other life existed. God has placed "eternity in their *[humans]* hearts" and living forever is quite easy to comprehend, but no one understands life that did not require a "time to be born." (Eccl. 3:2). God is LIFE because He had no beginning.

SPACE: The universe exists in something we call 'Space', which is an apt name for a volume that no one can measure. The name is like the bread that God gave to the ancient Israelites. When it first appeared, they asked, "What is it?" or, in the Hebrew, "Manna?"[3]

[1] Eccl. 2:21.
[2] John 10:10.
[3] Exod. 16:15.

While the universe has billions or trillions of galaxies containing billions or trillions of stars and planets, Space is big … really big. In fact, all of the galaxies are estimated to make up only $4.2x10^{-21}$% of its measurable volume. That is less than one wheelbarrow of dirt of the whole volume of the earth. What we call Space is a continuous area or expanse that is mostly unoccupied.

Like eternity, infinity is not something a human mind can comprehend except as a mathematical concept. Human minds rebel at anything without limitations or boundaries. Interestingly, cosmologists admit that they do not know if the universe has a boundary or edge while others say the universe might be flat, curved, or some other shape. If the universe has a shape it has to be limited by default. For example, the earth is a sphere but the only reason it has a shape is because it has a surface beyond which is Space. Everything with a limit or boundary MUST be contained within something else—like the earth floating in Space. If Space is limited, then by default it must be contained inside something else. Eventually, one must conclude that either Space is infinite or there is something that surrounds Space that itself is infinite. As Job observed:

> [TS2009, FV] JOB 26:13-14 By His Spirit **He *[God]* adorned the heavens**. … 14 Lo, **these *are* only the outer fringes** of His ways; **but what a trifling whisper we hear** about Him! And **who understands the thunder of His power**?"

Astronomers have measured the "outer fringes" of the universe to be 93 billion light-years across, but that is a "trifling whisper" of the infinite 'playground' of God!

INFINITY: This leads to is the realization that nothing about God has limits. God not only has no beginning but His Kingdom must be INFINITE as well. Notice this rather cryptic way of describing His Kingdom:

> DANIEL 7:27 Then **the kingdom** and dominion, and the greatness of **the kingdoms under the whole heaven**, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High …

The word for *kingdom* includes concepts of both rulership *and* geography. In other words, rulership is authority established over a region. The phrase "kingdoms **under the whole heaven**" indicates there will be smaller kingdoms under one superior Kingdom that is of the Whole Heaven. As already discussed, the Whole Heaven must be infinite, so the Kingdom which is ABOVE them all is infinite. But read what Isaiah said about this Kingdom:

> ISAIAH 9:7 **Of the increase of *His [the Son of God]* government *[empire]*** and peace *there will be* no end …

English treats *government* as the ruling *authority* over the citizens of a country. But it does not make sense that the *authority* of God will increase. His supremacy is not in question. However, in the Hebrew the word also means *empire*, which is a conglomeration of smaller kingdoms under a single, supreme Kingdom. Sound like Daniel 7:27? If there is no end to the *increase* of God's EMPIRE, then The Kingdom of the Whole Heaven will forever grow in size—it has "no end." Therefore, it has no limit or boundary, which means it is INIFINITE.

CREATOR: All beings have some ability to create things but only God has the power to create something from nothing:

> JOHN 1:3 All things were made through Him *[The Logos]*, and **without Him nothing was made that was made**.

This is curious wording. The TS2009 says, "All **came to be** through Him, and without Him not even one *[thing]* **came to be** that **came to be**." It implies coming into existence from NOTHING. That is TRUE creative power. Mankind, on the other hand, creates things from the resources God put upon this earth. They can only form or change one *thing* into another. Angels, too, have the ability to create. I imagine they are building the dwelling places in the house of God[4] and Jesus is the Master Builder or Architect. However, the evidence is sketchy whether they can create from nothing.

What is mindboggling about the creative power of God is the complexity of it all. When an engineer makes something, it begins as a mental concept that is captured on design plans. Those are usually simulated and then made into a working prototype that is subjected to testing. Any failings or limitations become modifications of the original plans after which it becomes a production item. But it does not seem that God did anything like that. When He made the heavens and earth, He did so according to what was in His mind and it was perfect without plans, prototypes, or testing. Why do I say that? Mainly because there will be a New Creation[5] that replaces the old one and its appearance is sudden and without precedent—there is no evidence God 'prototyped' it first. God just knows it will be perfect. Assuming that the New Creation, likely more complex and beautiful than this existing one, did not require a development process, neither did this current physical creation.

The creative power and brilliance of God is unimaginable and unmeasurable. This is another reason why The Kingdom of the Whole Heaven is infinite. What else could contain the indescribable creative power of God? That means, then, that The Kingdom of the Whole Heaven is when the God's works truly begin because they will expand into infinity. "Known to God **from eternity are all His works**." (Acts 15:18). God has been working for all eternity-past so it is safe to assume He will continue for eternity to come.

What is truly astounding is that The Kingdom of the Whole Heaven—the infinity of the New Creation—is the inheritance of the saints of God[6]. Let that sink in—the saints will inherit both the ETERNITY and the INFINITY of The Kingdom of the Whole Heaven. That makes sense because one requires the other. Eternal beings require an infinite canvas for their works and infinite works require eternal beings.

AGAPE LOVE: The purpose of The Kingdom of the Whole Heaven is so "that God may **be all** in all." (1 Cor. 15:28). Given the greatness of God—His eternity and the unending expanse of His Kingdom—how can ALL of God be in all of His people? It seems to imply that His fullness will be expressed in varying amounts and ways through His many children, but that is hard to grasp given that God is beyond measure in everything.

Including agape love. John says God IS love[7]. Love drives His thoughts, motives, and purposes including the reason for creating all life. No one can define what life is beyond some capacity for thoughts, feelings, memories, learning, and language. But God created life to share what He IS—agape love—with others. But how will He do that? How, exactly, does a created being come to know, understand, and have agape love? God gave people an understanding of spousal, familial, and brotherly love. However, the human forms of love

[4] John 14:2-3.
[5] Isa. 65:17.
[6] Rev. 21:7.
[7] 1 John 4:8, 16.

fall short when it comes to those filled with hatred—enemies. Perfect agape love is incapable of anger, hatred, or malice[8].

So, agape love begins with God. Scripture says that "**love is of *[or from]* God.**" (1 John 4:8). That means God "**first** loved us" (1 John 4:19). That makes sense. But then we must learn what love is (can you define it?). How? From the One who IS love—God. He "will teach us of His ways" (Isa. 2:3; Mic. 4:2). But God is also practical. His ways ("straight paths"[9] in the NT) must be expressed in definitive terms, not in figurative or poetic biblical expressions. Hence, God made Laws, which are simply rules of behavior expressed as do's and don'ts. What is interesting is that these rules are the same in the heaven as on the earth[10]:

> JOB 38:33 Do you know **the ordinances *[Laws]* of the heavens**? Can you set their dominion over the earth?

Apparently, even the angels had to learn agape love; otherwise, why would there be Laws in the heavens? (Before anyone objects to this by mentioning that Lucifer was perfect when he was created[11], the word perfect means meaning without blemish, not necessarily with full knowledge. I would suggest that all infants are born that way, too. Perfect at creation or birth seems to be a case of not yet knowing how "to refuse the evil, and choose the good."—Isa. 7:16.)

But even after teaching the Laws of Love, God also "**demonstrates** His own love toward us" (Rom. 5:8). Given the bad choices of *all* of mankind, He demonstrated His love by sacrificing His own Son. He showed people the meaning and depth of agape love because we were all enemies of Him. Those who learn agape love, abide by the rules of behavior, and follow the example of God will then be able "love Him **because He first loved us**." (1 John 4:19). And they will also "love one another" (1 John 4:8). Hopefully, this eventually includes our own enemies—those filled with anger, hatred, and malice toward us because the perfection of agape love is being willing to sacrifice even for an enemy.

And that is our hope—an ETERNAL life in an INFINITE Kingdom in which all its citizens not only love one another but are the sum and expression of all that God is living IN them! God said, "For I know **the thoughts that I think toward you**, says the LORD, **thoughts of peace** and not of evil, **to give you a future and a hope**." (Jer. 29:11). And that is something that I cannot imagine!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[8] 1 John 4:20.
[9] Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; Heb 12:13.
[10] Also Jer. 33:25.
[11] Ezek. 28:15.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-07-05—WHO IS AN ENEMY?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

If one takes a hard and honest look at the *ekklesia* today, there can be little doubt that this it is the age of Laodiceans:

> REVELATION 3:14-17 "And to the angel of the *ekklesia* of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 "So then, because **you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot**, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 "Because you say, '**I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'–and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked**–

Today is a life of prosperity and recreation for most—they are "rich *[and]* have become wealthy and have need of nothing." There is nothing wrong with wealth except that it is through afflictions that we draw and stay close to God with a zeal not found in a life of ease. That is why Jesus said "it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:23-24).

I only mention the prosperity and ease of these days because this is also a time when there are none of the enemies who pursued God's people to murder, rape, torture, or imprison them. I am referring to the real and brutal enemies of God and His people. In the Greek, enemy is *echthros* (H2190) meaning a hateful, odious, and hostile person. This describes people like Hitler, Genghis Khan, Stalin, Mao Zedong, Pol Pot, Leopold II, Lenin, Ivan the Terrible, Tojo, Vlad the Impaler, Saddam Hussein, etc. Thankfully, no one today has enemies like these.

So, that prompts the question, who is an enemy of God's people today? We surely need to know because we are to love our enemies—those who do evil to us:

> MATTHEW 5:43-44 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, **love your enemies**, bless **those who curse** you, do good to **those who hate** you, and pray for **those who spitefully use** you and **persecute** you,"

An enemy mentioned here could be someone who is wicked like the evil leaders listed above. However, most enemies stop far short of that, although they persecute God's people in other ways. Even so, it is not very common for God's people to encounter them, at least in this country.

The end of this age is certainly drawing near in which prophecy once again will bring the worst of afflictions upon God's people. John records what happened in the past and what will come about again:

> REVELATION 20:4 And I *[John]* saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then *I saw* **the souls of those who had been beheaded** for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

The nations of Abraham's descendants have not experienced such horrors in more modern times and, until it starts during the Tribulation, the enemies of God's people fulfill a different prophesy:

> MATTHEW 7:15 "Beware of **false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves**.
>
> ACTS 20:29-30 "For I *[Paul]* know this, that after my departure **savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock**. 30 "Also **from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves**.
>
> 2 PETER 2:1 But there were also **false prophets among the people *[of God]***, even as there will be **false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies**, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction.

Nowadays, the true enemies are WITHIN the *ekklesia*. They may not physically torture and murder, but they are enemies nonetheless and, perhaps, even worse:

> 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-2 Now the Spirit expressly says that **in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons**, 2 **speaking lies in hypocrisy**, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

Paul is referring to men who preach DECEPTIVE DOCTRINES of demons. Who were they? Men who DEPARTED from—are you ready?—The Faith! In other words, they were once a part of the Body of Christ! Scripture clearly states that enemies within the *ekklesia* include both shepherds and sheep. Notice first the enemy, shepherds:

> EZEKIEL 34:2-3 "Son of man, **prophesy against the shepherds of Israel *[ordained ministers]***, prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel **who feed themselves!** … 3 "**You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, *(living luxuriously)*** …

Tithes are a mainstay of organizations so they convince people to give directly to them. Their false doctrine is that elders and organizations are the successor to the temple and priests and that they have the authority to determine what is to be done with the tithes. (In doing so, the people abdicate their responsibility for Good Works to help others in need—a salvational requirement.) Mainly the money funds lavish office buildings, high-end retirement plans, insurance, housing and car allowances, fully paid festival expenses, etc. all for the shepherds. SIGN #1 of an enemy within the *ekklesia* is shepherds who live luxuriously off the backs of their flocks.

Oh, but you might say, they have a huge responsibility to preach the Gospel and that requires money. Hmm. Posting a bunch of sermons geared strictly toward believers on a website or Youtube channel is NOT preaching the Gospel and it does not cost that much! In fact, their messages are rarely, rarely, rarely ever about the Gospel. Preaching the gospel that way is so ineffective that, in the corporate world, it would be considered a failed business strategy, forcing any CEO and board to revamp their entire approach. Jesus said, "**Go** into all the world" (Mark 16:15), not hope that someone stumbles upon the Truth. Hope is never a strategy. Tinder,

Bumble, and Hinge websites might work for dating and LinkedIn for job searches, but how many people were baptized who said, "I found God's Truth on Google." How did Paul say it should be done?

> ROMANS 10:14-15 How then shall they call on Him *[Jesus Christ]* in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And **how shall they hear without a preacher**? 15 And **how shall they preach unless they are sent**? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

What little money remains is given to a few but it is always insufficient. Some receive a little help for the festivals but it usually does not cover a lot or is sufficient for the entire duration. There are also impoverished widows who are struggling and never receive a dime. And heaven forbid that they should help anyone who belongs to another group!

Continuing in Ezekiel 34:

> EZEKIEL 34:2-4 … **Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?** 3 … *but* **you do not feed the flock. 4 "The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken,** …

Shepherds are responsible for teaching. These days, it is mostly done through sermons, which are lectures that demand acceptance without question. I recall withholding comments or questions from Scripture in times past because I knew it was contrary to the party line. SIGN #2 of an enemy within the *ekklesia* is shepherds who do not help the spiritually weak, sick, or broken sheep.

Returning to Ezekiel 34:

> EZEKIEL 34:4 … **nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.**

Shepherds also 'disfellowship' those who disagree with their teachings and drive them out. It is also not enough to expel them from their organization because they also forbid the members to associate with them. They are dictators who surround their members with doctrinal barbed wire fences to keep them from associating with others who are not of their fold. SIGN #3 of an enemy within the *ekklesia* is shepherds who subjugate the sheep and drive away those who will not submit to them.

Now notice the enemies within the *ekklesia* who are sheep:

> EZEKIEL 34:17-21 'And *as for* you, O My flock, thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats. 18 ***"Is it* too little for you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must tread down with your feet the residue of your pasture–and to have drunk of the clear waters, that you must foul the residue with your feet? 19 "And *as for* My flock, they eat what you have trampled with your feet, and they drink what you have fouled with your feet."** 20 'Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the **fat and the lean sheep**. 21 "Because **you *[fat sheep]* have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad**,

> 22 "therefore I will save My flock, and **they shall no longer be a prey**; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

This might seem to have an obscure meaning, but let me assure you that there are plenty of examples. How about wealthy Americans who attend a feast site in an economically poor country? They boast about enjoying the best that can be had at bargain rates while excluding the impoverished locals from their fellowshipping and feasting. Or the struggling, impoverished widow who was refused help by the church and ignored by local brethren with their expensive cars and houses? Or brethren who cut off all contact with those their organization 'disfellowshipped'. (Disfellowshipping is such unspeakable heresy and hypocrisy because it is contrary to Scripture, which says "if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep *[intimate]* company with him, **that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.**"—2 Thess. 3:14-15.) Or those who spiritually murderer other brethren through their gossip, rumor, and slander. Or those who tattle to the minister instead of talking privately to the brother or sister. These are fat sheep eating the good pasture and drinking the clear waters while lean sheep eat the trampled residue and drink fouled waters. SIGN #4 of an enemy within the *ekklesia* are those who make victims of other sheep.

Perhaps, at this late point, it is worth defining *enemy*. Paul said an enemy is someone whose "mind *[is motivated]* by wicked works" (Col. 1:21). Enemies within the *ekklesia* are those "whose god *is their* belly, and *whose* glory *is* in their shame–who set their mind on earthly things" (Phil. 3:19). Enemies within the *ekklesia* are wolves in sheep's clothing. Enemies within the *ekklesia* are tares among the wheat. Why did Jesus mention tares? Because they are poisonous, causing dizziness, headaches, mental confusion, visual and speech difficulties, and coma. They predominately affect the mind. Interesting, huh? In fact, sowing tares in a wheat field was so sinister and objectionable that even Roman law prohibited doing it to an enemy.

But this is why, perhaps, the enemies of the Laodicean era are WITHIN the *ekklesia*—this is the age of No Love and No Works! They have need of nothing and ignore the few who have need of everything. They do not understand what it means to love brethren (in spite of what their church says) much less God. They have become enemies of each other and cannot recognize the true enemies.

The most frightening aspect of Laodicea is that it is the only one that has a CLOSED door. They are so lukewarm that it seems the door to salvation is shut. However, Jesus offers hope: "Behold, **I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him** and dine with him, and he with Me." (Rev. 3:20). In other words, He has not forsaken those of this Laodicean age—He is actively and purposefully KNOCKING on the door. Salvation is still there for those who are "zealous and repent." But THAT requires us to open the door to allow Him in!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-07-12—LAMENTATIONS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

This past week a tragedy occurred. Near the little town of Kerrville, Texas there was a storm that produced an unpredicted and unprecedented deluge of rain, which collected in the south fork of the Guadalupe River in the early hours of the morning of July 4. Families were gathered along the river basin in tents and campers and the local summer camps were filled with hundreds of children. Many were asleep when a thirty foot high torrent of water pushed through taking tents, cars, campers, and even cabins and houses with it. Boys and girls, men and women simply disappeared into the roiling waters that smothered life out of many.

> LAMENTATIONS 1:16 "For these *things* I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life, is far from me. My children are desolate because the enemy prevailed."

I am familiar with the area because it is where my relatives settled back in the late 1700s and early 1800s. They came from parts of the Black Forest region in Germany to Galveston, TX and established little towns such as Mason, New Braunfels, and Fredericksburg to eek out a living in the heat of south central Texas. They were true Texans, with names such as Uncle Billy Wayne, who raised their children and cattle on ranches or became preachers or doctors. Hardy, reliable, and loyal people with core values of God, faith, and family. This is a place where I could knock on most any door in town and be welcomed with joy and hugs as they collected nearby family for a feast even though it has been decades since I last visited.

> LAMENTATIONS 2:11 My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my [inward parts are] poured on the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the children and the infants faint in the streets of the city.

I doubt I knew anyone who died in the flood, but it was no small tragedy. Witnesses heard screams of people disappearing into the rapids or trapped in campers rolling down the river like bowling balls. Scenes like these were recounted through the choking words of helpless witnesses on the banks of the new shoreline that formed far from the expected boundaries of that usually mild river. As I watched the news, pictures of family members and little children were posted by loved ones as rescuers pulled the dead from clutches of trees or graves of mud covering their ravaged bodies, almost as if the river was trying to hide what it had done.

> LAMENTATIONS 2:13 How shall I console you? To what shall I liken you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare with you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin *is* spread wide as the sea; who can heal you?

Last year, nature spun furiously at the loom of destruction, weaving the deadly hurricanes Beryl, Milton, and Helene; a string-of-pearls of 165 tornados that ripped open the country's midsection from north to south; and fires that vaporized parts of California in a furnace stoked by the Santa Ana bellows. Sadly, no one gives them a second thought anymore. Calamities such as October 7 in Israel; Lahaina, Hawaii; and 9/11 are, like most tragedies, now words covered in the dust on discarded notebooks of journalists. When it comes to calamities, news media audiences quickly switch to a sports channel and a beer to escape the violence that victims can never forget.

> LAMENTATIONS 2:18-19 Their heart cried out to the Lord, "O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no relief; give your eyes no rest. 19 "Arise,

> cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. Lift your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, who faint from hunger at the head of every street."

The world is replete with destruction and grief. There is not a year that goes by without the intertwined bloodshed of man and the cauldron of nature destroying the lives of people. International wars notwithstanding, 4-5 million human beings that no one knew or remembers were erased from the world roster in the last 20 years by starvation, disease, tsunamis, earthquakes, tribal warrings, and religious persecutions.

> LAMENTATIONS 3:4-5 He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones. 5 He has besieged me and surrounded *me* with bitterness and woe.

But life will continue as it always does, including the irrational and inexplicable response of some so-called ministers. It takes a very disturbed individual to accuse both survivors and victims still dealing with horrific tragedies of being punished by God for their sins, especially if it is a preacher. One in particular never seems to miss an opportunity, adding to this despicable accusation in a recent monologue that Sunday-keeping Protestants are Satan-worshippers. It takes a complete absence of love to publicly voice such vile thoughts toward those who suffer.

Hatred is contrary to everything that IS God as Scripture says: "he who does not love does not know God, for **God is love**." (1 John 4:8). But claiming that victims of tragedies are being punished by God is satanic! Think that is an overstatement? Not at all, since that is exactly how Jesus described it when the disciples wanted to call down fire from God to punish people:

> LUKE 9:54-55 And when His *[Jesus's]* disciples James and John saw *this [that the Samaritans did not receive Jesus],* they said, "Lord, **do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them**, just as Elijah did?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "**You do not know what manner of spirit you are of**.

What is most baffling is that preachers of such hate have a following from within the *ekklesia*. Surprising since evil-speaking and hate are the ways of unconverted people:

> TITUS 3:2-3 … **speak evil of no one**, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men. 3 For we ourselves **were also once** foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, **hateful and hating one another**.

God's true children are becoming agape love, not anger, hatred, and malice[1]. Those who follow and condone preachers of hate put themselves in seriously grave danger because they will eventually begin to parrot them. The world is full of sinners, including the *ekklesia* before being called by God. The very reason that Jesus came was "**that the world** through Him **might be saved**" (John 3:17), because "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. But **go and learn what *this* means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.'** For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Matt. 9:12-13). He came to HEAL people of sin, not condemn them. (There will be a time for that but it comes later.) Proclaiming that God is punishing sinners with tragedies and condemning Protestants as Satan-worshippers is completely contrary to Scripture. Jesus said, "**if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world**." (John 12:47). And neither should any converted person:

[1] Col. 3:8.

ROMANS 10:1-3 Brethren, **my *[Paul's]* heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved**. 2 For I bear them witness that **they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge**. 3 For **they being ignorant of God's righteousness**, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.

Paul's heartfelt DESIRE and PRAYERS were for the salvation of Israel. Substitute *Protestant* for *Israel* and this verse describes the modern Anglo-Saxon nations. Many Protestants ARE zealous for God but too many in the *ekklesia* make a sport of condemning them for keeping Sunday. In doing so, they expose their ignorance of the Bible because GOD has prevented them from keeping the Sabbaths and holydays. Quoting from the Sabbath Thought of 2023-12-30:

"Hosea says something very interesting to the Ten Tribes regarding the keeping of the Sabbath and holydays:

HOSEA 2:2, 11 "Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For **she *[Ten Tribes of Israel] is* not My *[the LORD]* wife, nor *am* I her Husband**! … 11 **I will also cause all her mirth *[delight]* to cease *[for]* Her feast days, Her New Moons, Her Sabbaths– All her appointed feasts.**

"Because God divorced the Ten Tribes, He caused their "delight *[in the Sabbaths and appointed feasts]* to cease." This phrase in the Hebrew is *masows* (delight) *shabath* (to cease). Interestingly, *shabath* also means to "keep Sabbath." When God divorced the Ten Tribes, He literally took away the Sabbath and holydays and their delight and desire for them."

God removed the ability of the Ten Tribes to keep Sabbaths and holydays! Protestants "have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" because God put a veil of blindness and ignorance upon them. Are they sinning because they keep Sunday? Yes. But that makes them worthy of mercy and prayers, not condemnation. Preachers of hate are nothing like the true servants of God such as Jeremiah who wrote the book of Lamentations:

LAMENTATIONS 3:39-51 **Why should a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? 40 Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the LORD;** 41 Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven. 42 We have transgressed and rebelled; You have not pardoned. 43 You have covered *Yourself* with anger and pursued us; **You have slain *and* not pitied**. 44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud, that prayer should not pass through. 45 **You have made us an offscouring and refuse** in the midst of the peoples. 46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. 47 Fear and a snare have come upon us, desolation and destruction. 48 **My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people. 49 My eyes flow and do not cease, without interruption, 50 till the LORD from heaven looks down and sees. 51 My eyes bring suffering to my soul because of all the daughters of my city.**

Jeremiah did not whitewash the sins of his people even while he wept for them. Instead of condemning them, he desired with all his heart that they would repent and return to God:

LAMENTATIONS 3:31-33 For **the Lord will not cast off forever**. 32 Though He causes grief, yet **He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. 33 For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.**

Condemning people who are not called actually rejects the sacrifice of Jesus Christ! He did NOT die just for the *ekklesia* but for a world of sinners and enemies that the Father loves! A calling

from God is special—a treasure of unspeakable value—but it is not a license to condemn the world because anger and vengeance belong only to God[2]. Castigating people in the worst moments of their lives is not love. It is prideful boasting of self-proclaimed righteousness. Who among the *ekklesia* honestly thinks they will receive eternal life by hating and condemning others? Who among the *ekklesia* honestly thinks they will receive eternal life by applauding tragedies as punishments from God? The answer to these questions should be obvious but here is a clue: "**he who does not love does not know God**, for God is love." (1 John 4:8).

If the Two Great Commandments to love God and love your neighbor are GREATER than any other points of The Law and Prophets[3], then hating others is the WORST of all. The most severe judgment possible would be to hear God say, "there is no love in you." That is exactly the judgment against the goats in the parable in Matthew 25:31-46—they had no love. Preachers and their followers who hate and condemn victims of suffering might think they are serving God in some perverse way but, without love, they are likely to hear this from Jesus Christ:

> MATTHEW 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' 23 "And then I will declare to them, '**I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!**'

If the Law is Love, then lawlessness is lovelessness. Hate and condemnation is a poisonous brew that kills those who drink it. God will call all sinners to repentance and He alone will deal with the incorrigible. The Firstfruits, however, are those who weep for the sinners of the world:

> EZEKIEL 9:3-4, 6 … And He *[God]* called to the man clothed with linen, who *had* the writer's inkhorn at his side; 4 and the LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and **put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations** that are done within it." … 6 "Utterly slay old *and* young men, maidens and little children and women; but **do not come near anyone on whom *is* the mark**; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who *were* before the temple.

God does *not* spare those who hate and condemn sinners; it says He spares those who "**sigh and cry**" for their abominations. God is calling Firstfruits to help the world through their grief and loss with words that bind up and heal. They are compassionate, merciful, and loving. Those who are hateful and condemning need not apply.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[2] Rom. 12:19.
[3] Matt. 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-07-19—BIBLICAL DISTRACTION

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

As shocking as it may sound, salvation does not come from a Bible. The Bible is the singular repository certain knowledge imperatives of God for eternal life, but everything required for salvation came by word-of-mouth to many who never had one. It is indeed unthinkable for many today to even consider not having a Bible. However, I wonder how many would be better off without one. Bet you never considered *that*. While a Bible is a great blessing, especially in these Laodicean times when there is so much heresy (false teaching); consider for a moment the possibility that the Bible can be a *distraction*. In what way? By emphasizing reading, studying, learning, pondering, and memorizing the Bible over LIVING and DOING those things it says are necessary for salvation. Simply put, salvation is not through knowledge alone:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 And **though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains**, but have not love, I am nothing.

Here, *all* understanding and knowledge encompasses everything. Nothing is excluded so understanding of biblical prophecies, mysteries, and knowledge are equivalent to God's. But this says there is no salvation without agape love even if someone knows everything that God knows. Without it, a person is *nothing* (Gk. *oudeis*), meaning the *complete absence of*. Let that sink in: no matter how much knowledge and understanding a person has, without agape love there is no existence. Confusing biblical knowledge with salvation is common. This is also true with the Olivet Prophecy. Many think it is a directive to watch world events rather than preparing spiritually for Christ's return:

> MATTHEW 24:36, 38-39, 42-44 "But **of that day and hour *[of the return of Jesus Christ]* no one knows**, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. … 38 "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, 39 "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. … 42 "**Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.** 43 "But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. 44 "Therefore you also **be ready, for the Son of Man is coming** at an hour you do not expect.

Think about it. How can watching world geopolitical and meteorological events prepare anyone for Christ's return? It is absurd in any rational sense to think that Jesus commanded people to watch for precursors of prophetic events. But many do so even though no one has ever produced an accurate roadmap of world events in the fulfillment of prophecy! End-time prophecy is too nonspecific to define according to real world events. Even if there were actual world events that portend the coming Day of the Lord, what would you do with that information? Pray and study more? The point Jesus is making is to draw close to God now—"be ready"—because the Day of the Lord is CERTAIN even though no one knows when. The warning is to watch YOURSELVES, not world events. Scripture says to "**stir up**

love and good works *[this says NOTHING about watching world events]*, … and so much more **as you see the day coming** near" (Heb. 10:24-25). Luke recorded it this way:

> LUKE 21:34-36 "But **take heed to yourselves**, lest your **hearts** be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day *[of the Lord]* come on you unexpectedly. 35 "For **it *[that Day]* will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth**. 36 "**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.**"

This is a warning of the SNARE (trap) that will spring without warning upon the "**all** those who dwell on the face of the whole earth." What is the snare? The Day of the Lord, when Christ returns and executes vengeance. Why is it a snare? Because no one knows when the Day of the Lord will come. So, watching world events has nothing to do with salvation.

Jesus likened the Day of the Lord to The Flood in Noah's time because it came upon the whole world, even those in the ark. All who were on the ark were SAVED while everyone else died. Likewise, when the Day of the Lord comes the whole world will again be affected, including the *ekklesia*. This time, however, those who are saved from death will be on a cloud[1] instead of an ark. This is a not a message of how to *escape* the Day of the Lord, it is a warning to be found worthy of being SAVED when it comes. The Day of the Lord is also when the "house of God" is judged[2] and being "worthy to escape" means "**stand[ing]** before the Son of Man" in the resurrection. Watching world events saves no one nor does it prepare anyone for anything.

So what does it mean to "be ready" or "be counted worthy?" It means to "**walk** in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4)—LIVING a new Way[3]. Salvation certainly requires knowledge[4] but knowledge in and of itself is insufficient. Salvation requires also LIVING a life *according* to that knowledge. It is also critical to understand that not all biblical knowledge leads to salvation. Putting it another way:

> HEBREWS 6:1-2 Therefore, **advancing beyond the beginning principles of the doctrines of Christ, we should go on to perfection *[LIVING according to knowledge of salvation]***; not laying again *the* foundation of repentance from dead works, and *of* faith in God, 2 Of *the* doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of *the* resurrection of *the* dead, and of eternal judgment.

Doctrines of repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection, and eternal judgment do not bring salvation. These are "elementary *principles*" required for BAPTISM, which produces "a **new creation**."[5] After baptism, a person must leave behind the elementary principles of these doctrines and GO ON—move ahead, advance—to PERFECTION. Another way of saying it is to "**work out** your own

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[1] 1 Thess. 4:16-17.
[2] 1 Pet. 4:17.
[3] Matt. 22:16; John 14:6.
[4] Luke 1:77.
[5] 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15.

salvation"[6] by living a "new and living way"[7]. What is that? If I asked to explain what is required for salvation after baptism in one sentence, could you? In short:

Salvation requires BECOMING agape love and DOING Good Works.

Some think baptism and salvation are one and the same. They are certainly linked but baptism is only the beginning. Salvation requires growing in agape love to become like God IS[8] and doing Good Works, which is the Service of Giving and Receiving[9] unto all, especially of the household of faith[10]. Being baptized but not having agape love and doing Good Works[11] does NOT lead to salvation.

God "searches the **hearts**"[12] of those who "love Him and are called according to His purpose." (Rom. 8:27-28). Frankly, God does not care how many Bible verses someone memorizes, the depth of someone's biblical knowledge, how much prophecy they understand, or how many sermons they listen to each week. He is searching hearts to see who is LIVING a life that bears fruits of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control[13]. These fruits benefit OTHERS and, unless there is someone to receive these fruits, they serve little purpose.

I think many believe agape love is secondary to the Law but no one can sincerely keep or understand the Law without it. YOU CANNOT FULFILL THE LAW UNTIL YOU BECOME AGAPE LOVE:

> ROMANS 13:8, 10 Owe no one anything except to **love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law**. … 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore **love *is* the fulfillment of the law**.

Agape love is the motive for Good Works and Good Works are the proof of agape love in a person:

> [TS2009] 2 CORINTHIANS 9:10-13 And He *[God]* who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, shall supply and increase the seed you have sown and increase the fruit of your righteousness, 11 being enriched in every way for all simplicity, which works out thanksgiving to [God] through us. 12 Because the rendering of **this service *[of Good Works]*** not only supplies the needs of the [saints], but also is overflowing through many thanksgivings to [God]. 13 Through **the proof of this service *[of Good Works]***, they [glorify God for] **the [obedience] of your confession to the [gospel] of [Christ]**, and generosity in sharing with them and all men,

It IS that simple—become agape love and do Good Works and you will receive salvation. This is why salvation is not knowledge alone. Salvation is about the

[6] Phil. 2:12.
[7] Heb. 10:20.
[8] 1 John 4:8, 16.
[9] 2 Cor. 9:10-13.
[10] Gal. 6:10.
[11] Eph. 2:10.
[12] Rom. 8:27.
[13] Gal. 5:22-23.

heart, not the mind. The Kingdom will not be filled with children who can recite the entire Bible but are not loving and serving.

How many members of a COG know someone with needs but believe it is the sole responsibility of their church organization to help out? What prevents the member from helping directly? Maybe the fact that they send their money to the same organization that is *not* helping the needy. Perhaps they should reconsider where they send their money so THEY can do Good Works. Just saying. Who thinks God will forgive any of the goats in the parable in Matthew 25:31-46 who failed to help others with the excuse that they relied upon an organization to do Good Works on their behalf? Paul said "**faith work[s] through love**"[14] and James said "**faith without works is dead;**"[15] therefore, love without works is also DEAD[16].

Spending a lifetime reading, studying, learning, pondering, and memorizing the Bible without agape love and Good Works is pointless. The best thing would be to toss the Bible aside and start living according to the knowledge of The Way of salvation! Salvation does not come from knowledge of Scripture, long prayers, being a member of a church, following a preacher, giving money to an organization, or connecting world events to prophecy. James said those who are not living a life of agape love and Good Works are DECEIVED about salvation:

> JAMES 1:22 But **be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves**.

There is no Scripture that equates perfection with baptism. It is after baptism that the work of becoming agape love and doing Good Works begins. While knowing the Word of God is enormously inspiring and beneficial, agape love and Good Works are far more important. Only they make one worthy of salvation. Set aside time from the Bible and LIVE according to all that knowledge. Use the time remaining in your life to grow in and show agape love to God, Jesus Christ, brethren, neighbors, and even enemies. Seek opportunities to help the needy—whether or not they are believers. When there are times of need, allow others the opportunity to help. Doing these things then makes studying the Bible worthwhile and beneficial:

> COLOSSIANS 1:9-10 [We] do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be **filled with the knowledge of His will** in all wisdom and **spiritual understanding**; 10 that you may **walk worthy of the Lord**, fully pleasing *Him*, **being fruitful in every good work** and **increasing in the knowledge of God**;

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[14] Gal. 5:6.
[15] Jas. 2:17, 20, 26.
[16] Lest someone accuse me of twisting Scripture, this conclusion is based upon the (mostly) mathematical Transitive Property of Equality (a=b, b=c; therefore, a=c) of Deductive Reasoning. It is legitimate, rational, and reasonable.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-07-26—DISCIPLES OF THE GOSPEL

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Besides being the sacrifice for sin, Jesus Christ was anointed by God the Father to preach the Gospel:

> LUKE 4:18 "The Spirit of the LORD *is* upon Me *[Jesus Christ]*, because **He *[God]* has anointed Me to preach the gospel** …

After His trial by Satan in the southern Judean wilderness, Jesus began to call disciples as He journeyed north toward Jerusalem. During His ministry, Jesus preached the Gospel throughout the vast majority of Israel in His extensive travels. The places He visited included Mount Hermon near Damascus, Caesarea Philippi, Tyre and Sidon, the region around the Sea of Galilee (Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, Gadarenes, Gennesaret, Magadan, and Decapolis), Cana, Nazareth, Mount Tabor, Sychar, Ephraim, Emmaus, Jerusalem and the surrounding towns (Gabbatha, Bethphage, Mount of Olives, Bethany), Bethlehem, Jericho, and the southern Jordan River area. As He went about teaching and preaching, Jesus was accompanied by the disciples (Mark 6:1).

Who were these disciples? It might seem obvious but there were more disciples than one might think. The twelve disciples are well-known because they became apostles. Some were invited to become disciples but did not follow through (Matt. 8:19-22, et al). The Bible does not give a sense of the number of disciples but Scripture affirms that there were many[1]. Aside from the twelve there were at least 70 others. Around 20 or so disciples are named such as Lazarus, Mary Magdalene, Silas, Apollos, Martha, and Joseph of Arimathea. Often when disciples are mentioned in Scripture it is uncertain if it refers to the twelve or others, and that could be a few or many. But many disciples were involved in preaching the Gospel. The first recorded Gospel mission was undertaken by the twelve:

> MATTHEW 10:5-6 These twelve *[disciples]* Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying: "Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 "But **go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**.

> LUKE 9:2-6 He *[Jesus Christ]* sent them to **preach the *[Gospel of the]* kingdom of God** and to heal the sick. 3 And He said to them, "Take nothing for **the journey *[to the house of Israel]***, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece. 4 "Whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. 5 "And whoever will not receive you, when you go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet as a testimony against them." 6 So they departed and **went through the towns *[of house of Israel]*, preaching the gospel** and healing everywhere.

The twelve apostles did not go to a few local towns in the land of Israel. They went to the 'Lost' Ten Tribes in the regions around the Black and Caspian Seas. This was a long journey of months, which is why it is shocking that Jesus did not allow them to bring any provisions. Short journeys did not require preparations because there were many towns close by; however, it was unheard of to go on a long, arduous, and perilous trek of hundreds of miles completely unprepared. In fact, their journey took them farther than

[1] Mark 2:15.

Haran in Turkey, where Abram lived before journeying to Canaan. About the same time, Jesus sent 70 other disciples out to preach the Gospel:

> LUKE 10:1, 3-9 After these things **the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go**. … 3 "Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves. 4 "Carry neither money bag, knapsack, nor sandals; and greet no one along the road. 5 "But whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 "And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on it; if not, it will return to you. 7 "And remain in the same house, eating and drinking such things as they give, for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not go from house to house. 8 "Whatever city you enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you. 9 "And heal the sick there, and say to them, '**The kingdom of God has come near to you.**'

Jesus was traveling north toward Jerusalem at this time and the 70 disciples were sent to prepare the towns and villages for His imminent arrival by proclaiming "the kingdom of God **has come near**". Because the Gospel was preached to all of Israel and the Ten Tribes, many thousands of people became disciples of Jesus[2]. But shortly before His ascension, Jesus gave the eleven disciples (excluding Judas Iscariot) a new mission:

> MARK 16:14-15 Later He *[Jesus Christ]* appeared to **the eleven** as they sat at the table; … 15 And He said to them, "**Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.**"

The magnitude of this surely was not lost on the disciples. They were to "**Go into all the world**" and there is no indication that they were aided by others nor was this the beginning of a work—history records that the apostles THEMSELVES traveled the world. After replacing Judas Iscariot with Matthias and the conversion of Paul there were thirteen apostles. Still, how could so few cover the entire world? Notice also this astonishing statement from Paul years later:

> COLOSSIANS 1:23 … **the gospel** which you heard, **which was preached to every creature under heaven**, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

It is generally believed Paul wrote this around 62 AD. It was certainly not much later because Paul was martyred around 67 AD. What a stunning achievement by a few men to preach the Gospel to "every creature under heaven" a short 30 years or so after Jesus ascended to heaven. But this they did. History records that they spread the Gospel to North Africa, Ethiopia, the Arabian Peninsula, Asia Minor, extensive regions in and around the Black and Caspian Seas and eastward to Kazakhstan and India, southern Europe, and Britain. Vast numbers were converted to Christianity on a scale not appreciated in modern times. But there is another reason, aside from salvation, for preaching the Gospel:

> MATTHEW 24:14 "And **this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world** as a witness to all the nations, **and then the end will come**.

The Gospel is also a WITNESS, something that precedes the rendering of a judgment by God, and the timing here is just prior to the END OF THE AGE. Since the end-times are only a few years, it was not an assignment for the apostles nor a commission to the general *ekklesia*. It is also unlikely that this could even be done by the *ekklesia* today since it is hard to imagine any groups of Christians uniting together for this purpose in a

[2] Matt. 14:13-21 (5,000 near Bethsaida); 15:32-38 (4,000 near Decapolis).

short time. Therefore, it seems more likely it will be fulfilled by the second of the Three Angels during the Seventh Trumpet:

> REVELATION 14:6-7 Then I *[John]* saw another **angel** flying in the midst of heaven, **having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth–to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people**– 7 saying with a loud voice, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of **His judgment has come**; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

The primary command to the disciples before Jesus ascended to heaven was to preach a Gospel of salvation:

> MARK 16:15-16 And He *[Jesus Christ]* said to them *[the eleven]*, "Go into all the world and **preach the gospel** to every creature. 16 "**He who believes** and is baptized **will be saved**; but he who does not believe will be condemned.

One would hope that once the Gospel is received, people would remain faithful and pass it along to succeeding generations. However, persecution, martyrdom, and other various factors cause people to fall away (i.e., The Sower—Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23) and the Gospel message is lost over time. There will always be a need to preach the Gospel and the *ekklesia*, as disciples of Christ, have an important role in spreading it. Jesus sent many disciples to preach the Gospel aside from the twelve who were apostles. A *disciple* is simply a pupil or student. Even though Jesus gave the 70 power to heal and cast out demons, they were not apostles or ordained. They were simply dedicated believers and followers. All who follow Jesus are DISCIPLES[3] so the *ekklesia* has a responsibility to spread the Gospel:

> MATTHEW 5:14-16 "**You *[the saints]* are the light of the world.** A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 "Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all *who are* in the house. 16 "**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

Jesus was speaking here to a multitude of people at the very beginning of His ministry. They were simple folk. There were no apostles or elders at that point so this is a commandment to all disciples. What does it mean to be a light?

> PHILIPPIANS 2:15-16 **[You are] children of God** without fault **in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights** in the world, 16 **holding fast the word of life**, …

People who are lights are those who HOLD FAST (retain) the Word of Life! Is that not the basis of the Gospel? 'Holding fast' to the Word of Life does not mean to keep it hidden. Hiding the Gospel out of fear or, worst of all, shame can mean the loss of salvation:

> LUKE 9:26 "For **whoever is ashamed of** Me *[Jesus Christ]* and **My words *[the Gospel]*, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes** in His *own* glory, and *in His* Father's, and of the holy angels.

[3] Matt. 16:24; Mark 2:15.

Preachers in the last decades have caused people to be ashamed of the Gospel by preaching fear of possible persecution. But notice this about suffering:

> 1 PETER 3:13-17 And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. "And **do not be afraid of their threats**, nor be troubled." 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always ***be* ready to *give* [an answer] to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope *[of the Gospel]* that is in you**, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For ***it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil**.

> 1 PETER 4:16 Yet **if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed**, but let him glorify God in this matter.

Finally, Jesus said this about the Gospel in an early prophecy of the end-times:

> MATTHEW 10:23 "When they persecute you in this city, flee to another. For assuredly, I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, **you will not have gone through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes**.

The context of this is the coming Day of Judgment (v. 15) so it is for today; meaning you, me, and everyone who is "**holding fast the word of life.**" It is also about the cities of ISRAEL—descendants of the Ten Tribes! It is where most of us live, not in a foreign land.

A website does NOT preach the Gospel to those who have not heard it. Sending a preacher to people in Africa who ALREADY heard the Gospel is also not preaching it. All the *ekklesia* are commanded to be a light in the world—at least their small corner of it. Everyone has contact with other people and shining a light could be telling your boss about the Sabbaths and holydays; letting a neighbor know you are going to the Feast of Tabernacles; telling a contractor that he cannot work on Sabbaths; or saying "may God bless you" to a flustered clerk at the store. Letting our light shine is a beautiful thing:

> ROMANS 10:15 … As it is written *[Isa. 52:7]*: "**How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel** of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Put away any fear or shame of spreading the Gospel and let those in our small part of this world know we are disciples and followers of Christ who await His return. Our great desire and hope that lies within each of us was through the Gospel! So, how can we withhold that from others?

> LUKE 12:34-36 "For **where your treasure is, there your heart will be also**. 35 "Let your waist be girded and ***your* lamps burning**; 36 "and you yourselves be like men who wait for their master, when he will return from the wedding, that **when he comes and knocks they may open to him immediately**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-02—GLORY TO GOD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Bible demands we "give glory to God" in many, many scriptures. Maybe it is just me, but I have often wondered just what it means to give Him *glory*. I understand *honoring* God, but what is GLORY and how does one give it to Him? Biblically, glory is something that can be given, received, and possessed. Here are but a few examples:

God is glory:

> PSALMS 29:3 The voice of the LORD *is* over the waters; **the God of glory** thunders; the LORD *is* over many waters.

God possesses glory:

> ISAIAH 42:8 I *am* the LORD, that *is* My name; and **My glory I will not give to another**, Nor My praise to carved images.

God glorifies some people:

> DANIEL 2:37 "You, O king *[Nebuchadnezzar]*, *are* a king of kings. For **the God of heaven has given you** a kingdom, power, strength, and **glory**;

People can give glory to God:

> 1 CHRONICLES 16:28-29 Give to the LORD, O families of the peoples, **give to the LORD glory** and strength. 29 **Give to the LORD the glory *due* His name**; bring an offering, and come before Him. Oh, worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness![1]

> PSALMS 29:2 **Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name**; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

People can possess glory:

> PSALM 108:1 O GOD, my heart is steadfast; **I *[David]*** will sing and give praise, **even with my glory**.

Even things can possess a glory:

> HAGGAI 2:9 '**The glory of this latter temple** shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts."

The Hebrew word *kabowd,* which is almost always translated *glory* (sometimes honor) means WEIGHT. Even the root word *kabad* means to be heavy or make heavy so it, too, involves weight. It seems a rather odd word to use for *glory*. The Hebrew is also quite different from the Greek words, which simply mean glory. But neither the Hebrew or Greek *explains* glory. Perhaps, if glory is like a weight, then

[1] Duplicated in Ps. 96:7-8.

it is something that is lifted up, which would beautifully describe giving glory (whatever that is) to God. After all, God is above and we are below. In the opposite sense, if God glorifies someone, He 'lowers' it to the person. But that still does not tell us what glory IS.

I would guess that most understand what it means to honor someone, but honor is translated from different Hebrew and Greek words than glory in the Bible. What tipped the scales (pun intended) in understanding glory was this distinction: "Glory is very great honor, praise, or distinction bestowed by COMMON CONSENT." *Honor* is defined as high RESPECT and great esteem and *glory* is high RENOWN and great esteem. Notice the difference? Honor is esteem but it is a *personal* expression. Glory is also esteem but is RENOWNED esteem, a widespread and public attribution.

DEFINITION: Biblically, honor is a private or personal recognition and attribution of esteem for someone whereas GLORY is esteem that is publicly accepted and acknowledged rather than simply a privately or personally held expression.

One example of glory as a public honor involves King Herod:

> ACTS 12:22-23 *[Speaking of Herod]* the people kept shouting, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" 23 Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him *[Herod]*, because **he did not give glory to God**. And he was eaten by worms and died.

Herod gave a powerful speech dressed in radiant royal apparel and the people were moved to publicly proclaim him to be a god. Publicly proclaimed honor is glory. Instead of giving the glory to God Most High, he held onto to the glory of being identified as a god and was killed by an angel. If he had publicly redirected that glory to God, it would have gone well for him and he would have kept his personal honor of being a servant of God as king.

Glory is a public outpouring of honor to someone and that is why the Bible says to give glory to God, not honor. (When honor is used it is usually translated from the Hebrew word for glory.) Here is one of the few that mention God's honor:

> PSALM 104:1 Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, You are very great: **You are clothed with honor** and majesty,

Notice this describes God as being *clothed* with HONOR, not being *given* honor. Technically, God possesses honor but He demands honor from others in the form of glory—to be publicly RENOWNED because He alone is God. Even prayers are described in the Bible as giving God glory rather than honoring Him. But if glory is publicly proclaiming honor to someone, how does the definition of glory (public honoring) apply to private prayer? Would not private prayers be technically *honoring* Him instead? The answer is that none of our prayers, even those done in a private setting, are private matters in *heaven*:

> MATTHEW 6:6 "But you, **when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*;** and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

It says God is IN the secret place, not that God HEARS in secret. The throne of God is concealed (one meaning for *secret*) because it is not visible to men, but our

prayers come before God and Jesus Christ and are collected by the four Living Creatures and 24 Elders who sit upon their thrones:

> REVELATION 5:8 Now when He *[the Lamb]* had taken the scroll, **the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having** a harp, and **golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints**.

The prayers of the saints are then gathered by an angel who offers them upon the Golden Altar:

> REVELATION 8:3-4 Then another **angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne**. 4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

Even though prayers might be private on earth, they are not so in heaven. Prayers are special to God that they have a dedicated public ceremony in heaven where they are offered upon the Golden Altar before His throne. When we honor God in prayer, we are actually GLORIFYING Him before all the angels! And that is as it should be! ALL *honor* belongs to God. It should not be withheld from the lips of heavenly or earthly beings! Glory to God is RENOWNED honor to Him!

As for people receiving glory, that should not be expected in this life. It is mainly reserved for a time yet to come. Even Paul objected to any personal glory:

> GALATIANS 6:14 But **God forbid that I *[Paul]* should boast *[or glory]*** except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Last week I wrote about being "Disciples of the Gospel" (Sabbath Thought 2025-07-26). In short, we should NOT withhold from spreading the Gospel to others as we have opportunity. Proclaiming the message of Life or communing about it with others is one of the greatest acts we can do to glorify our Father in heaven:

> MALACHI 3:16 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**.

This does not say it is only 'converted' people speaking to one another but those who "feared the LORD." And guess what? GOD was listening in heaven. What were they discussing? The greatness of God! People cannot talk about the majesty of God *without* glorifying Him! But that is just one aspect of LIVING our lives to the glory of God:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 10:31 Therefore, … whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God**.

Do EVERYTHING to His glory! Even if the glory we give to God is despised by some, it is always a blessing to us:

1 PETER 4:14 **If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you,* for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.** On their part He is blasphemed, but **on your part He is glorified**.

On the other hand, NOT giving glory to God comes with a terrible price:

MALACHI 2:2 **If you will not hear, and if you will not take *it* to heart, to give glory to My name,**" Says the LORD of hosts, "**I will send a curse upon you**, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, because you do not take *it* to heart.

God was speaking to the Temple priests but this is no less a warning to us. Flesh and blood are not worthy of glory from God (or, for that matter, anyone) YET, but the saints are called unto a glory still to come. It is quite astounding to consider:

1 THESSALONIANS 2:12 that you would walk worthy of **God who calls you into** His own kingdom and **glory**.

1 CORINTHIANS 2:7 But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages **for our glory**,

In that day, Jesus Christ HIMSELF will glorify the saints:

JOHN 17:20-22 "I *[Jesus Christ]* do not pray for these alone, but also **for those who will believe in Me through their word**; 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And **the glory which You gave Me I have given them**, that they may be one just as We are one:

There is coming a time when the saints will receive glory from GOD! Why?

REVELATION 12:11 "… **they *[the saints]* overcame him *[Satan]* by the blood of the Lamb** and by the word of their testimony, and **they did not love their lives to the death**.

As spirit children, we will finally behold the grandeur of God's glory as we stand before Him in our own glories:

1 JOHN 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that **when He *[God]* is revealed, we shall be like Him *[including having our own glory]***, for we shall see Him as He is.

Until the days of our flesh are over, tear down any fences of fear or shame of the Gospel or glorifying God. To any who will listen, pour out the thoughts of your minds, the words and songs of your lips, and the goodness of your works as praise, worship, and thanksgiving to God! To GOD be the GLORY—in all the EARTH, as it is in HEAVEN!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-09—THE END OF THE AGE?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Bible contains many prophecies that pertain to what is referred to as "the end of the age." I have heard this phrase for decades and it is likely you have, too. But what or when is the end of the age? Is it The Tribulation? The Day of the LORD? The Great White Throne Judgment? A review of scriptures shows it is not always easy to pin it down but, before looking into this, note these six major prophetical end time events referenced throughout:

1) THE BEGINNING OF SORROWS: A time when there is great deception by False Christs, wars, famines, pestilences, and earthquakes. This period is rarely specifically evident in Scripture, Daniel 11 being one exception. (Matt. 24:4-8)

   MATTHEW 24:4-8 And Jesus answered and said to them: "Take heed that no one **deceives you**. 5 "For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will **deceive many**. 6 "And you will hear of **wars and rumors of wars**. See that you are not troubled; for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be **famines, pestilences, and earthquakes** in various places. 8 "All these *are* **the beginning of sorrows**.

2) THE TRIBULATION: Part of the Day of Trumpets. The time of trouble after the Beginning of Sorrows when the saints are afflicted and killed and all flesh could perish. It begins at or after the Abomination of Desolation and there is great deception by False Christs. (Matt. 24:15, 21-24)

   MATTHEW 24:15, 21-24 "Therefore when you see the '**abomination of desolation,**' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand), … 21 "For **then there will be great tribulation**, such as has **not been since the beginning of the world** until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 "And **unless those days were shortened *[limited],* no flesh would be saved**; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. 23 "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here *is* the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe *it.* 24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders **to deceive, if possible, even the elect**.

3) DAY OF THE LORD: Part of the Day of Trumpets. The Day of the LORD is synonymous with the 7th Trumpet. Of particular note are the First Resurrection and the subsequent Seven Bowls or Vials that are the vengeance of God upon the earth. (Matt. 24:29-31; Rev. 15:7; Rev. 16:1)

   MATTHEW 24:29-31 "**Immediately after the tribulation of those days** the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 "Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see **the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory**. 31 "And

He will send His angels **with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

REVELATION 15:7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels **seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God** who lives forever and ever.

REVELATION 16:1 Then I *[John]* heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out **the bowls of the wrath of God** on the earth."

4) DAY OF ATONEMENT (COVERING): The period of time that follows the Day of the LORD when Jesus Christ rescues captives and brings them to Jerusalem to establish a covenant with them. (Joel 2:12-17; et al)

5) THE MILLENNIUM (TABERNACLES): The 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ and the resurrected saints. (Rev. 20:4-6)

6) GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT: Post millennial judgment to eternal life or death. (Rev. 20:11-15)

OLD TESTAMENT

The phrase "end of the age" is actually from the New Testament, not the Old. In the Old Testament, there are two primary Hebrew words used in the context of the end times. The first is H0319 *'achariyth* (ach-ar-eeth'), which means *last* or *end*. The following are verses from the KJV and its variants that translate it as "last" or "latter" days (*days* is the separate word *yowm*).

GENESIS 49:1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you *[nation of Israel]* in **the last *[H0319 = last]* days**:

General description of the 12 Tribes of Israel in the last decades of the end times.

NUMBERS 24:14, 17 "And now, indeed, I *[Balaam]* am going to my people. Come, I will advise you *[Balak]* what this people *[Israel]* will do to your people *[Moab]* in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**." … 17 "I see Him *[Jesus Christ]*, but not now; I behold Him, but not near; a Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult *[Edom, Seir, Amalek, Kneites, Asshur, Eber]*.

DAY OF THE LORD—A future fulfillment since Israel never completely destroyed Moab in 2 Kings 3 and the Scepter of Israel (Jesus Christ) takes *vengeance* upon those who harmed Israel.

DEUTERONOMY 4:23-30 "Take heed to yourselves *[nation of Israel]*, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you. 24 "For the LORD your God *is* a consuming fire, a jealous God. 25 "When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of

the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger, 26 "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that you will soon utterly perish from the land which you cross over the Jordan to possess; you will not prolong *your* days in it, but will be utterly destroyed. 27 "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you. 28 "And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. 29 "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find *Him* if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. 30 "When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**, when you turn to the LORD your God and obey His voice

DEUTERONOMY 31:29 "For I *[Moses]* know that after my death you *[nation of Israel]* will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**, because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

> THE TRIBULATION—These have been at least partially fulfilled several times but this very likely still has a future fulfillment.

JEREMIAH 23:6-9, 19-20, 31"Behold, *the* days are coming," says the LORD, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper, and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. 6 In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this *is* His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. 7 "Therefore, behold, *the* days are coming," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' 8 "but, 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land." 9 My *[Jeremiah's]* heart within me is broken because of the prophets; all my bones shake. I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of the LORD, and because of His holy words. … 19 Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury– A violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked. 20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days** you will understand it perfectly. … 31 "Behold, I *am* against the *[false]* prophets," says the LORD, "who use their tongues and say, 'He says.'

JEREMIAH 30:18, 22, 24 "Thus says the LORD: 'Behold, I will bring back the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwelling places; the city shall be built upon its own mound, and the palace shall remain according to its own plan. … 22 'You shall be My people, and I will be your God.' " … 24 The fierce anger of the LORD will not return until He has done it, and until He has performed the intents of His heart. In **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days** you will consider it.

> THE TRIBULATION & DAY OF ATONEMENT—After the Day of the LORD and before The Millennium. God punishes Israel (The Tribulation as

prophesied in Num. 24:14) and then *rescues* them (Atonement). (Judah was captive in Babylon along with Jeremiah when he wrote it.)

JEREMIAH 48:47 "Yet I will bring back the captives of Moab in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**," says the LORD. Thus far *is* the judgment of Moab.

JEREMIAH 49:39 'But it shall come to pass in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**: I will bring back the captives of Elam,' says the LORD."

DAY OF ATONEMENT—After the Day of the LORD and before The Millennium. God punishes the nations who punished Israel and then *rescues* them. (Judah was captive in Babylon along with Jeremiah when he wrote it.)

EZEKIEL 38:8, 12, 16 "After many days you *[Gog]* will be visited. In **the latter *[H0319 = last]* years** you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword *and* gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely. … 12 "to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places *that are again* inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land. … 16 "You will come up against My *[the LORD's]* people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days** that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O **Gog**, before their eyes."

AFTER THE MILLENNIUM—Gog (and Magog) is specifically mentioned after the 1,000 years (Rev. 20:7-8).

DANIEL 8:17, 19, 23, 25 So he *[an angel]* came near where I *[Daniel]* stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision *refers* to the time of the end *[H7093 = end]*." … 19 And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in **the latter time *[H0319 = last]*** of the indignation; for at the appointed time *[H4150 =* mow`ed*]* the end *[H7093 = end] shall be*. … 23 "And in **the latter time *[H0319 = last]*** of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. … 25 "Through his cunning he shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt *himself* in his heart. He shall destroy many in *their* prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without *human* means.

See next section below.

DANIEL 10:14 "Now I *[an angel]* have come to make you *[Daniel]* understand what will happen to your people in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**, for the vision *refers* to *many* days yet *to come*."

This is a precursor to the chapters 10-12 (see below).

HOSEA 3:5 Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days**.

DAY OF ATONEMENT—After the Day of the LORD and before The Millennium. Israel is *rescued* from captivity and seeks king DAVID. (The 10 Tribes were captive in Assyria along with Hosea when he wrote it.)

ISAIAH 2:2 Now it shall come to pass in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days** *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

MICAH 4:1 Now it shall come to pass in **the latter *[H0319 = last]* days** *that* the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it.

DAY OF ATONEMENT—After the Day of the LORD and before The Millennium. People are going to the newly founded or established House of the LORD.

The other word used that is used in an end time construct is H7093 *qets* (kates), which means *end*. The following are verses from the KJV and its variants that translate it "the end" or "time of the end." Take particular note that it is always used with "appointed time" (H4150 = *mow`ed*).

ISAIAH 14:31 Wail, O gate! Cry, O city! All you of Philistia *are* dissolved; for smoke will come from the north, and no one *will be* alone in his **appointed times *[H4150* = mow`ed*]***." 32 What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, and the poor of His people shall take refuge in it.

DAY OF ATONEMENT—After the Day of the LORD and before The Millennium because Philistia is destroyed by God and people are going to the newly founded or established Mount Zion.

DANIEL 8:17, 19, 23, 25 So he *[an angel]* came near where I *[Daniel]* stood, and when he came I was afraid and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Understand, son of man, that the vision *refers* to **the time of the end *[H7093 = end]***." … 19 And he said, "Look, I am making known to you what shall happen in the latter time *[H0319 = last]* of the indignation; for at **the appointed time *[H4150* = mow`ed*] the end [H7093 = end] shall be***. … 23 "And in the latter time *[H0319 = last]* of their kingdom, when the transgressors have reached their fullness, a king shall arise, having fierce features, who understands sinister schemes. … 25 "Through his cunning He shall cause deceit to prosper under his rule; and he shall exalt *himself* in his heart. He shall destroy many in *their* prosperity. He shall even rise against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without *human* means.

DAY OF THE LORD—A future fulfillment since transgressions reach fullness or completion. Also, the Prince of princes is Jesus Christ, and

the destruction of the fierce king is by divine means. NOTE: Verse 19 is the only one in the Bible that includes H0319, H7093, and H4150.

DANIEL 11:6, 27, 29, 35, 40 "And at **the end *[H7093 = end]* of ~~*some*~~ years** *[not TIME of the end]* they shall join forces, for the daughter of the king of the South shall go to the king of the North to make an agreement; but she shall not retain the power of her authority, and neither he nor his authority shall stand; but she shall be given up, with those who brought her, and with him who begot her, and with him who strengthened her in *those* times. … 27 "Both these kings' hearts *shall be* bent on evil, and they shall speak lies at the same table; but it shall not prosper, for **the end *[H7093 = end] will* still *be* at the appointed time *[H4150* = mow`ed*]***. … 29 "At **the appointed time *[H4150* = mow`ed*]*** he shall return and go toward the south; but it shall not be like the former or the latter. … 35 "And *some* of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify *them*, and make *them* white, *until* **the time of the end *[H7093 = end]***; because *it is* still for **the appointed time *[H4150* = mow`ed*]***. … 40 "At **the time of the end *[H7093 = end]*** the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm *them*, and pass through.

BEGINNING OF SORROWS & THE TRIBULATION—As a future fulfillment referring to wars (Beginning of Sorrows?) and people being made "white" or pure through The Tribulation (Rev. 7:14).

DANIEL 12:1-4, 9-10 "At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands *watch* over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, *even* to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. 2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame *and* everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever. 4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until **the time of the end *[H7093 = end]***; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." … 9 And he said, "Go *your way*, Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till **the time of the end *[H7093 = end]***. 10 "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand.

DAY OF THE LORD—A time of trouble never before seen and a resurrection to eternal life.

HABAKKUK 1:5-7, 2:3 "Look among the nations and watch– Be utterly astounded! For *I [the LORD] will* work a work in your days *which* you would not believe, though it were told *you*. 6 For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places *that are* not theirs. 7 They are terrible and dreadful; their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. … 2:3 For the vision *is* yet for **an appointed time *[H4150* = mow`ed*]***; but **at the end *[H7093 = end]*** it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it

tarries, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. … 14 For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

DAY OF THE LORD—As a future fulfillment since the earth has never been filled with knowledge of God's glory.

JEREMIAH 8:7 "Even the stork in the heavens knows her **appointed times *[H4150 = mow`ed]***; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD.

THE TRIBULATION—As a future fulfillment from the veiled reference to the "time of their *[Israel's]* coming" punishment.

NEW TESTAMENT

In the context of end times, the NT uses the word *aion*, which is Greek for *eon* or *age* but it is an indefinite period of time[1]. However, it is often used with the Greek word *sunteleia* meaning *end*, which gives rise to the phrase "end of the age."

HEBREWS 9:26 He *[Jesus Christ]* then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at **the end of the ages**, He *[Jesus Christ]* has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

SACRIFICE OF JESUS CHRIST—2,000 years ago.

MATTHEW 13:37-43 He *[Jesus Christ]* answered and said to them: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. 39 "The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is **the end of the age**, and the reapers are the angels. 40 "Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at **the end of this age**. 41 "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, 42 "and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. 43 "Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!

DAY OF THE LORD—Resurrection of the righteous and death of the unrighteous in the Lake of Fire at the return of Jesus Christ (Matt. 24:50-51; 25:14-30).

MATTHEW 24:14 "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then **the end will come**.

DAY OF THE LORD—Preaching the Gospel to the *entire* world is only done by an angel (Rev. 14:6-7). This is followed by the First

[1] "ages to come"—Eph. 2:7; "other ages"—Eph. 3:5; "all ages"—Eph. 3:21; and "from ages"—Col. 1:26.

Resurrection (Rev. 14:14-15) and the destruction of the wicked (Rev. 14:17-19, 15:1).

I recognize that there are other scriptures not included. But what stands out is that "latter days," "last days," "time of the end," and "end of the age" refer to a variety of events that occur during the end times. All the conclusions about these events are my personal assessments and, given the complexities of prophecy, will likely be viewed differently by others. Regardless, the important takeaway is that the end of the age can refer to a variety of events including the punishment of Israel (The Tribulation); the return of Jesus Christ; the vengeance of God, the First Resurrection, destruction of the wicked (Day of the LORD); and rescue of captives (Atonement/Covering).

What is also interesting is that The Millennium and post-millennial events (Great White Throne Judgment) do not seem be included as events of "the end of the age" except for Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38. But the end of the age can have a broader meaning as when Jesus used the word or phrase to indicate this PHYSICAL age or the SPIRITUAL age, not specific events. Also, "appointed times," generally indicates a future time (even when referring to holydays) but especially when used with "time of the end." It does not seem to add any special emphasis to it either.

So how close is the end of the age? The apostles John and Jude thought it included their days (Jude 1:18; 1 John 2:18) and I suspect that Jesus would consider the whole of the last 2,000 years as part of the end of the age. However, we are well at the end of that time and, yet, specific end-time prophecies remain unfulfilled. Personally speaking, the phrase "end of the age" is not tied to the events of Trumpets, Atonement (Covering), or Tabernacles. Not only are they short-lived but the goal is the Kingdom of God, not the tribulations and afflictions one must go through to get there. And for the suffering we will endure, we have this assurance:

> MATTHEW 28:20 "… I *[Jesus Christ]* am with you always, *even* to **the end of the age**." Amen.

For me, the "end of the age" occurs when this physical universe is destroyed. That opens the door to the next one, an eternal age, with the revealing of the New Heavens and New Earth:

> REVELATION 21:1, 3 Now I *[John]* saw a **new heaven and a new earth**, for **the first heaven and the first earth had passed away**. Also there was no more sea. … 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "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.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-16—PRAISE GOD!

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

This past week a brother in Christ asked me about praising God. It is a topic we have all thought about but it is something we usually feel are inadequate to the task. Much of the issue is our limitations. Flesh and blood cannot see God and our imaginations fall far short of His majesty and greatness. But WHAT is praise? HOW do we praise Him? WHY do we praise God?

Our minds can produce only a limited image of God. From Scripture[1], we know God is the Great King[2] sitting upon a throne at the north end of Mount Zion encircled by an emerald-colored rainbow. At His right hand[3] is His Son, the Lord and King, Jesus The Messiah (Christ). In front of God's throne is a sea of glass, translucent and shiny, like the finest crystal and shimmering with fire. Originating from God's throne are sounds of lightning, thunder, and voices. Before His throne are seven spirits who wander the earth whose appearance is as flames of fire.

At God's throne are four Living Creatures. They do not have thrones themselves but are over and around God's throne. They praise and worship God saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty." These are cherubim who cover God's throne as portrayed by the two statues on the mercy seat in the temple of Solomon.

Nearby to His throne are twenty-four Elders, part of a celestial council who have their own thrones. These are, perhaps, located along both sides of the sea of glass, half on each side, facing toward each other but in front of God's throne. In their hands are harps and bowls of incense that are mixed with the prayers of the saints that are sacrificed upon the altar before God's throne.

What can anyone offer to God who is so unimaginably majestic and magnificent? To even attempt to understand, it is important to bear in mind that God IS love[4]. Have you ever wondered why He chose to be LOVE over evil like the wicked tyrant Satan? Imagine what horrors life would have if God were like Satan and created mankind for his 'amusement'. Truly, mankind should be thankful above all else that God IS love and not a god of evil!

Recognize, too, that we should be thankful for The Law of God. In this less-than-perfect world, mankind is assuredly NOT agape love—not even the most kindhearted of people. Imagine if God had not revealed from the beginning that murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and coveting are wrong. How long would this world have lasted? These days many have abandoned those righteous and universal statutes and the result is a bleak picture of things to come.

[1] Rev. 4-7; 8:3; 11:16-17; 14:3, 5; 15:7; 19:4; 20:11; 21:1-3.
[2] Matt. 5:35.
[3] Ps. 110:1.
[4] 1 John 4:8, 16.

However, God gave His Law so that people can strive for a peaceful relationship and doing GOOD for others. It is a framework for this life when dealing with the shortcomings of imperfect people as well as with those who are evil. The judgments in The Law specify punishments for crimes in order to maintain peace to the extent possible.

Revealing agape love to a sinful world is a monumental task, but God did it with His *Users Guide For Mankind* called The Law. It is SO MUCH more than the 10 Commandments and it covers all manner of situations from agriculture to war[5]. The genius behind The Law cannot be denied although many simply ignore it outside of the 10 Commandments, especially among the *ekklesia*. The wisdom of The Law is beyond measure and something to thank God for every day.

Thanksgiving to God for good things is a natural expression of appreciation and gratitude for the blessings He gives. These include our calling and election, eternal life, fellowship with brethren, wisdom and understanding, gifts and talents for serving others, abundance to enable us to do Good Works, health and healing, the necessities of life, spouses and children, relief from trials and afflictions, etc.

However, there was a terrible price that ENABLED God to bestow blessings upon us—the suffering and death of His Son Jesus The Christ! God paid a blood-ransom to redeem us because He hoped that we would be worthy of becoming His children. Only those perfected in agape love will receive such a gift, but have you considered the WORK that God must do to save people?

> ISAIAH 64:5-6, 8 You *[the LORD]* meet him who rejoices and does righteousness, *who* remembers You in Your ways. … **we need to be saved**. 6 But **we are all like an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags**; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. … 8 But now, O LORD, You *are* our Father; we *are* the clay, and You our potter; and all **we *are* the work of Your hand**.

Repentance, baptism, receiving the Holy Spirit, and striving to obey The Law are basically personal AFFIRMATIONS—declarations—of our desire to be SAVED. The real work to save us is done by GOD. If we consider just how far short all of the *ekklesia* fall of God's glory, it is a wonder that it is possible even for God to perfect someone. But it is something He PROMISED:

> PHILIPPIANS 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that **He *[God]* who has begun a good work in you will complete *it*** until the day of Jesus Christ;

WHAT is God doing to perfect us? He is writing His Law of LOVE in our hearts:

> PROVERBS 7:2-3 Keep **my commands** and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. 3 Bind them on your fingers; **write them on the tablet of your heart**.

[5] Refer to the booklet "Laws of God—Purpose, Application, & Topical List" for a list of many of the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments.

PROVERBS 3:1, 3 My son, do not forget **my law**, but let your heart keep my commands; … 3 Let not mercy and truth forsake you; bind them around your neck, **write them on the tablet of your heart**,

JEREMIAH 31:33 "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The Law of God is instruction in agape love and agape love IS perfection:

PSALM 19:7 **The law of the LORD *is* perfect, converting the soul *[into agape love]***; the testimony of the LORD *is* sure, making wise the simple;

1 JOHN 2:5 But whoever **keeps His word *[The Law]*, truly the love of God is perfected** in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

The big question is HOW does God perfect agape love in us?

1 PETER 5:10 But may the **God** of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after **you have suffered a while, perfect**, establish, strengthen, and settle *you.*

Agape love is perfected through sufferings! It is also something more to be thankful for. Really? Yes! Note this verse:

1 PETER 2:19 For **this *is* [thankworthy]**, if because of conscience toward *[recognition of]* God one **endures grief, suffering wrongfully**.

Some versions use commendable, favorable, or acceptable in place of *thankworthy* but only here is the Greek word reduced to something less than heartfelt, grateful thanksgiving. The word for *thankworthy* is *grace*. When it is from God, it is a blessing of His favor and love but when it is TOWARD God it is thanksgiving. Why would we give thanks for suffering? God has called the elect to an eternal and unimaginable life and reward. To that end, He ALLOWS us to suffer for the sake of His Son who was the blood-ransom for our lives! When God allows us to suffer, we should be thankful because we partake of some of Jesus Christ's sufferings and in doing so will receive the some of the honor He received from His Father:

2 CORINTHIANS 1:5-7 **For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.** 6 Now **if we are afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation**, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope for you *is* steadfast, because we know that **as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also *you will partake* of the consolation**.

Suffering is God WORKING in us the perfection of His agape love! It is a gift that He considers us WORTHY to suffer. Yes, there is pain, grief, sorrow, sadness, anguish, frustration, fear, and even anger at times because the work of God to save us

produces all of these. But all we must do is ENDURE during this life while God does the hard work:

> JAMES 5:10-11 My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as **an example of suffering** and patience. 11 Indeed **we count them blessed who endure**. You have heard of the perseverance of Job **and seen the end *intended by* the Lord**–that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

We complain about and resist sufferings, but there is much that God must do in a short time to perfect us. God suffers long with us because of our weaknesses and that is also something we should be thankful for.

> ROMANS 2:4 Or do you despise the riches of **His *[God's]* goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering**, not knowing that **the goodness of God leads you to repentance**?

> HEBREWS 12:7 If **you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons**; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

Suffering is hard but it is worthy of thanksgiving for the perfection and eternal promises it will bring. Up to this point I have talked about thanksgiving to God. My friend, however, asked about PRAISING Him so why focus on thanksgiving? Because they are hard to separate. Here are a few of many scriptures that both praise and give thanks to God:

> PSALM 106:1 **PRAISE the LORD!** Oh, **give thanks to the LORD**, for ***He is* good**! For His mercy *[*hesed = *covenant loyalty and devotion] endures* forever.

> PSALM 69:30 I will **praise the name of God** with a song, and will **magnify Him with thanksgiving**.

> PSALM 79:13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will **give You thanks** forever; we will **show forth Your praise** to all generations.

> PSALM 92:1 *It is* good to **give thanks to the LORD**, and to **sing praises to Your name**, O Most High;

The connection between praise and thanksgiving is evident in this next psalm that praises God's name, His covenant loyalty and devotion (*hesed*)[6], and faithfulness and then gives thanks to Him for His works:

> PSALMS 92:1-2, 4-5, 10-11 *It is* good to **give thanks to the LORD**, and to **sing praises to Your name**, O Most High; 2 **to declare Your lovingkindness *[*hesed = *covenant loyalty and devotion]*[6]** in the morning, and **Your faithfulness** every night, … 4 For You, LORD, have made me glad through **Your work**; I will triumph in **the**

[6] For more information about *hesed* refer to the Sabbath Thought articles "2025-02-22 – Compassion & Chesed" and "2023-04-15 – Hesed = Covenant Loyalty & Devotion."

works of Your hands. 5 O LORD, **how great are Your works**! Your thoughts are very deep. … 10 But **my horn You have exalted** like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. 11 My eye also has seen *my desire* on my enemies; my ears hear *my desire* on the wicked who rise up against me.

PRINCIPLE: THANKSGIVING is for blessings from God and PRAISE acknowledges His majesty, goodness, and love by which He bestows those blessings!

Here is one of several deeply heartfelt prayers in the Bible that first acknowledge the greatness and goodness of God and then thank Him for His works:

ISAIAH 63:7, 9 I will mention **the lovingkindness *[*hesed = *covenant loyalty and devotion]* [6] of the LORD** *and* the praises of the LORD, according to **all that the LORD has bestowed on us**, and **the great goodness** toward the house of Israel, which **He has bestowed** on them according to **His mercies**, according to the multitude of **His lovingkindnesses [hesed] *[covenant loyalty and devotion]*[6]**. 9 In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of His Presence saved them; in **His love and in His pity He redeemed them**; and **He bore them** and carried them all the days of old.

PRAISE acknowledges who God IS. Though His magnificence is beyond our capacity imagine, we can praise God for His greatness, eternity, majesty, beauty, holiness, sovereignty, honor, power, authority, righteousness, justice, wisdom, knowledge, grace, mercy, goodness, faithfulness, loyalty, devotion, longsuffering, and love.

Because God is all these things and more, it is astounding that He even considers our lowly estate[7]. David asked what is man, that God is mindful of him[8]. But you know the answer: God created mankind to become His children! Though we fall far short of glorifying (public praise[9]) Him, God has gifted to us blessings of abundance and need, fellowship and loneliness, food and want, joy and pain, happiness and grief, strength and weakness, peace and strife, wisdom and foolishness, knowledge and ignorance, and more. All of them, whether a joy or trial, are a WORK of God to perfect us! And for THAT we should always PRAISE His name and GIVE THANKS to the Most High merciful God above!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[7] Psalm 136:23.
[8] Psalm 8:4; 144:3.
[9] Sabbath Thought "2025-08-02 – Glory to God."

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-23—SALVATION IS SIMPLE—LIVING IT IS HARD

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Have you ever wondered why 3,000 people were baptized in ONE DAY as mentioned in Acts 2:41? This is quite the contrast from today when many prospective converts are required to go through some form of 'counseling' for a year or more. The answer is that salvation from God is very simple and not hard to understand:

SALVATION[1]: The free gift of salvation requires 1) repentance of sin in faith that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ brings remission of sin, 2) being buried with Him into His death through the symbolic act of water-immersion baptism in the name of Jesus, and 4) receiving the Holy Spirit by the laying-on of hands by an elder.

Baptism is then the beginning of living life as a new creation 1) that is dead to sin, 2) under the grace of God, 3) keeping The Law of God (all the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments), 4) growing and becoming agape love by the works of God through the Holy Spirit, and 5) doing Good Works (the Ministry of Giving and Receiving) to all mankind but especially to those who are of the Household of God as God gives the opportunities and means.

You probably already know this, so why talk about it? First of all, too many think that salvation is a complicated subject. If someone asks them to explain salvation, the usual response is to hand them a 50-page booklet that they themselves have not read. Those who think salvation is hard to understand could be an indication that their "minds may be **corrupted** from **the simplicity that is in Christ**" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Second, Pronomians—those who believe salvation is through Law-keeping—fail to understand that the "**purpose** of the commandment *[Law-keeping]* is ***[agape]* love** out of a pure heart" (1 Tim. 1:5; also Rom. 13:8-10.) They rarely consider anything beyond the Two Great Commandments and the Ten Commandments. Their eyes glaze over when they discover that The Law includes all of the statutes, precepts, testimonies, and judgments in the first five books of the Bible (the Torah).

Third, Antinomians—those who believe salvation does NOT require Law-keeping—emphasize love but reject any notion that keeping The Law is required. They wrongly believe God's grace eliminates The Law. They, too, fail to understand that the "**purpose** of the commandment *[Law-keeping]* is ***[agape]* love** out of a pure heart."

Finally, some think that salvation comes only by 'believing in the name of the Lord Jesus' but this is out of context with Scripture, which demands much more. It omits both Law-keeping AND agape love. Belief is clearly insufficient because James told the 'Lost' Ten Tribes that "Even the demons believe and tremble!" (Jas. 2:19). Obviously, belief is not enough because demons do not have salvation.

[1] NOTE: There are too many proof scriptures to list so the words highlighted bold and underline are keywords that can be used to verify this definition. All of them can also be found in Sabbath Thought articles and booklets on the website.

The hard problem is actually BECOMING agape love and DOING Good Works. Often we assume that people are being judgmental or rude when they do not respond as we expect. (Why is it so hard to assume the opposite?) For example, it is frustrating when we need help from a company. We start with an email or text because they make it hard to find a phone number so we can talk to a real person. If we actually find a phone number and finally get through the menu to talk with a real person, they usually have a thick accent making them hard to understand. On the flip side, they also have trouble understanding us.

Did you know that AARGH is actually a word in the Oxford Dictionary? It describes situations like this perfectly. This happens because we do not always wear 'Bible glasses' that allow us to see as God sees when we are out just living life. They allow us to see what others are going through with customers like us who only make it worse. Most of all, 'Bible glasses' remind us that these people are the focus of the great finish to God's Plan. Not now, but soon. I sincerely hope to be in the First Resurrection but the main purpose of the Firstfruits is to help bring many sons and daughters into the family of God—the Grand Finale. We are a very tiny fraction of all the future children in the Kingdom. So, God is NOT focused on us; His plan is much, much bigger than a few people. 'Bible glasses' allow us to see that God has scheduled them for a different time.

But there are also times when things are reversed. Brethren have been rejected because of lies and bias. I have received hateful emails about a few of my articles. It is hard to 'turn the other cheek' so they can do it again but that is what Jesus requires. Again, wearing 'Bible glasses' help us remember that He was beaten far, far worse than any of us. Above all, He bore it all FOR us.

Salvation is simple to explain, living it is hard. How nice it would be if salvation was simply a matter of 'believing in the name of the Lord Jesus' because I can BELIEVE all day long. The problem is that believing is no more than what the demons do.

The failings in living our lives stem from what the Bible calls judgment—the rendering of decisions about another person. But there is a difference between our judgments and God's. We make negative or even vindictive judgments but God renders RIGHTEOUS judgment. What is that? If you had asked me that question twenty years ago I would have said it is judgment according to The Law. But that falls FAR short of the righteous part of judgment.

I was taught early on that "all your *[God's]* **commandments *[The Law]* are righteousness**" (Ps. 119:172). While absolutely true, it is a purely Nomian view (strict letter of the Law). Why? If God is agape love[2] AND He is righteous, then righteous judgment is more than Law-keeping—it has to include agape love. It is quite simple to prove this:

> ROMANS 3:21-22 But now **the righteousness of God apart *[aside]* from the law is revealed**, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even **the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all** and on all who believe. …

[2] 1 John 4:8, 16.

The righteousness of God is <u>revealed</u> (made known) APART from The Law and proof of His righteousness comes <u>through</u> our FAITH in Jesus Christ. How?

> ROMANS 3:24, 26 *[We]* being justified *[judged to be righteous]* freely *[a gift, without cause]* by His *[God's]* grace through the redemption *[ransom]* that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth as a propitiation *[means of obtaining forgiveness]* by His *[Jesus Christ's]* blood through faith, … 26 **<u>to demonstrate *[prove, declare]* at the present time His *[God's]* righteousness, that He *[God]* might be just *[one who IS righteous]* and the justifier *[the one who makes righteous]* of the one who has faith in Jesus</u>**.

We were all condemned to death for our sins because The Law convicted us as criminals (transgressors)[3]. However, God paid a ransom for our lives by sacrificing His Son AFTER we were convicted and sentenced to death. How does THAT somehow prove the righteousness of God? And how is God's righteousness more than strict Law-keeping? If righteousness is simply Law-keeping then according to The Law, God would not have sacrificed His Son and just cast everyone into the Lake of Fire because that is what The Law REQUIRES of God. But His righteousness is more than strict Law-keeping because He SACRIFICED His Son out of love so that He can JUSTIFY us—judge us to be perfect and sinless. In other words, God sacrificed Jesus Christ so that He could expunge our criminal record and deem us to be not guilty. We are now innocent because God IS love.

The only reason God would extend such mercy and compassion to mankind is BECAUSE His righteousness is far more than strict Law-keeping—He judges those He loves with mercy and compassion! This is also why God is the Judge of all[4] through Jesus Christ[5] to whom He has committed ALL judgment[6]. He judges all according to the Law with mercy and compassion for our sinful flesh[7] out of love. But most of all, "the law made nothing **<u>perfect</u>**" (Heb. 7:19) because perfection IS agape love, not Law-keeping:

> COLOSSIANS 3:14 But above all these things **<u>put on love</u>**, which is **<u>the bond *[principle]* of perfection</u>**.

> ZECHARIAH 7:9 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: '**<u>Execute true justice, show mercy *[Heb.* hesed = *covenant loyalty and devotion]* and compassion</u>** everyone to his brother.

> MATTHEW 23:23 "… **<u>the weightier *matters* of the law *[are]* justice and mercy and faith</u>**. …

Mercy and compassion are foundational to righteous judgment and together these establish true JUSTICE. Without mercy and compassion no one could enter into the Kingdom. This is the reason mercy and compassion triumph over judgment:

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[3] Jas. 2:9.
[4] Heb. 12:23.
[5] Rom. 2:16.
[6] John 5:22.
[7] Rom. 8:3.

> JAMES 2:12-13 So speak and so do as those who will be **judged by the law of liberty**. 13 For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. **Mercy *[compassion]* triumphs over judgment**.

The more we wear 'Bible glasses', the more we will have mercy and compassion and the better we will understand why our judgment is so UNrighteous compared to God's. For example, very few criminals or child abusers chose to be that way. Most learned those behaviors from their own parents. The same is true of those filled with anger, hate, and malice—no infant is BORN that way. Yes, eventually everyone is responsible for who they are and what they will become. However, I hope you will agree that it is impossible for flesh and blood to righteously judge a child abuser who was also abused as a child. Even through 'Bible glasses', judging someone who deliberately hurts others is hard. It requires discerning the "thoughts and intents of the **heart**."[8] Who can do that perfectly? This is why judgment is in the hands of God and Christ[9]. WE have received mercy from God so we need to extend mercy to others but that is hard for flesh and blood to do:

> LUKE 6:36-37 Therefore **be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful**. 37 "**Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.**

Talking to the Pharisees, Jesus told them NOT to pass over "**justice *[the rendering of righteous judgment]* and the love of God**" (Luke 11:42) because true justice requires mercy and compassion—elements that come only from agape love. Even those who are condemned to eternal death in the Lake of Fire will receive righteous judgment with mercy and compassion because a heart consumed with anger, hatred, and malice is a terrible way to live.

How hard is it to show mercy, compassion, and love to others? Okay, yes, it can be really hard. The question is really what PREVENTS us from doing it? Most live in peace and abundance. Still, it is easy to forget our 'Bible glasses' when we step out the door into a world that is all too easy for US to judge and condemn. But that changes when we stop judging OTHERS and judge OURSELVES according to His mercy and compassion. RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT FOR US IS NOT JUDGING WHAT OTHERS LACK, IT IS JUDGMENT ACCORDING WHAT WE HAVE RECEIVED. We "**receive abundance** of grace and of the gift of righteousness"[10] because "we have **received mercy**."[11] In short, salvation is simply becoming agape love as God IS—living the way of agape love is hard.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[8] Heb. 4:12.
[9] Heb. 10:30-31.
[10] Rom. 5:17.
[11] 2 Cor. 4:1.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-08-30—DAY OF ATONEMENT OR DAY OF COVERING?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Day of Atonement is, perhaps, the most misunderstood holyday of all, at least for those whose primary language is English. For many, this day focuses on one or several of four main topics: 1) fasting; 2) two goats; 3) atonement or reconciliation; and 4) Passover.

The Jews call this day Yom Kippur. *Yom* is simply Hebrew for *day* but *kippur* is NOT the same as the English word *atonement*. In fact, Yom Kippur has been completely misunderstood because two Hebrew words in the Bible have been wrongly translated as a result of Catholic influence[1] upon the earliest English Bibles. The words in question are *kippur* (H3725) and *kaphar* (H3722), which are always wrongly translated in every English Bible as *atonement* or *reconciliation*.

The word atonement means reconciliation, which is restoration of a broken relationship. Biblically, atonement and reconciliation mean restoring a relationship with God after it was broken by sin. The problem with translating the Hebrew words as the noun *atonement* or verb *make atonement* is that the Hebrew noun *kippur* means a COVER or COVERING and the Hebrew verb *kaphar* means TO COVER—they have absolutely nothing to do with atonement or reconciliation as Scripture proves.

Everyone knows that the blood of animals was sprinkled on people as part of sacrificial sin offerings. However, it is also sprinkled on inanimate objects in the Tabernacle or Temple such as the Mercy Seat and the Altar of Burnt Offering! What is the purpose or function of animal blood? Pay attention to the words *kippur* and *kaphar* in this verse:

> EXODUS 29:36 "And you shall offer a bull every day *as* **a sin offering for ~~atonement~~ *[*kippur = *a covering]***. You shall **cleanse the altar when you ~~make~~ ~~atonement for~~ *[*kaphar = *cover]*** it *[by sprinkling the blood of the bull upon it]*, and you shall anoint it *[with blood]* to sanctify it.

The purpose of sprinkling animal blood was to COVER SINS. That makes sense for people but why is blood sprinkled on THINGS? If *kippur* and *kaphar* mean atonement or reconciliation, then how does the blood of an animal atone or reconcile the FURNITURE of the Tabernacle or Temple? Inanimate objects cannot sin nor do they have a relationship with living beings, so what would be the purpose of sprinkling them with blood? On the other hand, it makes sense if animal blood covers the UNCLEANNESS of sin.

Still, if the blood covers sins, what needs to be cleansed on the Tabernacle or Temple furnishings? The uncleanness of sins in people can be transferred to THINGS such that they become DEFILED or UNCLEAN. This is like getting grease on

[1] https://www.internationalstandardbible.com/A/atonement.html.

things after working on the car. The same happens with sin. One example was when God required Moses to remove his sandals at the burning bush to avoid defiling the GROUND. It was holy because of God's presence[2] and could have been defiled by Moses. In another case, Reuben defiled Jacob's BED when he lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine[3]—his sin defiled the bed and made it unclean. Likewise, everything in the Tabernacle and Temple could be defiled and made unclean because of the sins of people.

Another proof that *kippur* and *kaphar* do not mean atonement or reconciliation is the existence of the veil in the Tabernacle or Temple[4] into the inner Holy of Holies. The veil prevented anyone from entering into God's presence or gazing upon Him[5], even if they had just sacrificed an animal and their sin was FORGIVEN! The only reason that no one could enter into the presence of God was if their sins still REMAINED even after they are forgiven. They DO and here is why:

> HEBREWS 10:4 For ***it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins**.

Animal blood does not TAKE AWAY SIN and since sin separates people from God[6], the veil that kept them from being in the presence of God had to remain in place. If animal blood actually REMOVED sin then there would be no need for the veil. However, animal blood only COVERS sin so it is hidden, not removed. Even though sin was forgiven through the animal sacrifices, their sins were not removed so people were not allowed into God's presence. When Jesus died on the cross, the veil in the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom[7]. Unlike animal blood, His blood REMOVES sin[8]:

> HEBREWS 10:17-18 then He *[God]* adds, "**Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.**" *[quoting Jer. 31:34, a prophecy of a future covenant with Israel]* 18 Now **where there is remission *[removal]*** of these, *there is* no longer an offering for sin.

God never said to anyone under the Old Covenant that He would FORGET their sins, so it stands to reason that, if animal blood does not remove sin, God still remembers it. Only to those under the New Covenant does Jesus say, "My blood … is shed … for the **remission *[removal]*** of sin." (Matt. 26:28). If sin is removed then sin does not exist any longer and God does not remember it. The remission or removal of sin makes the person SINLESS. Without sin, a person is no longer separated from God and worthy to enter into His presence:

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[2] Exod. 3:4-5.
[3] Gen. 35:22; 49:4-5; 1 Chr. 5:1.
[4] Heb. 9:3.
[5] Exod. 33:20.
[6] Isaiah 59:2.
[7] Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45.
[8] Also Jer. 31:34.

> HEBREWS 10:19-22 Therefore, brethren, **having boldness *[confidence that we will not die]* to enter the Holiest *[Holy of Holies]* by the blood of Jesus**, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated **for us, through the veil**, that is, His flesh, 21 and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, 22 **let us draw near *[to God]*** with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The blood of animals is obviously deficient compared to the blood of Jesus Christ, which TAKES AWAY sin and allowing entry into the presence of God! Under the Old Covenant, the closest anyone ever came to God was when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies and even then His presence was obscured by a cloud of incense:

> LEVITICUS 16:12-13 "Then he *[the High Priest]* shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, with his hands full of sweet **incense** beaten fine, and **bring *it* inside the veil. 13 "And he shall put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of incense may cover the mercy seat that *is* on the Testimony, lest he die**.

Unlike animal blood, the blood of Jesus Christ allows even the lowliest of the saints to go PAST the veil and enter into the presence of God! If *kippur* and *kaphar* mean atonement or reconciliation, then the veil would be completely unnecessary.

This is similar to someone who has an illness. Animal blood in the Old Covenant sacrifices simply COVERED sin, which is like treating an illness with drugs that only mask the SYMPTOMS. The problem is that the person is still sick and contagious even if they feel better. On the other hand, the blood of Jesus Christ in the New Covenant does more than cover sin—it produces REMISSION of sin. The sin is completely removed and the person is sinless! This is like treating an illness so that it is completely cured and the person is no longer contagious. The Old Covenant animal blood is NOT atonement or reconciliation because sin still exists even though it is forgiven. Only the blood of the New Covenant removes sin completely.

The final proof that *kippur* and *kaphar* in the Old Testament simply mean COVER and TO COVER is the fact that atonement and reconciliation, by definition, RESTORE a relationship with God after it was broken by sin. The blood of Jesus Christ actually atones for and reconciles sin, the result of which is PEACE with God:

> EPHESIANS 2:12-18 that at that time **you were without Christ**, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and **without God in the world**. 13 But now in Christ Jesus **you who once were far off have been brought near *[to God]* by the blood of Christ**. 14 For **He Himself is our peace *[from the Greek verb* eiro *meaning "to join"]***, who has made both one, and has **broken down the middle wall of separation**, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is,* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* **making peace**, 16 and **that He might reconcile them both to God** in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and

to those who were near. 18 For through Him **we both have access *[admission]* by one Spirit to the Father**.

In the mid-90s there was a saying, "No Jesus, no peace. Know Jesus, know peace." It succinctly describes the end result of His sacrifice—peace with God. Animal blood does not remove sin; therefore, there is no atonement or reconciliation so it does not restore peace with God. Entering into the presence of God is allowed only for those WITHOUT sin. The BLOOD of Jesus Christ is the ATONING sacrifice[9] that reconciles—restores the broken relationship—and makes PEACE with God:

1 JOHN 2:2 And **He *[Jesus Christ]* Himself is the propitiation *[atonement]* for our sins**, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Propitiation simply means ATONEMENT. And there you have it. The blood of Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice that TAKES AWAY SIN, thereby making the sinner SINLESS, which reconciles and restores the relationship between God and mankind. The result is PEACE with God.

Eighteen of the apostolic epistles (it is missing in James, 1 & 3 John) and Romans begin with the nearly identical greeting of "Grace to you and **peace** from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The Greek word for *peace* is derived from a verb meaning *to join*. In fact, in the Greek *peace* means *to set at one again*. The peace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ joins together those who were once separated, making them one again. This is atonement and reconciliation! The BLOOD of Jesus Christ for the New Covenant REMOVES sin and is the ATONEMENT that RECONCILES and restores a relationship with God allowing access into the PRESENCE of God. The result is PEACE with God. This is why the apostles included a pronouncement of PEACE upon the *ekklesia* in their letters—PEACE is the ultimate purpose and fulfillment of the atoning blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ! Jesus spoke of being ONE with Him and God in John 17 but He also said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." (John 14:27). HIS peace is His sacrifice! This was NEVER possible with animal blood, which can only COVER sin, not bring about atonement and reconciliation.

Hopefully, it is clear now why Yom Kippur is the Day of COVERING, not the Day of Atonement because it has nothing to do with atonement or reconciliation. It was an annual cleansing ceremony to COVER the sins of the High Priest, the priests, and all the people. It also CLEANSED the Tabernacle or Temple, the Holy of Holies, the Altar of Burnt Offerings, and the Altar of Incense of sin once a year:

HEBREWS 9:7 But into the second part *[the Holy of Holies]* the high priest *went* alone **once a year, not without blood**, which he offered for himself and *for* the **people's sins** *committed* in ignorance;

LEVITICUS 16:32-34 *[Regarding Yom Kippur]* "And **the priest**, who is anointed and consecrated to minister as priest in his father's place, shall ~~**make atonement**~~ ***[kaphar = cover his sins]***, and put on the linen clothes, the holy garments; 33 "then

[9] Also 1 John 4:10.

he shall **~~make atonement for~~ [kaphar = *cover the uncleanness of]* the Holy Sanctuary**, and he shall **~~make atonement for~~ [kaphar = *cover the uncleanness of]* the tabernacle of meeting and for the altar *[of burnt offerings]***, and he shall **~~make atonement for~~ *[kaphar = cover the sins of]* the priests and for all the people of the assembly**. 34 "This shall be an everlasting statute for you, to **~~make atonement for~~ [kaphar = *cover the uncleanness of]*** the children of Israel, **for all their sins, once a year**." And he did as the LORD commanded Moses.

EXODUS 30:1, 10 "**You shall make an altar to burn incense** on; you shall make it of acacia wood. … 10 "And **Aaron shall ~~make atonement upon~~ [kaphar = *cover the uncleanness on]* its horns once a year with the blood of the sin offering of ~~atonement~~ [kippur = *covering]*; once a year he shall ~~make atonement upon~~ [kaphar = *cover the uncleanness on]*** it throughout your generations. It *is* most holy to the LORD."

NOTE: The phrase "offering of ~~atonement~~ *[*kippur = *covering]*" refers to one of the offerings performed on Yom Kippur.

The Yom Kippur annual ceremony was necessary such that, as God said, "I may dwell among them." (Exod. 25:8). It cleansed the people and the Tabernacle or Temple so that God could enter into the Holy of Holies above the Mercy Seat. There, He was AMONG or NEAR to the people but the veil (or incense) prevented them being in His PRESENCE.

Knowing that Yom Kippur is the Day of COVERING is unlikely to stop it being called the Day of Atonement; however, knowing the true meaning of *kippur* and *kaphar* brings clarity regarding the purpose of the day. It was a day to COVER the uncleanness of sin in the Old Covenant so that God could be near the ancient Israelites, which counters the idea that it was an atonement or reconciliation.

It is also important because the Day of Covering is part of the sequence of events of God's plan to bring MANY sons and daughters in His Kingdom. In fact, the Day of Trumpets, Day of Covering, and Tabernacles together are called the Feast of INGATHERING[10], which portray events that lead to the final Great White Throne Judgment. The Day of Trumpets describes the events of the Great Tribulation and Day of Vengeance. Tabernacles depicts the 1,000-year reign of Jesus Christ. The Day of Covering pictures rescuing survivors of a destroyed world (Day of the LORD) and bringing them to Jesus Christ in Jerusalem. This is the beginning of a millennium of PEACE and prosperity under a righteous King!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[10] Exod. 23:14-16; 34:22-23.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-09-06—THE FEASTS & BURNT OFFERINGS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Blessings from God are promised to those who observe the holydays of the Feast of Ingathering (the autumn holydays) but especially the Feast of Tabernacles:

> DEUTERONOMY 16:13, 15 "You shall **observe the Feast of Tabernacles** seven days, when you have gathered from your threshing floor and from your winepress. … 15 "Seven days you shall keep a sacred feast to the LORD your God in the place which the LORD chooses, because **the LORD your God will bless you** in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, **so that you surely rejoice**.

At least in ancient times, a major requirement for all of God's Feasts was to give an 'offering made by fire':

> LEVITICUS 23:37 'These *are* **the feasts of the LORD** which you shall proclaim *to be* holy convocations, **to offer an offering made by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering** and a grain offering, a *[sin and trespass]* sacrifice and drink *[peace]* offerings, everything on its day–

Did you know that all Feast days required offerings? If so, have you ever considered the offerings you bring (not just money)? There were a total of five sacrificial offerings required of ancient Israel. Descriptions of each are recorded in the first nine chapters of Leviticus. The Burnt Offering was to cleanse sins before coming before God, the Grain Offering was a voluntary offering to honor God (no blood was involved), the Peace Offering was thanksgiving to God, the Sin Offering was forgiveness of sins against God, and the Trespass Offering was about reconciling offenses between people.

A Burnt Offering was an animal sacrifice upon the Altar of Burnt Offerings where it was burned until completely consumed. Only ashes remained but even they had to be removed and properly disposed[1]. Every Burnt Offering is an "offering made by fire." Of all the sacrificial offerings commanded God, the Burnt Offering is the oldest and the first biblical record was after the flood:

> GENESIS 8:20-21 Then **Noah built an altar** to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, **and offered burnt offerings on the altar**. 21 And the LORD smelled a **[sweet] aroma**. …

Another example was the Exodus from Egypt. God sent Moses and the elders to Pharaoh to demand that he release them so they could go into the wilderness and sacrifice unto Him[2]. When God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, his son was to be a Burnt Offering[3]. Paul wrote, "… though **I give my body to be burned**, but have not love, it profits me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). Did you know that he was referring to being a Burnt Offering like Isaac? Burnt Offerings were also around during the days of Job[4]

[1] Lev. 6:9-12.
[2] Exod. 3:16-18.
[3] Gen. 22:1-2.
[4] Job 1:5.

but the Burnt Offering was first instituted for the Israelites at Mount Sinai after God gave Moses the Ten Commandments[5].

The Burnt Offering was the most widely used of all offerings and the most important. Even though the Grain, Peace, Sin, and Trespass Offerings were completely separate, small portions of them were required to be burned on the Altar of Burnt Offerings (usually the fat and entrails). The remainder—the hide, meat, or grain—was given to the priests, Levites, and/or the offerer. The Burnt Offering was a complete sacrifice to God because nothing but ashes remained.

The Altar of Burnt Offerings was located near the entrance to the courtyard of the Tabernacle[6] and Temple because it symbolized the cleansing of a sinner before coming into the presence of God. This altar required a perpetual burning fire and a sacrificial lamb to be offered twice a day, every day as part of the daily Burnt Offering.[7] However, there were other Burnt Offerings ("**besides *[in addition to]* the regular *[daily]* burnt offering**"[8]) required on the weekly Sabbath, the first day of each month, each of the seven Days of Unleavened Bread, the Day of Trumpets, the Day of Covering, and each of the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Aside from the sacrifice being a daily obligation and being completely consumed, the Burnt Offering stands out in another unique aspect—it is the only one that was a SWEET FRAGRANCE to God[9]:

> LEVITICUS 1:9 … a **burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD**.

Most likely understand there is a relationship between the offerings and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

> HEBREWS 10:5-9 Therefore, when He *[Jesus Christ]* came into the world, He said: "**Sacrifice and offering** You *[God the Father]* did not desire, but **a body You have prepared for Me**. 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin You *[God the Father]* had no pleasure. 7 Then I *[Jesus Christ]* said, 'Behold, I have come– in the volume of the book it is written of Me– to do Your will, O God.' " 8 [Saying above], "Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and *offerings* for sin You *[God the Father]* did not desire, nor had pleasure *in them*" (which are offered according to the law), 9 then He *[Jesus Christ]* said, "**Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God.**" He takes away the first *[offering]* that He may establish the second *[offering]*.

The majority is quoted from Psalm 40:6-8; however, the phrase "a body You have prepared for Me" is not mentioned. Its origin is unknown but it certainly fits because Jesus Christ came to do the WILL of God—to give His body as a sacrifice:

> LUKE 22:19 And He *[Jesus Christ]* took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them *[the disciples]*, saying, "**This is My body which is given for you**; …

[5] Exod. 20:23; Num. 28:6.
[6] Exod. 40:6.
[7] Exod. 29:42; Lev. 6:13.
[8] Num. 28-29 various verses.
[9] Num. 28-29 and many more.

This is why the author of Hebrews also wrote:

> HEBREWS 10:10 **By that will *[of God]* we have been sanctified *[cleansed of sin]* through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ** once *for all*.

As mentioned, Burnt Offerings were to cleanse sinners and that is exactly what the body of Jesus Christ does. His sacrifice is so great that it fulfilled ALL other offerings—"**once** for ALL". It should be obvious that He fulfilled the Sin and Trespass Offerings. It is also easy to see that Jesus Christ's sacrifice was voluntary[10] as was the Grain Offering. Likewise, it made peace with God like the Peace Offering:

> EPHESIANS 2:13-15 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near *[to God through the veil]* by the blood of Christ. 14 For **He *[Jesus Christ]* Himself is our peace**, who has **made both one**, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is,* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as **to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace**,

Like the Burnt Offering, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ totally consumed Him. His body was severely beaten, hung on a cross, and His blood poured out causing His death. Even the location of His crucifixion and burial were similar to the Burnt Offerings. The crucifixion occurred very near to the walls of the Temple courtyard whereas the Altar of Burnt Offerings was located at the entrance to the outer courts[11]. Jesus was buried in a tomb outside of Jerusalem, similar to the ashes from the Burnt Offering being carried "**outside the camp to a clean place**." (Lev. 6:12).

The connections between the sacrifice of Jesus Christ with all five offerings is clear, but there is an extremely important distinction between the Burnt Offering and the other four. The Grain, Peace, Sin, and Trespass Offerings ALL only had portions put on the Altar of Burnt Offerings. Why? Because they were ADDED to the Burnt Offering and , not separate from it. In contrast, the Burnt Offering was frequently offered by itself.

And this is the important point—the sacrifice of Jesus Christ FULFILLED all that the Grain, Sin, Trespass, and Peace Offerings were meant to accomplish; however, His sacrifice actually WAS the Burnt Offering! If the entire sacrifice is consumed, leaving nothing for the priest or offerer, then it is ONLY a Burnt Offering. But remember what the Burnt Offering did—it was a sweet fragrance to God. If the sacrifice of Jesus Christ actually WAS the Burnt Offering, then He is also a SWEET FRAGRANCE to God and that is exactly what Scripture says:

> EPHESIANS 5:2 And walk in love, as **Christ** also has loved us and given Himself for us, **an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma**.

This is why the Burnt Offering was the most important of the ancient sacrifices and why there were no Grain, Peace, Sin, and Trespass Offerings in the beginning. These four offerings were added for the ancient Israelites because they did not have the Spirit of God. But the Burnt Offering alone was sufficient for Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Job since they had the Spirit of God in them! The Burnt

[10] John 10:18.
[11] Exod. 40:6.

Offering was a shadow of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and those men were simply waiting for the Messiah to be the True Burnt Offering!

Those who "… were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). What did we put on? Knowledge of the glory of the mystery of the Gospel, which is Christ in you. (Col 1:27). The Gospel message is Jesus Christ living in us whereby God REVEALS in us the sweet fragrance of His Burnt Offering sacrifice:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-16 Now thanks *be* to God who always leads us in triumph *[to conquer, overcome]* in Christ, and **manifests through us the *[sweet[12]]* fragrance of His knowledge *[knowledge of Christ]*** in every place. 15 For **we are to God the *[sweet[12]]* fragrance of Christ** among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; 16 To those *[who are perishing] we are* a stench of death unto death; but **to those *[who are being saved] we are* a *[sweet[12]]* fragrance of life unto life**. And who *is* sufficient for such things?

The Burnt Offering cleanses sin and allows the offerer come before God. This is why the Psalmist wrote, "**I will go into Your house with burnt offerings … I will offer You burnt sacrifices** of fat animals, **with the sweet aroma** of rams; I will offer bulls with goats. Selah" (Ps. 66:13, 15). But then he then says:

> PSALM 66:16 **Come *and* hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul.**

The Burnt Offering was always brightly burning before God as a sweet fragrance unto Him. The Temple is gone but the eternal flame burns on the altar in heaven[13] and brightness of the glory[14] of the True Burnt Offering—Jesus Christ—sits next to God on His throne. But beyond all comprehension, the sweet fragrance of that sacrifice is present in the hearts and minds of those children begotten by God!

I encourage everyone during this Feast of Ingathering to gather as you are able with the Household of God[15] and be filled with the sweet fragrance of Christ in everyone. Let God's work of agape love in you be for the fellowship of peace and service toward each other. And forget not those who are absent from among you. Above all, declare to each other what God the Father and Jesus Christ have done for your SOUL, with all rejoicing!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[12] Added for emphasis.
[13] Rev. 8:5.
[14] Heb. 1:3.
[15] Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-09-13—FASTING & AFFLICTION

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Everyone understands that fasting is going without food or drink for a period of time. The Bible certainly confirms this:

> MATTHEW 15:32 Then Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because **they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting**, lest they faint in the way.

It is obvious what fasting does physically but what is the PURPOSE of fasting? It is an important question since fasting is synonymous with the Day of Covering.

> NOTE: Most refer to this as the Day of Atonement, called *Yom Kippur* in the Hebrew; however, *kippur* means COVERING, not *atonement*. For more information, refer to the Sabbath Thought 2025-08-30 Day of Atonement or Day of Covering and the Bible Study Atonement - Covering Sin.

Read the commandment for the holyday Day of Covering:

> NUMBERS 29:7 'On the tenth day of this seventh month *[Day of Covering]* you shall have a holy convocation. **You shall afflict your souls**; you shall not do any work.

In case you never noticed, nowhere in Scripture is FASTING ever commanded on the Day of Covering. Instead, the commandment is to "**afflict your souls.**" The reason fasting is foundational to the Day of Covering is that it CAUSES affliction:

> ISAIAH 58:3, 5 'Why have we **fasted**,' they say, 'and You *[the LORD]* have not seen? Why have we **afflicted our souls**, and You take no notice?' "In fact, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and exploit all your laborers. … 5 Is it **a fast that I *[the LORD]* have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul**? …

Affliction is a RESULT of fasting. So why, then, does God specifically command His people to afflict themselves instead of "fasting" on the Day of Covering? This is so important that God even emphasizes it with a warning:

> LEVITICUS 23:29 "For **any person who is not afflicted** *in soul* on that same day *[Day of Covering]* **shall be cut off** from his people.

Anywhere that God threatens to cut off someone should be taken very seriously. Biblically speaking, being cut off is either physical death or removal from a covenant with God. In either case it is a matter of life and death. Being afflicted on the Day of Covering is mandatory, not fasting. This distinction requires understanding the difference between fasting and affliction, which is crucial for observing that day in a manner that pleases God.

Affliction is simply a state of pain or suffering. So, does fasting always produce affliction? Affliction can be anything from significant to crippling but, by definition, it is not a minor condition. For example, fasting for health reasons is likely not an affliction. Most of the time, this is done to improve health not cause affliction. For some, fasting for a day might be nothing more than minor discomfort or hunger craving. That can hardly be what God intended when He said to afflict yourselves.

In general, healthy people do not have physical ailments that can be called afflictions. For them, fasting is the way to observe the Day of Coverings but that only works if fasting is done with the understanding that its purpose is to cause AFFLICTION. Simply being a little hungry or tired generally falls short of that.

Fasting became the central focus on the Day of Covering rather than affliction because a majority of people are healthy. They *need* to fast in order to become afflicted. But the idea that observing the Day of Covering simply requires abstaining from food and drink for 24 hours is not what is required. Recognizing we must afflict our souls is the proper observance of the day. Those who are healthy likely experience little more than discomfort from a one-day fast. Some even try to minimize it. How many eat a supper before sundown to minimize suffering on the next day? Some are so unaffected on the Day of Covering that they joke around. Others, however, barely survive the day. Which one would you say was afflicted? Being afflicted should reflect a somber and serious state of heart and mind on the Day of Covering. God never said to rejoice on that day.

PRINCIPLE: A fast devoted to God is self-denial of food and drink for the purpose of AFFLICTING our souls.

There are also some who cannot completely abstain from food and drink for various reasons. Some are dependent upon lifesaving medications or have serious diseases and illnesses such as cancer or diabetes. If the focus is on fasting, what are they to do? Often they will consume what they must in secret because everyone believes the day is about *fasting*. They are ashamed that they cannot they abstain from food and drink because it will cause *serious adverse health consequences*. But the commandment for the Day of Covering is to afflict our souls—not to fast. Whatever their health situation, some are truly afflicted WITHOUT fasting.

The Day of Covering is not about an empty stomach; rather, it is a day to be afflicted. But more than that, it is an affliction of the SOUL. That can be a physical state but it is likely an emotional or spiritual one as well. Notice David and Job:

> JOB 30:15-16 Terrors are turned upon me *[Job]*; they pursue my honor as the wind, and my prosperity has passed like a cloud. 16 "And now **my soul is poured out** because of my *plight;* the **days of affliction take hold** of me.
>
> [DOUAY] PSALMS 143:11-12 for thy name's sake, O Lord, thou wilt quicken me in thy justice. Thou wilt **bring my soul out of trouble**: 12 and in thy mercy thou wilt destroy my enemies. And thou wilt cut off all them that **afflict my soul**: for I am thy servant.

Typically, emotional and spiritual afflictions affect our physical condition and vice versa. God's command to "afflict your souls" perfectly describes affliction that causes some degree of all three—physical, emotional, and spiritual distresses.

But for the vast majority who are healthy, what does it mean to fast to the point of affliction? There is no single answer because every person is unique. Some people suffer terribly if they fast for a day while others can fast for a couple of days or more before it begins to noticeably affect them. For these reasons, there are some obvious precautions that must be noted. David abstained from food and drink so long that he was not only weak but he was emaciated:

> PSALM 109:24 My *[David's]* knees are weak from fasting, and **my flesh has become gaunt.**

Fasting to the point where there are outward signs of starvation is a serious condition; worse than God requires on the Day of Covering. It is a day to be afflicted but NOT to the point of *serious adverse heath consequence*s.

So, why does God command us to afflict our souls? First of all, it produces a heart and mind pleasing to Him:

> DEUTERONOMY 8:2 "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to **humble *[H6031* = `anah*]* you** and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for *humble* is translated *afflict* in the commandment for the Day of Covering:

> LEVITICUS 16:31 "It *[the Day of Covering]* is a sabbath of solemn rest for you, and **you shall afflict *[H6031* = `anah*]* your souls**. It is a statute forever.

It is translated *afflict* here because it is what we must DO. In Deuteronomy 8:2, it is translated *humble* because it is what God wants us to BECOME. He commands us to afflict our souls because He wants His people to be humble on the Day of Covering. After all, He is the Almighty God[1]; Most High[2], Ancient of Days[3], the Great King[4], the Beginning and Ending[5], the Creator[6]—in simple terms, He is the MORE than the sum of all eternity, authority, power, and wisdom. Humility is the ONLY way to come into His presence. In fact, humility is THE test of eternal life:

[1] Gen. 17:1; Exod. 6:3; Ezek. 10:5; Rev. 19:15; et al.
[2] Gen. 14:18-22; Num. 24:16; Deut. 32:8; Mark 5:7; Heb. 7:1; et al.
[3] Dan. 7:9, 13, 22.
[4] Ps. 47:2; 48:2; 95:3; Mal. 1:14; Matt. 5:35.
[5] Isa. 44:6; Rev. 21:6.
[6] Isa. 43:15; Rom. 1:25; 1 Pet. 4:19.

DEUTERONOMY 8:2 "And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, **to humble *[H6031* = `anah*]* you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not**.

Through affliction we humble ourselves and prove that our hearts and minds are committed to loving and obeying God. Fasting is simply one way to afflict ourselves and put on humility. That is why the commandment is to "afflict our souls" on the Day of Covering as opposed to fasting on that day.

PRINCIPLE: Being willing to suffer for God is an act of HUMILITY that establishes and proves the thoughts and intents of our hearts[7].

This is evident in our covenant with God. Love for God is established and proven through obedience to His Law[8]. Afflictions cause suffering and suffering produces humility. This proves our heartfelt desire to obey God. Why do this? Notice this from the Sermon on the Mount:

MATTHEW 5:6 Blessed are those who **hunger and thirst for [justice] *[H1343* = dikaiosune*]***, for they shall be filled.

Denying ourselves food and drink produces "hunger and thirst" What is God's justice? A state of being justified from our sins by God:

ROMANS 4:5-8 But to him who does not work but believes on Him *[God]* who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for [justice] *[H1343* = dikaiosune*]*, 6 just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom **God [accounts as] [justice] *[H1343* = dikaiosune*] apart from works: 7 "Blessed are those whose [iniquities] are forgiven, and whose sins are covered**; 8 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

Why does God care for those who hunger and thirst for justice? Because God's forgiveness is only through the sufferings of His Son Jesus Christ:

HEBREWS 5:8-10 though He *[Jesus Christ]* was a Son, yet **He learned obedience by the things which He suffered**. 9 And having been perfected, **He became the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him**, 10 called by God as High Priest "according to the order of Melchizedek,"

Jesus Immanuel (God with us) proved His obedience to God the Father by willingly suffering unto death. Through this singular act He became the blood sacrifice for sins. God forgives sin and justifies to those who are willing to suffer as Jesus Christ did. If Jesus Christ proved He was obedient to God the Father through sufferings, then all who would be children of God must likewise suffer:

[7] Heb. 4:12.
[8] 1 John 5:2-3; 2 John 1:6.

ROMANS 8:17 and **if children**, then heirs–heirs **of God** and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed **we suffer with Him *[Jesus Christ]***, that we may also be glorified together.

PHILIPPIANS 3:10-11 that I may know Him *[Jesus Christ]* and the power of His resurrection, and **the fellowship of His sufferings**, being conformed to His death, 11 **if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead**.

Fasting is a unique way to afflict ourselves because it is VOLUNTARY suffering, which differs from those who are afflicted by serious illness or disease—"the chastenings of God"[9]. Fasting is one way of observing the Day of Covering but the true PURPOSE of that day is to afflict our souls. Fasting is a selfless act with which God is well-pleased.

Afflictions are of the SOUL when they exceed minor discomforts of this life. We cry out to God, not for pleasures of the flesh, but by reason of our afflictions. And our afflictions of the flesh are to gain the eternal pleasures of our SOUL!

2 CORINTHIANS 4:16-18 Therefore we do not lose heart. **Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory**, 18 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**.

For more information, refer to the booklet on the website titled "Fasting—Afflicting the Soul, Humility, & Prayer."

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[9] 1 Cor. 11:32; Heb. 12:5.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-09-20—FREEDOM OF RELIGION

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Article I of the US Bill of Rights says, "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.*"

There are six distinct points in Article I; the first being religion. In those times, "respect" means to have regard or consideration, whether for OR against. Article I forbids any laws that *accept* or *reject*, *recognize* or *deny* religion and the *application* or *keeping* of it. Note that they did NOT say religions plural—the Founders referred only to one particular religion whose God they named four times in the Declaration of Independence—"Nature's God," "Creator," "Supreme Judge," and "Providence". Article I REQUIRES understanding what religion meant to the Founders.

In days when the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights were penned, there was ONE religion and it was based upon the Bible. Religion in those days had a real and palpable objective meaning—it was not rooted in the subjective opinions or interpretations of individuals. Nor was it synonymous with a morality or conscience. Religion, above all, was rooted in a relationship with the Creator of all life.[1]

Lest someone think their religion was an irrelevancy of Deism, the vast majority (all but one or two) of the 56 signers were Christians and half had the equivalency of college theology degrees. But this would be no surprise since belief in the God of the Bible was required by the 13 independent colonies—ALL of them mandated that officeholders (citizens as well in some) declare their faith and allegiance to the God of the Bible. Delaware, for example, required the oath "I, do profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son, and in the Holy Ghost."

The Religion of the Founders (indicated throughout by a capital 'R') was a humble relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law, which, for them, was absolute, inalienable, inviolate, and immutable. Religion for the Founders was a NECESSITY for life and the God of the Bible was beyond question or doubt. This is why the modern interpretation[2] of the "wall of separation"[3] that religion should not influence government is utter nonsense. For the Founders, all of life, especially a governing body, could never be separated from God.

Because Religion was integral to their existence, protecting it was the objective of the last four points of Article I. The primary concern for the Founders was ensuring that their Religion remained unrestrained, unencumbered, and disentangled from government. Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Press, Freedom of Assembly, and

[1] *A Historical, Philosophical, and Etymological Study of the Word "Religion" as Used in the First Amendment: Coming to a Textually-Based Definition*.
[2] Everson v. Board of Education (1947).
[3] Penned by Thomas Jefferson in a letter discussing the Article I establishment clause.

Right to Petition for Grievances ensured Freedom of RELIGION. Religion was the MOTIVE for the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights.

God and His Law were so integral to the Founders that they did not include crimes in the Constitution or Bill of Rights. Nowhere do they mention murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, or any other crimes and, yet, these will destroy any society or country if they go unchecked. Why the omission? The Law of God contained the criminal statutes and judgments:

> DEUTERONOMY 4:5-6, 8 "Surely I *[Moses]* have **taught you statutes and judgments**, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. 6 "Therefore be careful to observe *them;* for this *is* **your wisdom and your understanding** in the sight of the peoples who will hear **all these statutes**, and say, 'Surely **this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.**' … 8 "And what great nation *is there* that has *such* **statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law** which I set before you this day?

The Law of God completely satisfied the need for criminal codes in the Constitution or Bill of Rights; therefore, they created a form of government to uphold the supremacy of the Law of God. The Constitution established a framework that distributed power among the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches. The Bill of Rights, on the other hand, guaranteed rights of the citizenry that could not be impugned or tampered with by the government. Above all, the purpose of these documents was to safeguard Freedom of Religion—a humble relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law. Notice what the Founders proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence:

> "… [I]t is necessary for one people … to assume among the powers *[nations, governments]* of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them … We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights …"

The Founders declared that the Law of God was "separate and equal" to laws of all civil *governments* and "unalienable" (inviolate) for all *people*. In effect, they stated that the Law of God trumped all manmade laws. Why? They believed that God "gave them [His] statutes and showed them [His] judgments, which, ***if* a man does, he shall live by them**."[4] Experience had proven that only the Law of God produced maximum benefits of "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Founders were in universal agreement on this. They might debate the pro forma of Religion but none denied the immutability and benefits of the Law of God.

But religion today is not even a shadow of the Religion of the Founders. It can be realistically described as a variety of organized corporate businesses with differing doctrines wrapped around an uncertain and not-so-real God. And that is why the USA is doomed. The government of the Founders is completely incompatible with a nation that has rejected the Religion upon which it was purposed. The sole reason

[4] Ezek. 20:11.

for government is to protect the interests of its citizens. The Constitution and Bill of Rights were designed for a nation whose Religion was a relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law. But this lasted a mere two or three generations before citizens began to reject God as the Authority in their lives and abandon the Religion that the government was designed to defend.

Nowadays, Article I freedoms are abused and violated but people want to restore them by ironically demanding MORE laws and accountability (whatever that means). They utterly fail to accept the real problem. There is no possibility of, or purpose for, Freedom of Speech or any other Article I rights without the Religion of the Founders. In rejecting God, the people subsequently lost all of them.

Think about it. Without Religion, what exactly IS Freedom of Speech? A common belief is it is the right to say whatever comes to mind without regard for the cost to others or an expectation of personal consequences. But is that even rational? Is the pornography of Larry Flynn Freedom of Speech? Are demands for abortion Freedom of Speech? Is teaching children sexual perversions and transgenderism Freedom of Speech? Are threats against others Freedom of Speech? Is maligning others Freedom of Speech? Is burning the flag Freedom of Speech? Are calls for the destruction of Christians and the USA Freedom of Speech? Is cursing God Freedom of Speech? The modern permissiveness under Freedom of Speech invokes all of these. Until recent times, there were laws that prohibited perjury, slander, libel, threats, and moral allegiance to any other nation. Violations incurred serious punishments. Today, perpetrators are called victims according to nihilistic judges (unless the defendant is a political enemy).

If Freedom of Speech was never intended to allow every kind of speech, then what determines the limits? Religion. Instead of being independent, Freedom of Speech was protection for Freedom of Religion and, in turn, Freedom of Religion defined limits on Freedom of Speech. The Law of God codifies false testimony, perjury, slander, libel, verbal threats, lying, gossip, corrupt speech, cursing, abusive language, or evil speaking against man or God[5] as crimes (sins). Prohibiting these is TRUE Freedom of Speech. Freedom and Rights are enjoyed only by a people who are self-governed in accordance with God and His Law.

But do not think that this is simply a civil matter. Many church organizations have denied their members the freedoms in Article I in the name of a religion that is completely contrary to the Founder's Religion. Ask yourself, do they allow open discussion of doctrines (beliefs)? Do they allow public expression of personal thoughts and ideas that contradict theirs? Do they allow free assembly with members of different organizations? When there is disagreement, do they sincerely address those grievances? If you answer 'yes' to ALL these questions, then you *might* have Freedom of Religion. If you answered 'no' to ANY of these questions, then you do NOT have Freedom of Religion. Instead, the organization makes their own "law respecting an establishment of religion" (they establish rules that violate the Law of God) and are "prohibiting the free exercise of religion" (they determine acceptable doctrines and beliefs).

[5] Exod 20:16; Prov. 6:16-19; Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:29, 31.

Those in a humble relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law—Religion with a capital 'R'—have been "delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." (Rom. 8:21). Freedom of Religion is abiding in the liberty of God, not the tyranny of men:

> PSALMS 119:41-46 Let Your mercies come also to me, O LORD– **Your salvation according to Your word**. 42 **So shall I have an answer** for him who reproaches me, for **I trust in Your word**. 43 And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth, for **I have hoped in Your ordinances**. 44 So **shall I keep Your law** continually, forever and ever. 45 And **I will walk at liberty**, for **I seek Your precepts**. 46 **I will speak of Your testimonies** also before kings, and will not be ashamed.

The first person singular points to an individual and personal relationship with God and His Law—called Freedom of Religion by the Founders—that was written into the Bill of Rights. But churches today present a false religion that suppresses Speech, Press, Assembly, and Petition of Grievances by their dictates that stifle the liberty of a direct and personal relationship with God in accordance with His Law. The Bible never gave any minister RULERSHIP[6] over anyone—this was the sole responsibility of the citizenry; the *ekklesia*[7] of God. But churches usurp God's authority and become despots and tyrants like King George III.

The Founders immigrated to escape religious persecution. They fought and died so they and their children could have Religion—a relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law. The Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights only function for a Religion based upon the God of the Bible:

> GALATIANS 2:19-20 "For **I *[Paul]* through the law died to the law that I might live to God**. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

It could be said that the rebellion against England was wrapped in civil disputes, as detailed in the 27 Facts submitted in the Declaration of Independence. While true, these 27 Facts were all rooted in repressing Religion; specifically, the preeminence of the Law of God. The Founders wrote that the abuses of England "*evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism*" and that the "*King of Great Britain [has] a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny.*" Despotism and tyranny are the exercise of absolute power with utter disregard for the supremacy of the Law of God. King George III, simply speaking, "regarded [God's] **law as void**"[8] as the 27 Facts proved. The Founders held tightly to a relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law that the King attempted to supplant. There is no question that the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights were all designed to protect Freedom of Religion.

[6] Matt. 20:26; Mark 9:35; 10:43; 1 Pet. 5:3.
[7] Matt. 18.
[8] Ps. 91:13.

Ignorance of the importance Religion played in the founding of this country is heard constantly from public voices in their desperate cries to counter the unprecedented levels of anger, hatred, malice, violence, murders, and rioting that continue to rise. The solution, according to liberals, conservatives, public officials, judges, and media talking heads, is a return to family values, tolerance, kindness, more laws, etc. But, "professing to be wise, they became fools"[9] in the eyes of God:

> JEREMIAH 4:22 "For **My *[the LORD's]* people *are* foolish, they have not known Me. They *are* silly children, and they have no understanding. They *are* wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.**"

Nothing will be solved in this country because the people REJECTED Religion—any relationship with the Creator God in accordance with of His Law. Once this occurs, history shows there is no recovery. The reasoning behind all the proposed solutions is the same that created the problems; they reject God for the same reasons they will never turn back to Him—they are rebellious and refuse to repent. The leaders in government, industry, media, AND churches failed the people and all will soon see the fruits of the godlessness that they demanded:

> PROVERBS 29:2 When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but **when a wicked *man* rules, the people groan**.
>
> ISAIAH 9:16 For **the leaders of this people cause *them* to err, and *those who are* led by them are destroyed**.
>
> HOSEA 4:6 **My *[the LORD's]* people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge**, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; because **you have forgotten the law of your God**, I also will forget your children.

Regardless of the obstacles, the Founders never stopped fighting for the freedom to have a relationship with the Creator God in accordance with His Law—even if they paid with their lives. In the end, Article I was lost. However, there is coming a New Government that will forever establish Freedom of Religion:

> PSALMS 47:1-2 … Shout to God with the voice of triumph! 2 For **the LORD Most High *is* awesome; *He is* a great King over all the earth**.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[9] Rom. 1:22. Also Ps. 94:3-8; Jer. 5:21.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-09-27—CROWNS & WREATHS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The events of the Day of Trumpets are incredibly diverse. They portray everything from worldwide destruction and death to the glorious return of Jesus Christ. Regarding His return, the vision of John begins with a long and loud trumpet blast in heaven that is heard around the world. Then a King appears, possessing unprecedented POWER and AUTHORITY and GLORY[1], appointed by the Most High God to take vengeance upon the wicked[2] and destroy them in the flaming fire of His wrath. This King is like no other ever in the history of the world for He bears the sword of the Word of God. His eyes are ablaze with fury as He leaves the Temple of the Almighty God in Mount Zion on a white warhorse. The vast host of the heavenly armies on white horses accompanied Him and they descend to this earth upon pure white clouds of heaven. The sheer power and wrath of this King of Heaven and Earth proceeds forth as a visible whirlwind of fire and smoke that turns the sun black and the moon to blood, causes the stars flee from His presence, and the heavens to quake. His coming causes the earth to tremble and move out of its place. The fire and smoke of His fury roils before Him, melting the strength and courage of all flesh and blood with the sheer terror of His awesome sight. He is clothed with a royal vesture dipped in blood and is crowned with MANY crowns.[3] His names are Son of God, Messiah, Lamb of God, Savior, Alpha and Omega[4], Lord of lords, and King of kings!

Perhaps this fantastic vision inspired the beautiful and moving hymn “Crown Him with Many Crowns” written in 1851 by Matthew Bridges and Godfrey Thring. Each verse is a proclamation of the crowns worn by Jesus The Christ:

- Crown Him with many crowns!
- Crown Him the Lord of love!
- Crown him the Lord of peace!
- Crown him the Lord of heaven!
- Crown him the Son of God!
- Crown him the Lord of light!
- Crown Him the Lord of life!
- Crown Him the Lord of lords!

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ returned to heaven and received a kingdom from His Father[5]. Since then, He has been preparing to return and gather the saints. His return will be announced by the Seventh Trumpet and all the earth will see the One[6] crowned by God as LORD of lords and KING of kings[7] with all authority in heaven and earth[8]!

Crowns are associated with kings and officials in the Old Testament including the high priest (Exodus 29:6; 39:30), Saul (2 Samuel 1:10), the king of Rabbah (2 Samuel 12:30), Joash (2 Kings 11:12), Vashti (Esther 1:11), and Mordecai (Esther 8:15) to name a few. However, not all crowns are the same.

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[1] Dan. 7:13-14; Matt. 11:27; 28:18; Luke 10:22; John 3:35; 17:2; 1 Cor. 15:27; Heb. 2:8.
[2] 2 Thess. 1:7-8; Jude 1:14-15.
[3] Rev. 19:11-16.
[4] Son of God = Rev. 2:18. Messiah = Dan. 9:25-26. Lamb = John 1:29, 36; Rev. Savior = Luke 2:11; 1 John 4:14; et al. Alpha & Omega = Rev. 1:11. Lord of lords, King of kings = Rev. 17:14; 19:16.
[5] Luke 19:12.
[6] 1 Tim. 6:15.
[7] 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16.
[8] Matt. 28:18.

There are several different Hebrew words that are translated crown. The high priest and kings of Israel wore a *nezer* (H5145), which is like a chaplet (wreath). In the case of the high priest, the chaplet was worn on top of the miter[9]. Then there is a *kether* (H3804), a *diadem* used exclusively of the royal crowns worn in the court of Ahasuerus, including Vashti and Esther[10]. General references to other crowns include `*atarah* (H5850) and *tsaniyph* (H6797)[11], both of which mean *crown* but are vague about the design.

However, this is not the case in the New Testament. There are only two Greek words translated crown, the most common of which is *stephanos* (G4735). The root of this word is *to twine* or *wreathe*. It was used as "*a badge of royalty, a prize in the public games or a symbol of honor*". Specifically, *stephanos* is a chaplet or wreath, it is NOT a diadem or royal crown. Each of the twenty four elders sitting on thrones around the throne of God wear a *stephanos* or *wreath*[12]. Similarly, a *wreath* is given to the saints, not a crown:

> 2 TIMOTHY 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me *[Paul]* the **~~crown~~ *[G4735* = stephanos = *wreath]* of righteousness**, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but **also to all who have loved His appearing**.
>
> JAMES 1:12 Blessed *is* the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the **~~crown~~ *[G4735* = stephanos = *wreath]* of life** which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.
>
> 1 PETER 5:4 and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the **~~crown~~ *[G4735* = stephanos = *wreath]* of glory** that does not fade away.
>
> REVELATION 2:10 … Be faithful until death, and I *[Jesus Christ]* will give you the **~~crown~~ *[G4735* = stephanos = *wreath]* of life**.

Wreaths are given to honor those who are VICTORIOUS, oftentimes in battle. Wreaths are given to the saints who overcame temptation and sin:

> 2 CORINTHIANS 10:3-4 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. 4 For **the weapons of our warfare** *are* not carnal but mighty in God for **pulling down strongholds, 5 casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God**, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, 6 and being ready to [avenge] all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.

The battle of the saints is waged against everything that EXALTS ITSELF AGAINST GOD! It is a victory against all odds because the strength of the enemy is far beyond flesh and blood. But those who are victorious are not given crowns (diadems) because those are only worn by royal kings. Even John's vision in Revelation 12 recorded The Woman, who portrays the *ekklesia*, wearing a wreath. The saints will be kings in the Kingdom of God (Rev. 1:6) but they will be adorned with wreaths because there is only one King who is worthy of a crown and the saints are only victorious through Him.

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[9] Exod. 29:6; 39:30; Lev. 8:9; Lev. 21:12; 2 Sam. 1:10; 2 Kgs. 11:12; 2 Chr 23:11; Ps. 89:39; 132:18; Prov. 27:24; Zech 9:16.
[10] Esth. 1:11; 2:17; 6:8.
[11] Job 29:14; Isa. 62:3; Zech. 3:5.
[12] Rev. 4:4, 10.

Evidence of the distinction between wreaths and crowns is in the other Greek word—*diadema*—from which we get the English word diadem. A diadem is a jeweled crown that symbolizes sovereignty; that is, a royal crown is only worn by a king with supreme power[13]. This contrasts a wreath, which is given to honor the victors of battles or contests. The Greek word *diadema* is only used three times in the Bible. The first is the crowns worn by Jesus Christ:

> REVELATION 19:11-13 Now I *[John]* saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him *was* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. 12 His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and **on His head *were* many crowns *[diadema]***. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. 13 He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and **His name is called The Word of God**.

Jesus Christ will return wearing many diadems or crowns. This shouldn't come as any surprise because Jesus Christ is the King above ALL other kings. However, there are two others that also wear crowns (diadems). The first is Satan:

> REVELATION 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red **dragon *[epithet of Satan—v. 9]*** having seven heads and ten horns, and seven **diadems *[crowns]*** on his heads.

The third and last *diadema* is mentioned in Revelation 13:1-2:

> REVELATION 13:1-2 Then I *[John]* stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw **a beast rising up out of the sea**, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns **ten crowns *[diadema]***, and on his heads a blasphemous name. 2 Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. **The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.**

The Beast That Rises Out of the Sea also wears crowns (diadems) and his power and authority are from Satan. It is appalling that Satan and the Beast dare to wear crowns that symbolize royal authority and sovereignty in the same manner as Jesus Christ. But then it is not surprising since Satan once bragged, "I will be like the Most High."[14] To fully grasp the extent of Satan's ambitions, notice the final temptation of Jesus Christ:

> MATTHEW 4:8-11 Again, **the devil** took Him *[Jesus Christ]* up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You **if You will fall down and worship me**." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, '**You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.**' " 11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

There is no GREATER BLASPHEMY than for Satan to demand obeisance from his Creator. In his prideful arrogance, Satan elevated Himself above Jesus Christ, the Son of *God*! Wearing a crown is evidence that Satan desired to be *equal* to God (at least in authority over the angels). Similarly, then, the Beast wants to be to Satan like Jesus Christ is to God. It is no wonder that the demand by Satan to worship him angered Jesus who

[13] Webster's 1828 Dictionary.
[14] Isa. 14:14.

responded by demanding that he leave. This was no polite request. In the KJV, it is translated stronger as "Get thee hence." However, the Greek includes the sublety of to sink out of sight. Basically, Jesus told Him to go crawl back into his hole. There is no one WORTHY to wear a diadem except Jesus Christ—only He was given supreme authority and power by God Most High. This is why the saints will be given wreaths for their victory over death, not diadems.

However, there is another reason that Jesus Christ is the true bearer of the regal crown. The etymology of the Greek word *diadema* is a compound of *dia* and *deo*. Individually, these words mean *through* and *bind*, respectively. The compound of these words produces a meaning of "through binding." But *binding* has several meanings and one is "*to be betrothed, to pledge, or to give oneself in marriage.*" In other words Jesus Christ wears a crown that is not just a symbol of royal authority and power; it symbolizes Him as the Husband of the saints!

> REVELATION 19:7-9 "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him *[God the Father]* glory, for **the marriage of the Lamb *[Jesus Christ]* has come, and His wife has made herself ready**." 8 And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. 9 Then he said to me *[John]*, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to **the marriage supper of the Lamb**!' " And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

Jesus Christ is Lord of lords and King of kings and His bride of saints, will be joined to Him in marriage because He alone wears the DIADEM of royalty, authority, power, and the Husband bound to the saints. God chose for His Son a marriage through binding to a bride that has made Herself ready[15]. He is the only and true King and Husband of saints, crowned by the Most High Great God Almighty!

> REVELATION 15:2-3 And I *[John]* saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and **those who have the victory** over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. 3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O **King of the saints!**

Trumpets is the return of the King of kings crowned with many crowns to fulfill our joy! Jesus is the Son of God, the Lamb of God, and Husband of the saints! Let all the earth sing, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!"[16]

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[15] Rom. 10:15.
[16] Rev. 19:6.

CROWN HIM WITH MANY CROWNS

Mormon Tabernacle Choir 2022—https://youtu.be/vyW5rEP7b3Q

Crown Him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon His throne,
Hark! How the heav'nly anthem drowns
all music but its own!
Awake, my soul, and sing
of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King
thro' all eternity.

Crown Him the Lord of life!
Who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife,
for those He came to save.
His glories now we sing,
who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring,
and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of peace!
Whose power a scepter sways,
From pole to pole, that wars may cease,
And all be prayer and praise:
his reign shall know no end,
And round his pierced feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend,
Their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown Him the Lord of love:
behold His hands and side,
Those wounds yet visible above,
in beauty glorified.
All hail Redeemer hail,
For thou has died for me.
All praise and glory shall not fail,
For all eternity.
All praise and glory shall not fail,
For all eternity.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-10-18—NO WORK & NO SERVILE WORK

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Perhaps the most recognizable aspect of the seventh-day Sabbath is that it is a day of rest, as is plain from the meaning of the word. While physical rest is important, sleep is not the focus. In all regards, the Sabbath-rest is a cessation from WORK:

> EXODUS 20:8-11 "Remember **the Sabbath day**, to keep it holy *[the seventh-day Sabbath is a holyday]*. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day *is* the Sabbath of the LORD your God. *In it* **you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger** who *is* within your gates. 11 For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and **rested the seventh day**. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

The Hebrew word for *work* here is *mla'kah* (H4399). It means occupation, employment, and work (but "never servile" work—Strong's). In the literal sense, it means engagement in any business, occupation, profession, or trade that is a source of livelihood. The command of "no work" is used for the seventh-day Sabbath. The prohibition against work is quite extensive, covering just about every living thing[1]:

> DEUTERONOMY 5:14 but **the seventh day *is* the Sabbath** of the LORD your God. *In it* **you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you**.

"No work" applies to everyone including family, servants, foreigners, and animals. If servants are not even allowed to perform work, then "no work" seemingly forbids all that can be construed as work by man or beast. But to ensure this is the correct understanding, it is important to take a deeper look.

The four holydays of the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), Day of Trumpets, and Feast of Tabernacles have the command "no servile work." It is translated from two Hebrew words `*abodah* (H5656), meaning *bondservant* followed by the same word used for the Sabbath command, *mla'kah* (H4399), again, meaning *work*. Together, they are translated "no servile work."

However, understanding the difference between "no work" and "no servile work" is difficult from word meanings alone. They do not differentiate whether "no work" more or less restrictive than "no servile work." The key, however, is found within Scripture.

The seventh-day Sabbath and all the holydays are either under the prohibition of "no work" or "no servile work" except for one. For the Feast of Unleavened Bread,

[1] Also Exod. 20:10; 23:12.

both terms are used and this provides the key to understanding the differences. Notice the command in the chapter where God proclaims His feasts:

NO SERVILE WORK (DUB):

> LEVITICUS 23:6-8 'And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** to the LORD; seven days you must eat unleavened bread. 7 '**On the first day** you shall have a holy convocation; **you shall do no [servile] work on *[H5656* = `abodah = *bondservant* + *H4399* = mla'kah = *no work]*** it. 8 'But you shall offer an offering made by fire to the LORD for seven days. **The seventh day** *shall be* a holy convocation; **you shall do no [servile] work *[H5656* = `abodah = *bondservant* + *H4399* = mla'kah = *no work] on it*.**'

Scripture plainly designates both the first and last days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread as "no servile work" (`*abodah* + *mla'kah*). However, these same holydays were classified as "no work" days when the Law was given at Mount Sinai—but with an exception:

NO WORK (DUB):

> EXODUS 12:16 'On **the first day** *[of the Feast of Unleavened Bread] there shall be* a holy convocation, **and on the seventh day** there shall be a holy convocation for you. **No manner of work *[H4399* = mla'kah = *no work]* shall be done on them; but *that* which everyone must eat–that only may be prepared by you**.

The exception to "no work" here is that food preparation is allowed. This is the only place where both "no work" and "no servile work" are applied to the same days. Moreover, neither is it mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy, the "Second Law," where Moses made a few minor clarifications just prior to the ancient Israelites crossing the Jordan. In other words, the timing and context are the same for Leviticus 23:6-8 and Exodus 12:16. That means that the singular exception of food preparation to "no work", then, is the key for defining both since the Bible never mentions any exceptions for "no servile work":

BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS:

NO WORK = *mla'kah* (H4399)—forbids **all work** by everyone—family, servants, foreigners, and animals.

NO SERVILE WORK = `*abodah* (H5656) + *mla'kah* (H4399)—forbids all work EXCEPT for **food preparation**.

Obviously, "no work" is the most restrictive because no one, not even animals, is allowed to perform any kind of work. "No servile work" is the same except that food preparation is permitted.

Having established the meaning of "no work" and "no servile work," the question now is which apply to each of the holydays? The following lists each holyday; however, even though the two holydays of the Feast of Unleavened are "no work" days, the exception of food preparation places them into the "no servile work" category:

NO WORK HOLYDAYS:

- Seventh-Day Sabbath

- Exod. 16:29; 20:9-10; 23:12; 31:14-15; 35:2; Lev. 23:3; Deut. 5:13-14.
- *NOTE: The seventh-day Sabbath is a holyday—Lev. 23:3.*

- The Day of Covering (Atonement[2])
  - Lev. 16:29; 23:28, 30-31; Num. 29:7.

NO SERVILE WORK HOLYDAYS (FOOD PREPARATION IS ALLOWED):

- 1st & 7th days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread
  - 1st Day: Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:7; Num. 28:18.
  - 7th Day: Exod. 12:16; Lev. 23:8; Num. 28:25.
- Feast of Weeks (Pentecost)
  - Lev. 23:21; Num. 28:26.
- Day of Trumpets
  - Lev. 23:25; Num. 29:1
- 1st & 8th days of the Feast of Tabernacles
  - 1st Day: Lev. 23:35; Num. 29:12.
  - 8th Day: Lev. 23:36; Num. 29:35.

The Law of God is purposeful and intentional; therefore, there must be reasons for the two different work restrictions. While there are likely other explanations, there are differences in what the holydays portray when grouped according to "no work" and "no servile work." While not absolutes, Scripture paints an interesting picture of why one set of holydays prohibit food preparation and the other does not.

Begin with the days that are "no servile work" and, for the moment, omit the Feast of Unleavened Bread. That includes the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the Day of Trumpets, and the 1st & 8th days of the Feast of Tabernacles. These are observances that picture God bringing children into His Kingdom or executing vengeance upon the wicked of the world.

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) is the late spring small wheat HARVEST of firstfruits of the saints into God's Kingdom. In fact, it is called "the Feast of the Harvest [of] the Firstfruits" and "the Feast of Weeks of the Firstfruits of the wheat Harvest."[3] The next holyday is the Day of Trumpets, which specifically focuses on the VENGEANCE of God as that "Day of the LORD's vengeance."[4] Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles is the early autumn main wheat harvest, part of the "Feast of Ingathering,"[3] representing the final great HARVEST of mankind into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the Feast of Weeks, the Day of Trumpets, and the Feast of Tabernacles could be called JUDGMENT days—judgments of eternal life and eternal death.

"No work," on the other hand, was commanded for the seventh-day Sabbath and the Day of Covering. What is the focus of these days? God saving people from bondage and slavery! Notice what God commands about the seventh-day Sabbath observance:

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[2] It is the Day of Covering, not Atonement. Refer to the Sabbath Thought 2025-08-30 Day of Atonement or Day of Covering or the Bible Study Atonement—Covering Sin.
[3] Exod. 23:16; 34:22.
[4] Isa. 34:8; 61:2; Jer. 46:10.

DEUTERONOMY 5:14-15 but **the seventh day *is* the Sabbath** of the LORD your God. *In it* you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your ox, nor your donkey, nor any of your cattle, nor your stranger who *is* within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 And **remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there** by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

The seventh-day Sabbath was instituted for the ancient Israelites as a remembrance of God liberating them from bondage and slavery in Egypt.

Now look at the Day of Covering. The Great Tribulation and Vengeance of God are future events that bring terrible destruction upon the world. During those days, many will be enslaved and imprisoned by an evil world under the control of the Beast and False Prophet. After God takes His vengeance upon them, He then liberates these captives from the bondage and slavery:

PSALMS 107:2-5, 10, 13-14 Let **the redeemed *[captives liberated after the Day of the LORD]*** of the LORD say *so,* whom **He has redeemed from the hand of the enemy, 3 and gathered out of the lands**, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. 4 They wandered in the wilderness in a desolate *desert by the* way; they found no city to dwell in. 5 Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. 6 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, *and* He delivered them** out of their distresses. … 10 Those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, bound in affliction and irons *captive*– … 13 Then **they cried out to the LORD in their trouble, *and* He saved them out of their distresses**. 14 He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their chains in pieces.

This is what the Day of Covering portrays—rescuing the survivors of the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD. These captives cry out to God to be saved and He hears them. Like the seventh-day Sabbath, it is a day that God liberates the surviving captives from bondage and slavery.

What about the heretofore unmentioned Feast of Unleavened Bread? While the 1st and 7th days during this feast are "no servile work" days, they were first given a "no work" command along with an exception. That is interesting because the Feast of Unleavened Bread is a memorial of the actual ESCAPE of the ancient Israelites *from* bondage and slavery in Egypt:

EXODUS 12:17 'So you shall observe ***the Feast of* Unleavened Bread, for on this same day I will have brought your armies out of the land of Egypt**. Therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as an everlasting ordinance.

So, the seventh-day Sabbath and Feast of Unleavened Bread are inextricably linked to God rescuing His chosen nation of ancient Israel from bondage and slavery. This same theme occurs during the fulfillment of the Day of Covering as it portrays God saving people from bondage and slavery after the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD's vengeance. Therefore, the seventh-day Sabbath, Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Day of Covering could be called LIBERATION days—liberation from bondage and slavery.

But what do 'Liberation Days' have to do with "no work" that prohibit food preparation? The PROVIDENCE of God. No one who is just liberated from bondage and slavery can survive on their own for very long. People in the Nazi death camps during WW2 were intentionally starved and many died. All of them needed food and water even after being liberated and that had to be supplied by others—the European Allied Forces.

Similar conditions occurred after God liberated the ancient Israelites from Egypt—they needed food and water. A short time after escaping into the wilderness from the Egyptians, God gave them manna:

> EXODUS 16:14-15, 22-26 And when the layer of dew lifted, there, on the surface of the wilderness, was a small round substance, *as* fine as frost on the ground. 15 So when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said to one another, "**What is it *[manna]*?**" For they did not know what it *was.* and Moses said to them, "**This *is* the bread which the LORD has given you to eat.** … 22 And so it was, **on the sixth day, *that* they gathered twice as much bread *[manna]***, two omers for each one. And all the rulers of the congregation came and told Moses. 23 Then he said to them, "This *is what* the LORD has said: '**Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath** to the LORD. Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.' " 24 So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. 25 Then Moses said, "**Eat that today, for today *is* a Sabbath** to the LORD; today **you will not find it in the field**. 26 "**Six days you shall gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none.**"

God provided manna for six days and on the sixth day gave them twice as much to sustain them through the seventh-day by which they learned that "no work" meant no food preparation on the Sabbath—they had to do it in advance. God also provided water for them. One such instance was recorded in Numbers 20:1-13. So the seventh-day Sabbath with its "no work" command also prohibited food preparation because it was a reminder that the people relied upon God for provisions. This will also be the case for the people liberated as portrayed by the Day of Covering:

> JOEL 2:18-19 Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. 19 The LORD will answer and say to His people, "**Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them**; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.
>
> ISAIAH 49:9-10 That You *[the LORD]* may **say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,'** to those who *are* in darkness, 'show yourselves.' "**They shall feed along the roads**, and their pastures *shall be* on all desolate heights. 10 **They shall neither hunger nor thirst**, neither heat nor sun shall strike them; for He *[Jesus Christ]* who has mercy on them **will lead them, even by the springs of water** He will guide them.

The surviving captives liberated after the Great Tribulation and Day of the LORD are fed by God as He brings them to Jerusalem! Again the seventh-day Sabbath AND the Day of Covering are "no work" holydays. The Sabbath is a reminder that the ancient Israelites relied upon God for their food and water after being liberated

from bondage and slavery in Egypt and the Day of Covering is a portrayal of God providing for the survivors of a destroyed world that He liberates in the future!

When the ancient Israelites fled Egypt, they only brought with them enough unleavened bread to essentially last the journey from Egypt to the wilderness across the Red Sea. This is the memorial of the days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

> EXODUS 12:39 And **they baked unleavened cakes** of the dough which they had brought out of Egypt; for **it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt** and could not wait, **nor had they prepared provisions *[for the journey]*** for themselves.

While lack of food was not an immediate issue during their flight out of Egypt, part of the remembrance of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is that they had just enough food to leave. Shortly after that, they would be in dire need of food and water as emphasized by the statement "nor had they prepared provisions" for a long journey.

So the "no work" holydays are memorials or portrayals of God liberating people who were/are in bondage and slavery AND providing them food and water during those times. That is why "no work" prohibits food preparation!

> SUMMARY: The seventh-day Sabbath and Day of Covering are holydays with a "no work" ordinance that prohibits food preparation. These days represent God liberating people in bondage and slavery and providing them the necessary food and water!

Avoiding food preparation on the seventh-day Sabbath and the Day of Covering, which is obviously a day of fasting for most[5], is a reminder of God's merciful promises to provide for our needs, just as Jesus said:

> MATTHEW 6:31-34 "Therefore do not worry, saying, **'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?'** or 'What shall we wear?' 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For **your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things**. 33 "But **seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you**. 34 "Therefore **do not worry about tomorrow**, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day *is* its own trouble.

So, not only are there differences between "no work" and "no servile work," there is meaning and purpose behind God's commands if we will seek them!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[5] For more information about fasting, refer to the booklet Fasting—Afflicting the Soul, Humility, & Prayer.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-10-25—UNDERSTANDING NO WORK & NO SERVILE WORK

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Last week's Sabbath Thought was a discussion of how the weekly Sabbath and Day of Covering are distinct from the other holydays, at least in regard to "no work" and "no servile work." The former are what I called liberation days whereas the latter I referred to as judgment days. I did not focus on how to apply these statutes and realize I should have discussed it as well.

The Law of God defines agape love. Keeping the Law is the beginning of growing in that singular characteristic that IS God. It is composed of statutes, judgments, and testimonies. Together, the Law also establishes precepts (principles)—a way of *thinking*. The Law is more than "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not" rules it guides personal decisions and judgments because it does not address every possibility:

> PSALM 19:8 **The [precepts] of the LORD *are* right, rejoicing the heart:** the commandment of the LORD *is* pure, **enlightening** the eyes.

The Law is fulfilled by obeying the specific statutes but also by applying its PRINCIPLES to guide the "thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12) in a humble striving to please God.

So, how does one understand the "no work" and "no servile work" statutes in last week's Sabbath Thought article? Like most things, they impact people differently. Folks in sub-Saharan Africa may still slaughter animals and prepare food over wood fires; very much like the ancient Israelites in the wilderness. People in northern climates typically do not prepare food from live animals and use modern stoves to cook on but they live in cold climates that many heat with wood, a situation that does not exist in tropical Africa.

Precepts are important. The Law is not only specific statutes; it is a way of THINKING, the result of which is agape love. This is critically important because it is the primary motive of God. For this reason, He describes the Law this way:

> 1 JOHN 5:2-3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And **His commandments are not burdensome**.

The Law of God should never be a BURDEN. But do not confuse burden with inconvenience. So, the prohibition of food preparation on the weekly Sabbath was never meant to be burdensome. There are a few biblical instructions that help understand the differences in "no work" and "no servile work" where the Sabbath is distinct from the other holydays as a time of "no food preparation" beginning with:

> EXODUS 35:2-3 "Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh day shall be a holy day for you, a Sabbath of rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. 3 "**You shall kindle no fire** throughout your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

If kindling a fire on the weekly Sabbath is forbidden, does that mean people cannot heat their home? Is cooking food forbidden? Why did God forbid kindling a fire on the Sabbath? What else is forbidden?

> NUMBERS 15:32, 35 Now while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man **gathering sticks *[foraging for wood]* on the Sabbath day**. … 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall **stone him** with stones outside the camp."
>
> EXODUS 16:23, 25 Then he *[Moses]* said to them, "This *is what* the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. **Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.**' " … 25 Then Moses said, "**Eat that *[which remains]* today**, for today *is* a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field.

Apparently, kindling a fire, gathering firewood, and cooking are all forbidden on the Sabbath. What, then, does God allow to satisfy the need for food?

> MATTHEW 12:1-8 At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And **His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat**. 2 And when the Pharisees saw *it,* they said to Him, "Look, **Your disciples are doing what is not lawful** to do on the Sabbath!" 3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: 4 "how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? 5 "Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? 6 "Yet I say to you that in this place there is *One* greater than the temple. 7 "But if you had known what *this* means, 'I desire **mercy and not sacrifice**,' you would **not have condemned the guiltless**. 8 "For **the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath**."

I suspect that Jesus deliberately led them into the field to bring this matter to light because there are several important principles here. Above all, mercy is greater than sacrifice. Mercy is compassion and God's compassion permitted David and his followers to unlawfully eat the showbread and priests to work on the Sabbaths. Do you understand what Jesus said here? Even though they broke the Law, Jesus said they were GUILTLESS! They sinned and yet were SINLESS! Because Jesus Christ is Lord (Ruler) of the Sabbath, He established the Law in mercy and set compassion above law-keeping! This was not something new because He was quoting from 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, and Micah 6:6-8. When this transpired, the disciples did not say to Jesus, we are hungry so we are going into town to get something to eat and will see You in a couple of hours. Instead, they did what allowed them to continue in the presence of the Emanuel ("God with us") who was Jesus Christ—their Teacher and Lord! Lastly, Jesus made it abundantly clear that those who condemn others will not be in the Kingdom[1].

So, back to the question about "no work" and "no servile work," the distinction being food preparation. No one can make enough rules to cover every situation, forcing everyone to keep the Law. The Pharisees tried this and became overlords. Keeping the Law is a matter of the "thoughts and intents of the heart" for each individual. David, the priests, and disciples were sinless because they were not being rebellious. They had physical needs that could not be met under the strict letter of the Law so God was merciful. But why did David do it if he knew it was unlawful for him to eat the

[1] Matt. 23:33.

showbread? David meditated on God's Law day and night[2] so he understood the PRECEPTS (intentions) of the Law[3]. Bearing this in mind, notice other details about food preparation on the Sabbath:

> EXODUS 16:4-5, 12, 23-26, 29-30 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread *[manna]* from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not. 5 "And it shall be on the sixth day that they shall prepare what they bring in, and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily." … 12 "I have heard the complaints of the children of Israel. Speak to them, saying, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. And you shall know that I *am* the LORD your God.' " … 23 Then he *[Moses]* said to them, "This *is what* the LORD has said: 'Tomorrow *is* a Sabbath rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. **Bake what you will bake *today*, and boil what you will boil; and lay up for yourselves all that remains, to be kept until morning.**' " 24 So they laid it up till morning, as Moses commanded; and it did not stink, nor were there any worms in it. 25 Then Moses said, "**Eat that *[which remains]* today**, for today *is* a Sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. 26 "**Six days you shall gather it**, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will be none." … 29 "See! For the LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore He gives you on the sixth day bread *[manna]* for two days. **Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.**" 30 So the people rested on the seventh day.

In those days, the diet of the ancient Israelites consisted of meat (quail) in the evening and bread (manna) in the morning. They were to bake or boil their food on the preparation day and lay aside the remainder of the food they prepared to consume on the Sabbath. Eating requires food, food must be prepared for cooking, cooking requires a fire, and fire requires wood.

But notice how God summarized the restrictions on Sabbath food preparation in verse 29: "**Let every man remain in his place; let no man go out of his place** on the seventh day." What does this have to do with food preparation? Much about cultures and languages has been lost or diluted over the last 2,000 years, but imagine just what was involved in preparing food.

First of all, God provided quail and manna but the people had to go outside the camp to find and gather them. It was not delivered to their tent doors so hundreds of thousands of people went out and wandered over a large area to collect them and bring it back. Realize also that the quail or manna nearest the camp was quickly gathered up so those in the rear had to forage farther and farther.

Next, the food had to be prepared. Every quail had to be killed, plucked, and butchered. It is a time-consuming and messy process. The feathers and innards also could not remain inside the camp. If left lying around, it not only attracted all kinds of unpleasant flies and critters but would produce a terrible, rotten odor. Imagine the quantity of feathers and innards from millions of quail every single day. Whether the quail were prepared inside the camp or outside, the offal had to be disposed of outside the camp where they likely buried it.

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[2] Ps. 1:2.
[3] Ps. 119:97-100.

Wood had to be collected for fires. Cutting wood is unbelievably arduous if it was even possible (how many owned an ax?). Without modern tools, dead trees are useless because they are too big to cut, too heavy to haul, and too long to burn in a small campfire. Instead, they must have gathered smaller branches. These would burn faster than larger logs, which meant more branches were needed. That likely required several trips for a single day's supply. A cart would help, but imagine the effort of hauling it over miles of rough ground and hills, even with service animals. Like the quail and manna, nearby wood would be quickly gathered up by the early workers so the distance increased for finding wood, especially if they were in the same place for days, weeks, or months. Millions of people can quickly clear a forest of dead branches. It would not be surprising if it took hours of foraging for the wood necessary for one day.

Next, a fire had to be kindled. It would be fairly simple if they used hot coals from the previous day or kept some in insulated leather bags (an ancient practice). But there were certainly occasions when new fires had to be started such as after fleeing Egypt or arriving at a new site. They did not have matches or lighters and starting a fire from scratch was arduous labor. I have used a bow and stick to start a fire as well as flint and steel. Both take a long time to heat tinder to ignition temperatures on a good day without rain or wind. While they likely had flint or chert, they would need to find new ones from time to time. This technique also requires making the tinder (thin shavings of wood or grass). Once the tinder is smoldering, careful attention is required to produce a flame that can be progressively fed with larger material. Starting a fire is not easy, which is why God forbid KINDLING a fire on the Sabbath! Today, I frequently burn huge piles of brush using a lighter and diesel fuel and it is going within seconds. Is that work? Perhaps, but it is nothing compared to kindling a fire with primitive tools. I firmly expect that God would never have made any commandment against kindling a fire if it was as easy as flipping a light switch, pushing an elevator button, or starting a car.

Only now is everything ready to cook the food, which was, by comparison, the easy part. Everything leading up to this required enormous effort and time <u>outside the camp</u> GATHERING the food, wood, and disposing of offal in order to finally cook the food. Now it is understandable why God told ancient Israel the two primary prohibitions on the Sabbath were not to kindle a fire and not to go outside the camp. It also is plain why one man was gathering wood on Sabbath. To prepare for TWO days was even more work than one. Overall, it is likely that many of the ancient Israelites spent much of every weekday simply feeding themselves and their families. God commanded that they stay in the camp and eat the remainder prepared on Friday so they could rest and spend time with God! Can anything pertaining to food preparation today compare to the level of effort in those days?

While on the topic of not traveling outside the camp, there was a prohibition against traveling farther than a 'Sabbath Journey' maintained by the Pharisees. This has been estimated to be the distance between the Mount of Olives and Jerusalem[4], about 2/3 mile (1.2 km). It presents two problems, however. First, if someone went from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives on the Sabbath to pray, he could not return until sundown. The other point is that there is nothing in the Law that limits the distance of

[4] Acts 1:12.

travel on the Sabbath. This is manmade and I suspect was one of several such things that Jesus did not violate "lest we offend."[5]

I bring this up is BECAUSE there is no biblical restriction for Sabbath travel. However, does that mean it should be ignored? No. It is an example of situations that should receive some consideration, just like food preparation. Fellowship is an incredible blessing for those who are able to gather with brethren. Most travel on the Sabbath for that reason alone. Peaceably cruising past the beauty of this earth going to or from a Feast, especially in the fellowship of family or brethren can also be wonderful and uplifting. On the other hand, not so much if driving in congested Los Angeles traffic or on hazardous roads. I also want to raise awareness to those who would judge others that there are legitimate considerations for those who travel on the Sabbath or holydays including poor night vision, work obligations and available funds (usually at the Feast of Tabernacles), transporting other brethren, etc. At the very least, considering what travel is unnecessary on Sabbath and holydays is thinking in terms of agape love for God according to His Law.

I could make a list of the do's and don'ts I personally observe for food preparation on the Sabbath or travel on the holydays. However, they could not apply to everyone and some would find them too restrictive while others might see them as too liberal. That is why it is pointless to make up rules. Above all, making rules that are not in the Bible is a sin of adding to or taking away from the Word of God[6]! Aside from specific statutes, there are principles to guide us: 1) keeping the Law is love toward God; 2) Jesus said His commandments are NOT burdensome; 3) in rare cases where the Law is violated (knowingly or not), Jesus said people are guiltless (if they are humble and their thoughts and intents are right with God); and 4) judging or condemning others, especially when based upon traditions of men, can lead to death.

The Law is more than specific statutes because the entirety of it is the way God THINKS toward us. Learning, knowing, and practicing the Law teaches us the principles of God's ways:

> ISAIAH 28:9-10 Whom shall he *[God]* **teach knowledge**? and whom shall he make to **understand doctrine**? *them that are* weaned from the milk, *and* drawn from the breasts. 10 For **precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept**; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little.

God did not say knowledge and understanding is memorizing specific statutes of the Law but building precept upon precept, which is growing in agape love because it is who He IS!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[5] Matt. 17:27.
[6] Deut. 12:32; Rev. 22:19.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-11-01—IS THE NEW COVENANT REALLY NEW?

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Some have questioned whether the New Covenant began after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Their thinking is that the New Covenant will not be offered until the Millennium or beyond because of this prophecy:

> JEREMIAH 31:31-33 "Behold, **the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a New Covenant** with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah– 32 "**not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers** in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. 33 "But **this *is* the *[new]* covenant** that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: **I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

God refers to a "New Covenant" that is "not according to the *[Old]* Covenant." But the prophecy continues and here is the crux of the matter:

> JEREMIAH 31:34 "**No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me**, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

It is obvious that all do NOT know God, so it can be reasoned that the New Covenant is not yet offered and still an unfulfilled future prophecy. It is somewhat rational since over half of the modern world either rejects the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob or has not heard of Him. But is it entirely a future fulfillment?

Start with the basics. The foundation of the Old Covenant is a vow to obey the Law of God[1], which has been around since the beginning—even before Adam and Eve. Demons could not have sinned unless there was a law that defined sin[2]. Obedience to the Law of God, however, is also the foundation of the New Covenant[3]. If the Law of God has existed from the beginning, then when was the New Covenant first offered? The answer requires knowing the difference between the Old and New Covenants. While both require obedience to the same Law, the promises of the Old Covenant were limited to physical blessings. Eternal life was only promised under the New Covenant. And, as far as anyone knows, there is only what is called the New Covenant that has a promise of eternal life.

Now the question is when was eternal life first offered to mankind? Adam and Eve, of course. They were offered the Tree of Life, the fruit of which gave eternal life:

> GENESIS 3:22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and **take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever**"–

[1] Exod. 19:8; 24:3.
[2] Gal. 3:19.
[3] Matt. 19:17; John 14:15; 1 Cor. 7:19; 1 John 2:3-4; 3:22-24; 5:2-3.

The Tree of Life is a central feature of the Kingdom of God, a habitation of eternal beings: "To him who overcomes I *[Jesus Christ]* will give to eat from **the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God**." (Rev. 2:7). Existence of the Tree of Life in Eden meant that Adam and Eve were offered eternal life in the Kingdom, a promise of the New Covenant. Both covenants require obedience to the Law of God, so the principle differences between the Old and New Covenants are physical blessings versus eternal salvation, respectively.

The Tree of Life indicates that the New Covenant existed from the beginning of mankind's existence, but how is that possible? Was the New Covenant offered but then withdrawn after Adam and Eve sinned? No, because many righteous men and women came after them and received the same promise of eternal life[4]. Among the many examples were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who lived before Christ and the apostles who continued after Christ—all will have eternal life:

> MATTHEW 8:11 "And I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you that **many will** come from east and west, and **sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven**.
>
> LUKE 22:28-30 "But you are those who have continued with Me *[Jesus Christ]* in My trials. 29 "And **I bestow upon you *[the twelve disciples]* a kingdom**, just as My Father bestowed *one* upon Me, 30 "that you may eat and drink at My table **in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel**."

It may be hard to believe, but the evidence shows that the New Covenant with the promise of eternal life is not really new in terms of TIME—it has existed since the beginning. How else could the righteous men and women down through the ages have the promise of eternal life without the existence of the New Covenant?

So, why is it called new, then, if it predates the Old Covenant? Perhaps it is new because the Old Testament focused mainly on the Old Covenant at Mount Sinai. Or maybe it is new because it is the "better" covenant (Heb. 7:22; 8:6) wherein everyone is "a **new creation**." (2 Cor. 5:17). It is not a very significant point as long as one understands the difference is eternal life.

It is hard to deny the biblical evidence that the New Covenant promises PREDATED the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. How is that possible? The answer requires knowing the REASON Jesus Christ shed His blood for the New Covenant. Did His blood create or inaugurate the New Covenant or was there another reason? Notice what Jesus said about His blood and the New Covenant[5]:

> MATTHEW 26:28 "For this is **My *[Jesus Christ's]* blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins**.

Jesus said His was the blood OF the New Covenant. He did not say His blood created or inaugurated it. What does that mean? If His blood created or inaugurated the New Covenant, He could have said "My blood IS the New Covenant." Pay close attention to the last part—the reason He shed His blood is "**for the remission of sins**!" Jesus blood removes SIN, it does not create or inaugurate the New Covenant.

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[4] Heb. 11:4-39.
[5] Also Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25.

Why this distinction? The problem of any covenant with God is that SIN prevents sinners from entering into one. Blood is NEVER required to enter into a covenant with God if the person is SINLESS. God said, "**your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden *His* face from you, so that He will not hear.**" (Isa. 59:2). SIN is the ONLY reason blood is required for any covenant with God!

> HEBREWS 9:18-23 Therefore **not even the first *covenant* was dedicated without blood**. 19 For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, 20 saying, "**This *is* the blood of the covenant** which God has commanded you." 21 Then likewise he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry. 22 And **according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission *[of sin]***. 23 Therefore ***it was* necessary that the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices** than these.

This is profound. It says that covenants between God and mankind require the cleansing (purification) of sin through BLOOD! Blood does not create or inaugurate any covenant; it cleanses sin so people CAN enter into a covenant. This is true of both the Old and New Covenants. The phrase "this is My blood **of** the new covenant" is not saying that His blood creates or inaugurates the New Covenant, it is saying that the blood that cleanses sin FOR the New Covenant is His. The blood that cleanses sin FOR the Old Covenant is that of animals. Luke and Paul[6] said it this way:

> LUKE 22:20 Likewise He *[Jesus Christ]* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "**This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood**, which is shed for you.

While it is worded slightly differently, it still says that the blood used for cleansing sin for the New Covenant is the blood of Christ. Now it makes sense. Both covenants required blood cleansing sin because all have sinned[7]. Everyone under the New Covenant was cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Everyone under the Old Covenant was cleansed by the blood of animals. It might make more sense for modern readers if it was translated, "This cup is the New Covenant **through** My blood." Regardless, no covenant is created or inaugurated by blood and Jesus blood was simply for the remission of sin.

So, how did righteous men and women of ancient times enter into the New Covenant BEFORE the sacrifice of Jesus Christ? The Bible does not give a clear answer, but there are a couple of possibilities. The first is what might be thought of as an abstract view of time from the perspective of an almighty God who said:

- "**I *am* God … declaring the end from the beginning**." (Isa. 46:9-10).
- "**The Lamb *[Jesus Christ]* slain from the foundation of the world**." (Rev. 13:8).
- "**The works *[of God]* were finished from the foundation of the world**." (Heb. 4:3).
- "**God … calls *[forth]* those things which do not exist as though they did.**" (Rom. 4:17).
- "So shall **My *[the LORD's]* word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please**, and it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it." (Isa. 55:11).

[6] Luke 22:20 and 1 Cor. 11:25 are identical.
[7] Rom. 3:23; 5:12.

God knows and declares the end from the beginning and ensures all things come to pass so it is more than possible that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was such an absolute certainty that God concluded Jesus was, for all intents and purposes, slain from the foundation of the world. His blood could then be applied to all righteous people from the beginning. After all, "with God all things are possible." (Matt. 19:26).

The other possibility is that those under the New Covenant before Jesus Christ relied upon animal sacrifices to substitute for the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. There is no question that God accepted animal sacrifices for the cleansing of sin:

> HEBREWS 9:13 For if the **blood of bulls and goats** and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the **unclean, sanctifies *[cleanses sins]*for the purifying of the flesh**,

Perhaps it was through animal sacrifices, such as those offered by Job and Abraham[8], that their sins were cleansed so they received the New Covenant promises of eternal life. After all, animal blood was a shadow of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

> HEBREWS 10:1-2 For the law, having **a shadow of the good things to come**, *and* not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins.

Regardless, the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for the sins of the whole WORLD[9], which included—wait for it—ALL who ever lived! Jesus Christ literally bore the sins of everyone—past, present, and future! His blood covers the sins of those who died BEFORE and AFTER His sacrifice! Therefore, the New Covenant existed from the very beginning because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ covered sins committed even before it. The question of *when* the blood of Jesus Christ was applied to sins is unimportant—it absolutely did, does, and will even if it is hard to explain how.

Now getting back to the prophecy of Jeremiah. He said that God would put His Law into the hearts and minds of Israel under a "**New Covenant**." (Jer. 31:31). How would God do this?[10]

> ISAIAH 59:21 "As for Me," says the LORD, "**this *is* My covenant with them: My Spirit [that] *is* upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth**, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants' descendants," says the LORD, "from this time and forevermore."

Those under the New Covenant promises of eternal life have the Holy Spirit within them. It begets them with the seed of eternal life, which is why David said, "**Do not cast me away from Your presence**, and **do not take Your Holy Spirit** from me." (Ps. 51:11). The Holy Spirit is the seed of the New Covenant promise of eternal life.

Now the question about the prophecy in Jeremiah can be answered. Recall that it said, "**No more shall every man teach his neighbor**, and every man his brother, saying, '**Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me**." (Jer. 31:34). The mistake is likely assuming that

[8] Job 1:5; Gen. 15:9-18.
[9] 1 John 2:2.
[10] Also Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27.

people will be gathered before God like the ancient Israelites at Mount Sinai. But stop and consider: how does someone KNOW God without being taught by others? Obviously, they are taught by GOD! This, too, is a PROPHECY:

> JOHN 6:45 "It is written in the prophets *[Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah]*, 'And **they shall all be taught by God**.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me *[Jesus Christ]*.

Jeremiah 31:34, Isaiah 54:13, and Micah 4:2 all say the same thing—all shall be taught by God. When does that happen? Every time someone receives the Holy Spirit of God! Every single person, including the prophets who had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is taught by God:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-13, 16 But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man **the things which God has prepared** for those who love Him." 10 But **God has revealed *[taught] them* to us through His Spirit**. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. 11 For **what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him**? Even so **no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God**. 12 Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit [which] is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God**. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which **the Holy Spirit teaches**, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. … 16 For "who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" But **we have the mind of Christ**.

The prophecy also never says that all will be taught by God at ONCE. The Feasts of God portray 'harvesting' people into the Kingdom of God. The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) is the small harvest and the Feast of Ingathering is the large harvest. God always starts small. Everyone with the Holy Spirit throughout time is taught by God. It does not require a gathering at the end-times like there was at Mount Sinai.

God dwelt with ancient Israel at the Tabernacle and Temple, did He not? Yes, and there was always a VEIL between them and God. Even when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on the Day of Covering, there was a cloud of incense that obscured the Mercy Seat. They could not be in the actual PRESENCE of God because they had sin and lacked the Holy Spirit. The veil was only torn asunder when Jesus died on the cross because His blood finally removed sin and made sinners SINLESS in the righteousness of God[11]. THEN the Holy Spirit came upon Believers. The veil is now gone and people not only enter into the very presence of God, He LIVES in them through the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant existed at the time of Adam and Eve, it exists NOW, and all points in between. If that is not true, then what was the covenant MINISTERED by Paul?

> 2 CORINTHIANS 3:1-18 Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others,* epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? 2 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; 3 clearly ***you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart**. 4 And we have such trust through Christ toward God. 5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, 6 who also made us sufficient as

[11] Heb. 10:14; Rom. 4:6, 22.

ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. 7 But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, 8 **how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious**? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, **the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory**. 10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 11 For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what **remains** *is* much more glorious. 12 Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech– 13 unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. 14 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because **the *veil* is taken away in Christ**. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless **when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away**. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is,* there *is* liberty. 18 But **we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image *[of Christ]*** from glory to glory, just as **by the Spirit of the Lord**.

Now read John 6:45 again and pay particular attention to the last part:

> JOHN 6:45 "It is written in the prophets *[Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Micah]*, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' **Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father** comes to Me *[Jesus Christ]*.

Every person is taught by God through the Holy Spirit—read 1 Corinthians 2:11 again: "**no one knows the things of God except *[with or through]* the Spirit of God.**" At any particular time, God's 'classroom' could be one person or thousands or millions. Jeremiah 31:34 was being fulfilled long before the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it is being fulfilled now, and it will continue to be fulfilled in the future. Being TAUGHT by God and KNOWING God is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, not a world gathered before Him in the millennium or beyond. It is also through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ LIVES in every person. Unlike the Old Covenant, God and Jesus Christ LIVE in people and TEACH them because they are under the New Covenant promises of eternal life through the Holy Spirit[12]:

> GALATIANS 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but **Christ lives in me**; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[12] Also John 17:23.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-11-08—GIVING FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

The Fruits of the Spirit was a topic of many sermons although not so much in recent years. Even so, they are vital topics because they are defining traits of Christians[1]:

> GALATIANS 5:22-23 But the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control**.

Every message I can remember approaches the Fruits of the Spirit as characteristics that every Christian should possess; however, these are qualities that are meant to benefit OTHERS. A tree does not produce fruit for itself but for people to enjoy! With that perspective, take a fresh look at the Fruits of the Spirit:

1) JOY is an inner *cheerfulness* or *calm delight* transmitted to others. This could be in form of cheerful words or actions. Jesus said, "These things I *[Jesus Christ]* have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full." (John 15:11). Being cheerful toward others gives them joy!
2) PEACE is *calm*, *tranquility*, or *quietness*. While it is a personal emotional state, it is intended to be spread abroad through words and actions that affect the heart and mind of others. Jesus Christ said, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me *[Jesus Christ]*, I also send you." (John 20:21). Peace comes from Jesus Christ so it is meant to also be a gift from us to others.
3) LONGSUFFERING is *forbearance* or *patience* under duress. When others bring troubles, intentionally or not, showing tolerance or restraint "with longsuffering, bearing with one another" (Eph. 4:2) is a fruit or gift of the Spirit. No one 'longsuffers' for themselves.
4) KINDNESS is *goodwill* toward others that makes a *positive difference*. When God sacrificed His Son for the sins of mankind, it was demonstrating His kindness toward us in that "He *[God the Father]* might show the exceeding riches of His grace in *His* kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:7). But kindness is more than being nice; it actually IMPROVES the life of others. While the world says "be kind to yourself," kindness is always for other people.
5) GOODNESS is possessing *godly character* for the benefit of others. Many struggle to define goodness but it is, succinctly and simply, virtue. This encapsulates qualities such as righteousness, integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, truthfulness, respectfulness, etc. Goodness allows others to feel comfortable in our presence especially when discussing serious matters. Paul says "you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another." (Rom. 15:14). Admonishing someone requires the other person to have confidence that they will be shown virtue—righteousness, integrity, trustworthiness, honesty, truthfulness, respectfulness. Otherwise, how can they

[1] These and other fruits are found in Rom. 5:3-5; Col. 3:12-15; Eph. 5:9, etc.

hear what is "needful?"[2] Virtue DRAWS people; it does not push them away. Goodness assures others that they are valued and acknowledges their potential.

6) FAITHFULNESS is *devotion.* Faithfulness is more than a dedication of the mind; it is heartfelt fidelity and commitment. For Christians, it is a devotion to God "You *are* the LORD God, Who chose Abram … You found his heart faithful before You." (Neh. 9:7-8). But faithfulness is also required for every relationship between people.

7) GENTLENESS is a state of *humility* or *meekness.* It an attitude toward others "with all lowliness and gentleness" (Eph. 4:2). Gentleness is not a measure of oneself against others, it is recognizing the immeasurable greatness of God and realizing that one should "not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think." (Rom. 12:3). Gentleness is always a quality for others, not oneself.

8) SELF-CONTROL is *temperance* or *purposeful restraint.* It is exercising the will and discipline to stop selfish desires from taking priority over the needs of others. It was evidenced by how Michael responded to Satan when disputing about the body of Moses: "Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"" (Jude 1:9). Satan assuredly deserved whatever censure or condemnation might be made but Michael exercised restraint for the purpose of allowing God to judge that most evil being.

What is important is to understand that fruits are not personal traits but are qualities intended to help others. A tree produces fruit, which is picked by people (a tree cannot pick its own fruit). Have you ever wondered why fruits and vegetables are referred to as "produce?" *Produce* (emphasis on the first syllable—PRO-duce) is derived from the verb *produce* (emphasis on the second syllable—pro-DUCE), which means to create or bring forth. Fruits of the Spirit are exactly that—PRO-duce for others! A true Christian is like a tree that bears fruit for others. In fact, what happens if no one picks the fruit on a tree? It falls off and rots. Fruit is meant for others! Bearing Fruits of the Spirit are not simply a sign of a true Christian but required for salvation:

> MATTHEW 7:17-19 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. 19 "**Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**

Good trees are uncommon and many are ignorant that their salvation depends upon bearing good fruit. NOT producing bad fruit is insufficient. Jesus said that even good trees without good fruit are cast into the fire. Bearing good fruit is more than a desire; it is the result of a war against the flesh. Paul prefaced the list in Galatians 5:22-23 by describing that war:

> GALATIANS 5:16-17 I *[Paul]* say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For **the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against**

[2] Jude 1:3, for example.

the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Failing to recognize the struggle or not fighting against fleshly lusts results in Works of the Flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). These are the 'produce' of the spirit in man, which is absolutely selfish. What distinguishes a "good tree" from a "bad tree?" The Greek word for *good* is used in numerous scriptures to contrast with *evil* so a good tree portrays a person having agape love whereas a bad tree is one without it. It is also why good fruit cannot come from a bad tree—it is only produced by those with God's Spirit sent by Jesus Christ[3]. This is why bearing fruit requires CRUCIFYING the flesh. Notice how Paul concluded his list of Fruits of the Spirit:

> GALATIANS 5:24-26 And those *who are* Christ's have **crucified the flesh with its passions and desires**. 25 If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 **Let us not become conceited *[glorifying oneself]***…

Fruits of the Spirit can be seen as qualities that benefit others or as selfish desires like Eve in the Garden in Eden:

> GENESIS 3:6 So when the woman *[Eve]* saw that the *[fruit of the]* tree ***was* good for food, that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make *one* wise**, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.

Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil because she was driven by SELFISH desires of the flesh. That is why the spirit in man is cannot produce Fruits of the Spirit. It is a selfish spirit driven by the emotions and needs of a physical body. In complete contrast, the Spirit of God is agape love:

> 2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For God has not given us **a spirit** of fear, but of power and **of love** and of a sound mind.

Fruits of the Spirit are not traits to glorify oneself, but qualities that serve others. Agape love is the one thing that produces Fruits of the Spirit. It is the greatest of them all[4]. Like the other Fruits of the Spirit, agape love exists without expectation of receiving something in return. So Fruits of the Spirit are dependent upon growing and abiding in the love of God the Father and Jesus Christ:

> JOHN 15:8-9 "By this My Father is glorified, that **you bear much fruit**; so you will be My disciples. 9 "**As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.**

Producing Fruits of the Spirit is a daunting task; so much so that it can be overwhelming. But think about it—who actually produces them? God the Father through His Son living in us[5]! It is GOD who strengths us ("He *[God]* would grant you … to be strengthened with might through His Spirit"—Eph. 3:16). It is GOD who

[3] John 15:26.
[4] 1 Cor. 13:13.
[5] Gal. 2:20.

sustains us ("to **Him [God] who is able to keep you**"—Jude 1:24). It is GOD who works in us ("we are His *[God's]* workmanship"—Eph. 2:10). It is GOD who perfects us ("the [perfecting] of the saints"—Eph. 4:12). God requires His children to become perfect—an impossible task for us—but HIS work produces perfection[6]!

> MATTHEW 19:25-26 When His *[Jesus Christ's]* disciples heard *it,* they were greatly astonished, saying, "**Who then can be saved?**" 26 But Jesus looked at *them* and said to them, "**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.**"

Every time we say "I can't" we deny God's WORK in us. Every time we say "I am unworthy" we deny God's RIGHTEOUSNESS in us. Every time we say "I won't" we deny God's WILL for us. Every time we say "I don't know" we deny God's WISDOM in us. Every time we say "I am weak" we deny God's POWER in us. Every time we say "I am lacking" we deny God's PROVIDENCE to us. We have no fruit of ourselves and will produce nothing without God. But for those in whom He lives there is a saying: "I can do all things through *[Jesus]* Christ."[7]

The result of God's work in us are Fruits of the Spirit that are the PRODUCE of His Holy Spirit. Moreover, Fruits of the Spirit are Good Works in the service of others:

> COLOSSIANS 1:10-11 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him,* being **fruitful in every good work** and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;

Agape love and the Fruits of the Spirit are the work of God. The work of God in each individual establishes their part of fruitful Good Works within the Body of Christ. This cycle of God's work and Good Works is the perfection of agape love within the Body of Christ:

> [TS2009] EPHESIANS 4:16 from whom the entire body *[of Christ]*, joined and knit together by **what every joint supplies, according to the working by which each part does its share, causes growth of the body for the building up of itself in love**.

Fruits of the Spirit are Good Works that fulfill the "Administration [or Service] of Giving and Receiving"[8]. Not just Giving but also Receiving. One requires the other. Understanding that Fruits of the Spirit are to benefit and help others, what fruits are you bearing that can help those around you?

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[6] Heb. 13:20-21.
[7] Phil. 4:13.
[8] 2 Cor. 9:10-13.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-11-15—GOOD & EVIL WORKS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Last week's Sabbath Though article explained that Fruits of the Spirit are actually *Good Works* that benefit others, not acquired personal traits. Why is that important? The answer has to do with the human mind. In his preface to the Fruits of the Spirit, Paul discusses the antipathy of the human mind with the Spirit of God:

> GALATIANS 5:16-17 I *[Paul]* say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. 17 For **the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another**, so that you do not do the things that you wish.

Aside from referring to a physical animal or human being, *flesh*, also translated *carnal [mind]*, describes an individual that is focused upon personal needs and desires. This is *selfish* behavior that goes beyond simply providing for one's needs, something that is basic *selfcare*. God created all physical life to respond to physical needs[1]; it is natural and required to ensure the continuation of life; however, *flesh* or a *carnal mind* is behavior that has no regard for others:

> ROMANS 8:5-7 For **those who live according to the flesh *[H4561]* set their minds on the things of the flesh *[H4561]***, but those *who live* according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For to be carnally *[H4561]* minded *is* death, but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace. 7 Because **the carnal *[H4561]* mind *is* enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God**, nor indeed can be.

Such disregard for others, including God, is why a carnal mind wars against the Spirit of God because it is one of agape love that produces a SOUND mind in contrast to a carnal mind:

> 2 TIMOTHY 1:7 For God has not **given us a spirit** of fear, but of power and **of love and of a sound mind *["thinking that is correctly trained and moderated"]***.

Agape love is selfless, directed toward others. Agape love does not discriminate nor does it expect something in return. Agape love will even deny the self—it can cost the giver. Therefore, the carnal mind is focused upon self whereas the Spirit of God is agape love toward others.

The two Great Commandments are agape love toward God and mankind[2]. The fact that "all the Law and Prophets" hang, or expand, upon them means that the entirety of the Law of God is an instruction in the ways of agape love. This is why Paul said above that a carnal mind is not willing to obey or submit to the Law of God—a carnal mind is selfish whereas the Law of God is agape love. Following his remarks about the war between a carnal mind and the Spirit of God in Galatians 5:16-17, Paul listed Works of the Flesh:

[1] Matt. 6:31-32.
[2] Matt. 22:36-40.

> GALATIANS 5:19-21 Now the **works of the flesh** are evident, which are: **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, [licentiousness], 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions *[strife]*, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries**, and the like; of which I *[Paul]* tell you beforehand, just as I also told *you* in time past, that those who practice such things **will not inherit the kingdom of God**.

There is really no need to go into detail about each of the Works of the Flesh. They are the antipathy of agape love. There are also many, many more not listed here. A quick search of NT Scripture produced a staggering SEVENTY (70) Works of the Flesh that were included in the Sabbath Thought article on 2025-03-08[3] (they are reproduced at the end of this article). The crucial point about Works of the Flesh is that "those who practice such things **will not inherit the kingdom of God**."

DEFINITION:

WORKS of the Flesh are acts that cause harm to others in the pursuit of selfish motives in contrast with the FRUITS of the Spirit that are acts that benefit others in the pursuit of becoming agape love[4].

But works begin with thoughts in the mind. Works of the Flesh are the result of carnal thinking and Good Works of the Fruits of the Spirit arise out of agape love. What are the main factors that determine whether the works are good or evil? Consider that every human being possesses the Spirit in Man:

> JOB 32:8 But *there is* a **spirit in man**, and the breath of the Almighty **gives him understanding**.

The Spirit in Man differentiates humans from animals[5] because it allows the human mind to have "understanding;" that is, the ability to *think*. The Spirit in Man existed in Adam and Eve *before* they sinned so the human mind is susceptible to influence. The three main ones are 1) emotions, 2) physical stimuli, and, 3) influence of others. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they rejected God as the primary influence of what is good and evil. Whether they knew it or not, that decision unleashed and established Satan as the main influencer throughout the world:

> [TS2009] EPHESIANS 2:2-3 in which **you once walked** according to **the course of this world, according to the ruler of the authority *[NOT power]* of the air, of the spirit that is now working** in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom also **we all once lived in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind**, and were by nature children of wrath, as also the rest.

Have you wondered why God does not broadcast His influence upon the world the same way Satan does? Many translations say *power* in verse 2 but it is AUTHORITY. This verse basically says that the Prince[6] of the world—Satan—was given "**the**

[3] *Sabbath Thought 2025-03-08 - Keep the Feast With Sincere Sincerity*.
[4] *Sabbath Thought 2025-11-08 - The Gift of Fruits of the Spirit*.
[5] Job 32:8; Eccl. 3:21.
[6] John 16:11.

authority of the air." Satan has AUTHORITY to broadcast HIS influence—the Spirit of Satan—throughout the earth. The Spirit of Satan is the main influence upon the Spirit in Man in this world, producing THOUGHTS that are Works of the Flesh.

The Spirit in Man is not something that can be broadcast. It simply allows a physical mind to understand and think but it is susceptible to emotions, physical stimuli, and spiritual influence. The choice Adam and Eve made was whether the primary spiritual influence would be the Spirit of Satan that influences a mind to focus on the self and the Spirit of God that influences a mind toward others. But it gets worse. Even those with the Spirit of God dwelling in them are still influenced by the Spirit of Satan because he has the AUTHORITY to do so. This is why a WAR exists in the human mind between the Spirit of Satan and Spirit of God—no one can simply *replace* the influence of the Spirit in Satan with the Spirit of God:

> [TS2009] ROMANS 7:21-23 I *[Paul]* find therefore this law, that **when I wish to do the good, that the evil is present with me.** 22 For I delight in the [Law] of [God] according to the inward man, 23 but **I see another [law] in my members, battling against the [law] of my mind**, and bringing me into captivity to the [law] of sin which is in my members.

Adam and Eve made a choice for all mankind. The choice now is not between the influence of the Spirit of Satan and the Spirit of God, it is a war AGAINST the Spirit of Satan FOR the Spirit of God. This is the point when Jesus said:

> MATTHEW 5:28 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you that **whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart**.

Adultery is one of the Works of the Flesh. The influence of the Spirit of Satan on the Spirit in Man produces the THOUGHT that leads to the act. But it is important to understand that Satan does not have to target someone with his influence, he has the authority to saturate the "air" with his evil influence. Paul talked about this:

> [TS2009] ROMANS 7:5 For when we were **in the flesh *[of a carnal mind]*, the passions *[emotions]* of sins**, through the [Law], **were working in our members to bear fruit to death**.

Emotions and physical stimuli are powerful influences upon the human mind but the "**passions of sins**" are great temptations by the Spirit of Satan. On the other hand, Jesus also said:

> MATTHEW 5:44 "But I *[Jesus Christ]* say to you, **love** your enemies, **bless** those who curse you, **do good** to those who hate you, and **pray** for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

The Fruits of the Spirit are works but the THOUGHTS behind these Good Works come from the influence of the Spirit of GOD upon the Spirit in Man. Paul calls it having "the mind of Christ."[7] God said "the **thoughts** that I think **toward** you *[are]*

[7] 1 Cor. 2:16.

thoughts of peace and not of evil."[8] He IS agape love[9] so His thoughts are Good Works toward us. Works are a measure of a person's thoughts[10] because works are the result of influence either by the Spirit of Satan or the Spirit of God:

> MATTHEW 7:16-18 "**You will know *[whether people are good or evil]* them by their fruits.** Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? 17 "Even so, **every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit.**

Have you ever wondered what Jesus meant when He said in John 15:16, I appoint you that you "should go and bear fruit, and *that* **your fruit should remain *[abide, endure]***?" The Fruits of the Spirit are Good Works for others. Works are the result of thoughts; therefore, fruit that abides and endures over time is evidence that mind that is becoming agape love by the consistent influence of the Spirit of God!

People are known by their fruits (Good Works) but they are also a means to assess our own minds. When Works of the Flesh are exhibited, the Spirit of Satan is likely the influence. When Good Works of the Fruits of the Spirit are manifest, the Spirit of God is likely the influence. Someone might ask how does one actually become agape love? How does someone produce Good Works that are Fruits of the Spirit?

> HEBREWS 5:13-14 For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is,* **those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil**.

Skill comes through practice and repetition. Intentionally DOING *Good* Works reject the Spirit of Satan and allow the Spirit of God to influence and dominate our thoughts. Jesus judged the *ekklesia* in the townships in Revelation 2-3 by their WORKS[11]. That is also the message of the Parable of the Talents[12]. Judgment to eternal life or death is based upon works because they are a measure of the thoughts of the mind. That is why Good Works are required for SALVATION! Rejecting the Spirit of Satan and embracing the Spirit of God in our thoughts can be as simple as DOING Good Works of the Fruits of the Spirit unto others. Purposeful giving the gifts of joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control is of the Spirit of God—the WAY of agape love and life.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[8] Jer. 29:11.
[9] 1 John 4:8, 16.
[10] Also Matt. 7:20; 12:33; Luke 6:44.
[11] Rev. 2:2, 9, 13, 19, 23; 3:1, 8, 15.
[12] Matt. 25:14-30.

LISTING OF 70 WORKS OF THE FLESH

1) Abomination (detestable, disgusting)
2) Adultery
3) Anger (violent passion)
4) Backbiting
5) Bitterness
6) Blasphemy (evil-speaking)
7) Boasting
8) Clamor (pandemonium, uproar)
9) Coarse jesting (sarcasm)
10) Condemnation
11) Contention (quarrels, strife)
12) Covenant breaking (untrustworthy)
13) Covetousness (avarice, extortion, fraud, greed)
14) Cowards
15) Deceit
16) Devising evil
17) Disobedient
18) Dissension (sedition)
19) Drug sorcery (witchcraft)
20) Drunkenness
21) Effeminate
22) Envy (ill will)
23) Evil desire
24) Extortion (exploitation, predatory, swindlers, violent greed)
25) Filthiness (obscene)
26) Filthy language
27) Foolish (undignified) talking
28) Fornication
29) Gossip
30) Greed
31) Hatred (hostility)
32) Heresy (factions, denominations, disunions)
33) Idolatry
34) Impious (God-haters)
35) Incest
36) Jealousy
37) Kidnapping
38) Lewdness (lasciviousness, licentiousness)
39) Lying (deceit)
40) Lust
41) Malice
42) Meddling (busibodies)
43) Mischievousness (bad character)
44) Murder
45) Perjury
46) Pride
47) Prostitution
48) Quarrels
49) Revelry (carousing)
50) Reviling (abusers, criticism)
51) Rivalry (emulation)
52) Selfish ambition
53) Sexual immorality
54) Slander
55) Sodomites (homosexuals)
56) Spiteful (insulting)
57) Strife (wrangling debate)
58) Talebearing (tattlers)
59) Theft
60) Unbelievers (untrustworthy)
61) Uncleanness (satanic)
62) Undiscerning
63) Unforgiving
64) Unloving
65) Unmerciful
66) Unrighteousness (treachery, injustice, wickedness)
67) Wantonness
68) Wickedness (depravity)
69) Whispering
70) Wrath

NOTE: Compiled from Rom. 1:29-31; 13:13; Gal. 5:19-21, Eph. 4:29-31; 5:3-5; Col. 3:5, 8; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1 Tim. 1:9-10; 3:1-5, 11; 5:13 and Rev. 21:8.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-11-22—JESUS' LAST WISH

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

On His last night on this earth, Jesus gave a NEW commandment:

> JOHN 13:34-35 "**A new commandment** I *[Jesus Christ]* give to you, that you **love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another**. 35 "**By this all will know** that you are My disciples, if you **have love for one another**."

What did Jesus mean that "all will know that you are my disciples?" Presumably, it is referring to Believers recognizing others in the Body of Christ. However, in His last words to the twelve disciples before His crucifixion, Jesus beseeched God for one thing above all others and you may be surprised to find out the reason for it:

> JOHN 17:11, 20-23 "Now I *[Jesus Christ]* am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, **that they may be one as We *are***. … 20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also *[pray]* for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "*[I pray]* **that they all may be one**, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; **that they also may be one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, **that they may be one just as We are one**: 23 "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.

Jesus prayed FIVE times "that they may be one" with EACH OTHER in the same way that He and His Father ARE one! Who are *they*? All the disciples (v. 11), including the twelve, as well as all "who will believe in Me though their word" (v. 20). *They* refers to every Believer from the apostles to the end of the age. But most surprising of all, Jesus prayed that Believers would be one with each other so that the world would KNOW and BELIEVE that He was sent by God the Father—He repeated it TWICE! When Jesus said "**all** will know" He was referring to the WORLD, not just Believers!

Oneness among the one Body of Christ is how the world can know and believe that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah sent by God the Father!

FIVE TIMES Jesus urged God to "keep *[guard, keep an eye on]* through Your *[God the Father's]* name" the Believers so they would be one with each other! In the modern vernacular this could be, "In the name of God, be ONE with each other!" Unity of Believers weighed heavily upon Him likely because He knew what would happen; the worst occurring during the Great Tribulation[1]:

> MATTHEW 24:9-10 "Then they will deliver you *[the saints]* up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. 10 "And then many *[saints]* will be offended, will betray one another, and **will hate one another**.

[1] Also Mic. 7:1-6; Ezek. 38:19-21; Matt. 10:21; Mark 13:12; Luke 21:16;

A good portion of the New Testament record is dedicated to pleadings against divisions, dissentions, and offenses. Just as Jesus beseeched God, Paul also pleaded for oneness among Believers:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10 Now **I *[Paul]* plead *[beseech, implore, entreat]* with you, brethren**, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and ***that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together** in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Similar entreaties were made by Paul to Believers in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, and Philippi as well as to Timothy and Titus and by James to the Twelve Tribes[2]. Perhaps the most heartfelt plea was to the Ephesians:

> EPHESIANS 4:1-7, 11-13, 15-16 I *[Paul]*, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, **beseech *[plead, implore, entreat]* you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness *[humility]* and gentleness *[meekness]*, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love**, 3 endeavoring to **keep the unity of the Spirit** in the bond of peace. 4 *There is* **one body and one Spirit**, just as you were called in **one hope** of your calling; 5 **one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father** of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all. 7 But **to each one of us grace was given** according to the measure of Christ's gift. … 11 And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 **till we all come to the unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; … 15 but, speaking the truth in love, **may grow up in all things into Him** who is the head–Christ– 16 **from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body **for the edifying of itself in love**.

In my experience, the hate among Believers today continues to increase. While it is likely not yet the magnitude of hate during the Great Tribulation, it is there just as it was in the days of the apostles. Hatred causes divisions. Few seem to take seriously keeping the "**unity of THE SPIRIT**" and the "**unity of THE FAITH**" with each other in "**all [humility] and [meekness], with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.**" Even though there is *one* Body, *one* Spirit, *one* hope, *one* Lord Jesus, *one* faith, *one* baptism, and *one* God, there is no unity when there is hate among Believers, as is evident in those who:

- Believe a man or organization is the best or only source of 'truth';
- Believe a man has authority to disfellowship a Believer from the Body of Christ;
- Reject a Believer who questions the teachings of a man or organization;
- Condemn Non-believers who are not yet called;
- Reject a Believer simply because your preacher tells you to;
- Ignore or reject a Believer simply because someone else does;
- Ignore or reject a Believer who fellowships with another organization;
- Reject a Believer who has different understandings of prophecy;

[2] Acts 15:7-10; Rom. 12:1-21; 14:1, 20-21; 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:3-4; 8:9-13; 10:32-33; 11:18-19; 2 Cor. 2:6-8; Eph. 5:6; Phil 1:9-10; 2:3, 14; 4:2; 1 Tim. 1:6; 6:3-5, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14-18; Titus 3:9; Jas. 3:1-2

- Reject a Believer who makes a mistake;
- Ignore or reject a Believer even when they sincerely try to reconcile;
- Assume a serious trial that comes upon a Believer is punishment from God;
- Is pleased when a serious trial comes upon a Believer—even if they did sin.
- Ignore or reject a Believer in need;
- Ignore or reject a Believer in need because they believe their organization will provide for him or her;
- Ignore or reject fellowship with a Believer during the Feast of Tabernacles;
- Refuse to wash the feet of a Believer during the Passover;
- Criticize a Believer whose child does not behave in an 'approved' manner;
- Take sides in an offense between Believers without hearing both sides;
- Take sides in marital issues between Believers without knowing both sides;
- Ignore or reject fellowship with a Believer who is poor or does not have a nice home, car, clothes, etc.
- Gossip about other Believers;
- Listen to gossip about other Believers;
- Criticize or condemn other Believers for any reason.

These are not imagined problems and the list could go on and on. I have personally witnessed every single one of them at least once. I have been guilty of some of them and you have as well. The problem is lack of humility, meekness, and longsuffering in agape love. We demand perfection from others but expect others to be tolerant of our own faults, mistakes, and even sins. The disunity among Believers is an enormous problem. Every year, Believers partake of the yearly Passover without regard for the lack of agape love among them. The Day of Covering (aka, Atonement) is not about resolving divisions and offenses. Unity in the *one* Body, *one* Spirit, *one* hope, *one* Lord Jesus, *one* faith, *one* baptism, and *one* God is through the ONE bread of the Passover:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16-17 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not **the communion *[intimate fellowhip]*** of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not **the communion *[intimate fellowhip]*** of the body of Christ? 17 For **we, *though* many, are one bread *and* one body; for we all partake of that one bread**.

Communion at Passover is an intimate fellowship of Believers through the ONE bread, which is the ONE Body of Christ! There is NO intimate fellowship without unity. Is it possible that the majority of this world do not believe that Jesus Christ was sent by the Most High God because there is an lack of unity among Believers? I wonder how much different the world would be if there was unity in the *one* Body of Christ! Unity among Believers must include the WHOLE Body of Christ, not just an organization. Good Works are a measure of agape love and I know of only a few who help other Believers in need but even they seem to think that "the household of faith"[3] is limited to members of their organization.

[3] Gal. 6:10.

What is the solution? How can the entire Body of Christ be one with each other? First, accept the fact that there are more than a few *true* Believers outside of your organization; second, accept the fact that other Believers may have different non-salvational beliefs and teachings (that does not make them wrong!); third, accept the fact that each member of the Body of Christ has different gifts from God who intends them to be USED to serve others[4]:

> ROMANS 12:1-15 I *[Paul]* beseech *[plead, implore, entreat]* you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. 3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think *of himself* more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. 4 For as **we have many members in one body**, but all the members do not have the same function, 5 so **we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. 6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, *let us use them [put those gifts to USE!!!!]:*** if prophecy, *let us prophesy* in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, *let us use it* in *our* ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. 9 *Let* love *be* without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. 10 *Be* kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor *[appreciation]* giving preference to one another; 11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; 13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

Each Believer has different gifts according to the grace of God. While these include prophesying, ministering, and teaching, the greater gifts, in my opinion, are exhortations, giving, leading, mercies, and agape love. The gifts of God USED to do Good Works unify the Body of Christ if done with affection, brotherly love, and honor toward one another. Being kindly affectionate, giving preference, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, steadfast in prayer, distributing to the needs of the saints, and given to hospitality build oneness among Believers. Jesus last and heartfelt desire for Believers was "that they may be one" with EACH OTHER, in the same way that He and His Father ARE one! Unity comes by using the gifts God has given to everyone. Oneness among the one and only Body of Christ is vital because it is how the world can know and believe that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah sent by The Father to redeem the world from death unto eternal life in the Kingdom of God!

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[4] Also 1 Cor. 12:4-27.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-11-29—TEACH US TO PRAY

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

You want to go to the store but cannot find your car keys. While searching you mutter under your breath, "God, please help me find my keys." I imagine everyone has prayed such things. Some might think to themselves, what is wrong with that? I have faith and look to God for everything. But in many ways, this is like bursting into the throne room of the Most High God and interrupting by asking the Almighty God to stop everything and find your car keys. So, is that kind of prayer appropriate? Does it honor the Great King of the universe or is it disrespectful? Or is it like a small child running up to his or her parents to interrupt them and demand they go look for their toy? Would you, as the Creator of the heavens and earth, be entreated by a seven-word prayer for an inconvenience (not an emergency), giving no heed to His immeasurable greatness, glory, and eternal works? Those of us old enough will remember parents teaching children not to interrupt adults but to be respectful and address them properly. That has gone by the wayside and prayers, too, seem to lack a basic respect for God. Maybe it is time to take a new look at prayers.

Prayer is, I believe, the most important part of the life of a Believer. Through prayer comes the power and mind of God; without it, there is confusion and ignorance. So HOW should we pray? Do we pray to God alone or can we pray to Christ? What are the roles of God the Father and Jesus Christ in our prayers?

Prayer is a connection that grows as a relationship with God matures. The same was true of the disciples. As their awareness of God the Father increased, they desired to have a deeper relationship with Him. Once, after Jesus finished praying to the Father, the disciples asked Him to teach them to how pray to God. This was a milestone because, throughout His ministry, the disciples simply spoke with Jesus; they did not need to petition God:

> LUKE 11:1 Now it came to pass, as He *[Jesus Christ]* was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, *that* one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, **teach us to pray**, as John also taught his disciples."

Like all interactions with God, there are rules for prayer—a framework that governs acceptable prayers to God. Jesus taught:

> LUKE 11:2 So He *[Jesus Christ]* said to them, "When you pray, say: **Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as *it is* in heaven**.

Jesus said to begin a prayer by hallowing God's name, seeking God's Kingdom, and desiring God's will to prevail in our lives. God the Father is the Most High God and Great King[1] over all creation and all living beings[2], including Jesus Chris, so acknowledging His preeminence is important. Hallowing or revering God's *name* is required; in fact, He DEMANDS it:

> LEVITICUS 10:3 Then Moses said unto Aaron, this *is it* that the LORD spake, saying, **I will be sanctified in *[or by]* them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified**. And Aaron held his peace.

[1] Ps. 47:2; 48:2; 95:3; Matt. 5:35.
[2] Eph. 4:6.

LEVITICUS 22:32 "**You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed** among the children of Israel. I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you,

MALACHI 1:11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, **My name *shall be* great** among the Gentiles; in every place **incense *shall be* offered to My name, and a pure offering**; for **My name shall be great** among the nations," says the LORD of hosts.

All who come NEAR to God shall regard Him as holy and glorify His name. Anything less is unacceptable. Next, we are to "seek the Kingdom of God"[3]—nothing is more important. Focus on the things above that will not vanish[4] when the Kingdom comes. The greatest of all "**the gifts of God** is eternal life"[5] and "your Father who is in heaven **give[s] good things to those who ask** Him!"[6] If "it is your Father's good pleasure **to give you** the kingdom,"[7] why would He withhold the small things needed in this life? God the Father KNOWS you need them and will provide them if you put His Kingdom above all else.

Also beseech God for His WILL to prevail in your life, especially in the things you ask of Him. It is by His will that any will be in the Kingdom or receive anything in this life. Epaphras once prayed that the Colossians "stand perfect and complete **in all the will of God**."[8]

So, the beginning of a prayer to God, aside from dire emergencies, shall hallow, honor, and praise God's NAME, seek God's KINGDOM, and ask for God's WILL to prevail in your life. Only after this did Jesus say to offer petitions for yourself or others:

LUKE 11:3 **Give us** day by day our daily bread. 4 And **forgive us** our sins, [as] we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And **do not lead us** into temptation, but **deliver us** from the evil one."

These four requests—give us (those things we need), forgive us (as we forgive others), lead us (into righteousness and love), and deliver us (from all evil)—are beautiful lead-ins for all petitions of the Father, whether they are for ourselves or others.

Finally, as time for His death grew near, Jesus told the disciples He was going to the Father and, when that happened, they would no longer ask Him for anything but would pray to the Father—and then He told them to pray in His name:

JOHN 16:23 "And in that day **you will ask Me *[Jesus Christ]* nothing**. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you **ask the Father in My name He will give** you.

That was a major pronouncement because, as Jesus Christ acknowledged, God the Father was Lord of heaven and earth:

MATTHEW 11:25 At that time Jesus answered and said, "I thank **You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth**, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.

[3] Matt. 6:33.
[4] 1 Cor. 13.
[5] Rom. 6:23.
[6] Matt. 7:11.
[7] Luke 12:32.
[8] Col. 4:12.

So, what changed? The fulfillment of the prophecy[9] of a promise God the Father made to Jesus that bestowed upon Him the title of Lord with all authority over heaven and earth after He was born of flesh and blood:

> LUKE 1:31-32 "And behold, you *[Mary]* will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name **JESUS. 32 "He will be great**, and will be **called the Son of the Highest**; and the **Lord God will give Him the throne** of His father David.

God the Father anointed[10] Jesus as The Messiah and established Him as Lord of heaven and earth when He became His Son. The latter apparently happened on the day of the Wavesheaf Offering after His resurrection because Jesus announced it shortly afterward:

> MATTHEW 28:18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth**.

A *lord* (G2962 = *kurios*) is someone with power and authority; a master or ruler. Why pray in the name of "Lord" Jesus? Because He has the authority over the heavens and earth! Supplications are directed toward God the Father because He is supreme; however, petitions are done in the name of Jesus Christ—He is Lord, Master, and Ruler of heaven and earth—because He has the authority and power to carry out the works that fulfill God's will. Prayers are directed toward God the Father to influence His will and gain favor but asked in the name of Jesus Christ[11] whom God appointed as Lord to fulfill those petitions:

> JOHN 14:13-14 "And **whatever you ask *[of God the Father]* in My *[Jesus Christ]* name, that I will do**, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14 "**If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it.***"

Some (Protestants) pray to the 'Lord God'. Even though God the Father was Lord over all and will be once again[12], Jesus Christ is currently Lord of the heavens and earth, not God the Father. So, praying to the 'Lord God' is confusing because there is one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ[13]:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 8:6 yet for us *there is* **one God, the Father**, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and **one Lord Jesus Christ**, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*.

Perhaps one reason prayers have become so casual is a misunderstanding of one particular Scripture:

> HEBREWS 10:19 Therefore, brethren, **having boldness to enter the Holiest** by the blood of Jesus,

In English, *bold* means everything from *daring* to *reckless*. It should be obvious that approaching God with such an attitude is dangerous. Verse 19 describes those with the Holy Spirit coming into the Holy of Holies; that is, in the presence of God. In contrast, under the Old Covenant, the Temple veil prevented direct access to the Holy of Holies

[9] Ps. 132:11; Isa. 9:6-7; 16:5; Jer 23:5 et al.
[10] Ps. 2:2; 23:5; 45:7; Isa. 61:1; Dan. 9:24 et al.
[11] Also John 15:16; 16:23, 26; Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; Jas. 1:5.
[12] 1 Cor. 15:24-25.
[13] Also 2 Cor. 1:2-3.

where God's Mercy Seat was located. Once a year, the High Priest only was allowed to enter but even he had to burn incense on the altar so that a cloud hid the Mercy Seat[14]. NO ONE could be in the direct presence of God, not even the High Priest! Anyone daring to do so would DIE.

That changed with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because there is now complete remission of sin[15] through His blood, making people SINLESS! People who are without sin can actually be in the PRESENCE of God! This is why people can have "boldness" coming into the presence of God—they are sinless and will not DIE. Coming boldly into the Holy of Holies is not talking about coming to God with a particular attitude, but with the assurance that we will not die in His presence. Coming in sinlessness through the blood of Christ is the "new and living way":

> HEBREWS 10:20-22 **by a new and living way** which He *[Jesus Christ]* consecrated for us, **through the veil**, that is, His flesh, 21 and *having* a High Priest over the house of God, 22 **let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil *[wicked]* conscience and our bodies washed with pure water**.

Even though we can enter into His presence, God still demands the reverence, respect, and honor that Jesus taught the disciples. This is coming before God in TRUTH (without lies), with the fullness of FAITH in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (making us sinless), and hearts CLEANSED from wicked thoughts.

As for the car keys, if instead of the 3-4 second prayer, what if you stopped everything, paused, took a deep breath, and then prayed:

> "God of all mercies. You are above all in might and power, wisdom and intelligence, mercy and love. To you belong all the honor, praise, and worship my lips can utter. I offer thanksgiving to you for all the blessings in my life. I desire always to be an instrument of your goodness and kindness toward others, so help me proclaim your awesome and wondrous works to an undeserving world. I come before you, Holy Father, your humble and contrite servant, in a moment of frustration and exasperation for I have lost my car keys and have need of them. Please restore the peace of my Lord and King, Jesus Christ, unto me and guide my search for them. In His blessed name I pray. Amen!"

This prayer, lasting only about a minute, is a far cry from the first one. It hallows God's name and honors the Most High Creator and His lovingkindnesses. It acknowledges Jesus as Lord who does the works that fulfill God's will to establish children in His Kingdom. And it is submitting to the will of our God and His Lord with a heart and mind that respects, honors, and glorifies Them!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[14] Lev. 16:13.
[15] Matt. 26:28.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-12-06—GOD IS A DESPOT

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

During the days of Paul, there were both slaves and masters among those "called in the Lord." One such was Onesimus, a slave of Philemon. At some point Onesimus escaped from Philemon, perhaps having also stolen from him, and somehow came into contact with Paul who was bound in chains in Rome. After his conversion, Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter, saying:

> PHILEMON 1:10, 15-16 I *[Paul]* appeal to you *[Philemon]* for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten *while* in my chains, … 15 For perhaps he departed for a while for this *purpose,* that you might receive him forever, 16 **no longer as a slave but more than a slave–a beloved brother**, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Paul was acutely aware that slaves were often harshly treated by their masters and the animosity it caused between them. Several times in his writings Paul admonished slaves to obey their masters as they would Jesus Christ and masters to treat their slaves knowing that they themselves were in bondage to Jesus Christ:

> EPHESIANS 6:5-9 **Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ**; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but **as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord**, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free. 9 And you, **masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven**, and there is no partiality with Him.
>
> COLOSSIANS 3:22 **Bondservants, obey in all things your masters** according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God.
>
> COLOSSIANS 4:1 **Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair**, knowing that **you also have a Master in heaven**.

The bible mentions slaves, bondservants, and servants (or housemen and maids). These are all different roles in biblical times even though they are all usually translated from the same Greek word *doulos* (G1401). Context in Scripture determines the correct translation.

DEFINITIONS:

1) Slaves were forced into servitude and were considered to be purchased property having no personal rights or freedoms.

2) Bondservants were similar to slaves but were often those who voluntarily chose to remain in servitude even after being offered their freedom.

3) Servants were free persons who were hired help that could leave their service anytime. Those who served a 'household' (referring to hired hands in general, not specifically a butler or maid) are an example of servants.

In the above verses, *master* is always translated from the Greek word *kurios* (G2962), which is mostly translated *lord* elsewhere. In the context of slaves and bondservants, *kurios* refers to the slave *master* who had authority over them. However, there is another word translated *master* and it is used only ten times in the Bible. It ALWAYS refers to the master of slaves, bondservants, or servants:

> 1 TIMOTHY 6:1-2 Let as many **bondservants *[G1401* = doulos*]*** as are under the yoke count their own **masters *[G1203* = despotes*]*** worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and *His* doctrine may not be blasphemed. 2 And those who have believing **masters *[G1203* = despotes*]***, let them not despise *them* because they are brethren, but rather serve *them* because those who are benefited are believers and beloved. Teach and exhort these things.
>
> TITUS 2:9 *Exhort* **bondservants *[G1401* = doulos*]*** to be obedient to their own **masters *[G1203* = despotes*]***, to be well pleasing in all *things*, not answering back,
>
> 1 PETER 2:18 **Servants *[G3610* = oiketes*]***, *be* submissive to *your* **masters *[G1203* = despotes*]*** with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

The Greek word for *master* is *despotes* in the verses above, from which is derived the English word *despot*. A despot literally means a ruler in a position of absolute power. Although despot is usually associated with a ruler who is cruel and oppressive, that is not part of the strict meaning. However, notice the verses that use *despotes* outside the context of slavery:

> LUKE 2:25-29 And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. 26 And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the **Lord's *[G2962* = kurios*]* Christ**. 27 So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, 28 he took Him up in his arms and blessed **God** and said: 29 "**Lord *[G1203* = despotes = *God the Father]***, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word;
>
> ACTS 4:24 So when they heard that, they *[Peter, John, and others]* **raised their voice to God** with one accord and said: "**Lord *[G1203* = despotes = *God the Father],* You *are* God**, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,
>
> 2 TIMOTHY 2:21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the **Master *[G1203* = despotes = *God the Father]***, prepared for every good work.
>
> REVELATION 6:9-10 When He *[Jesus Christ]* opened the fifth seal, I *[John]* saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the

testimony which they held. 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O **Lord *[G1203* = despotes = *God the Father]***, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

In all these verses, whether translated "Lord" or "Master," *despotes* refers only to God the Father, NOT Jesus Christ. In fact, they would be better translated *Master* because *despotes* means absolute ruler. There are many, many scriptures where Jesus Christ is called by the title of Lord (*kurios*) and a fair number where the same refers to God the Father. So, *kurios* can point to either one. However, outside of the context of slavery, despot ONLY refers to God the Father. Notice another verse where *kurios* refers to Jesus Christ and *despotes* refers to God the Father but both are translated *Lord*:

JUDE 1:4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only **Lord *[G1203* = despotes*]* God *[the Father]*** and our **Lord *[G2962* = kurios*]* Jesus Christ**.

If there is still uncertainty, notice the last verse that contains *despotes*:

2 PETER 2:1 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the **Lord *[G1203* = despotes = *God the Father]* who bought them**, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction.

Lord, as Despot or Supreme Ruler, always points to God the Father because HE paid the price to liberate people who were in bondage to sin:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *that is* in you, whom you have from **God *[the Father]***, and you are not your own? 20 For **you were bought at a price**; therefore glorify God in **your body and in your spirit, which are God's**.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:23 **You *[pl. = ALL of you]* were bought at a price**; do not become slaves of men.

The price or wages for sin[1] is death. The ransom that God the Father paid was the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ[2]. Why is God the Father called a Despot? Because *despotes* refers to the owner or master of a slave or bondservant. It is derived from *deo* which means to bind. Slavery was common in times past and slaves had no rights. Slaves were the PROPERTY of the master and could be bought and sold according to his will.

But there is another form of slavery in which every single person on earth is or has been held captive without even knowing it—sin. All are or have been slaves of sin[3].

[1] Rom. 6:23.
[2] Isa. 53:6-11; Rom. 8:32; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:14; 10:5.
[3] John 8:34.

It was from the bondage of sin that God the Father ransomed people and made them HIS bondservants:

> ROMANS 6:16-20, 22-23 Do you not know that **to whom you present yourselves slaves *[or bondservants]* to obey, you are that one's slaves *[or bondservants]* whom you obey**, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that *though* **you were slaves of sin**, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And **having been set free from sin, you became ~~slaves~~ [bondservants] of righteousness**. 19 I speak in human *terms* because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members *as* **slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness** *leading* to *more* lawlessness, so now present your members *as* **~~slaves~~ [bondservants] *of* righteousness** for holiness. 20 For when you were **slaves of sin**, you were free in regard to righteousness. … 22 But now **having been set free from sin, and having become ~~slaves~~ [bondservants] of God**, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. 23 For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Because most translators do not understand the distinction of slave, bondservant, and servant, they are seemingly used rather randomly. However, it would be better to refer to those in bondage to sin as *slaves* and refer to those ransomed by God as *bondservants*. This is because a slave has no choice in his service; whereas, a bondservant is a former slave who was freed and then chose to remain in servitude. Neither are the begotten children servants because they are not hirelings.

But how are God's children bondservants? They are children of God[4] but they are only BEGOTTEN, not yet born of spirit and inheriting all things[5]:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-44, 50 So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. ***The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.** 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. … 50 Now this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.

Flesh and blood cannot be full children of God—that requires a spirit body. Only when resurrected as spirit beings will they be true children of God:

> MATTHEW 5:9 Blessed *are* the peacemakers, for **they shall be *[future tense]* called sons *[or children]* of God**.

> LUKE 20:35-36 "But **those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead**, neither marry nor are given in marriage; 36 "nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and **are sons *[or children]* of God, being sons *[or children]* of the resurrection**.

[4] Gal. 3:26.1 John 3:1-2.
[5] Rev. 21:7.

The begotten children of God were slaves ransomed ("bought with a price") from sin. They belong to God but are still flesh and blood battling an existential spiritual war against a powerful, wicked spirit being and fighting temptations of the flesh[6]. The only path to victory is to "submit to God"[7] as humble bondservants:

> 1 PETER 2:16 as free *[men and women]*, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but **as bondservants of God**.

People are liberated as slaves to sin so that they can choose to become bondservants of God, choosing Him as Master—The Despot with absolute, supreme authority. Unlike human despots, God is full of mercy, compassion, and lovingkindness. By His love, God's children will not always be bondservants:

> ROMANS 8:20-21 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him *[God the Father]* who subjected *it* in hope; 21 because the creation itself also **will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God**.

The last thing that happens is flesh and blood will be liberated from the bondage of corruption—DEATH, "the last enemy *that* will be destroyed."[8] The children are delivered through the resurrection unto spirit and they will no longer be bondservants:

> GALATIANS 4:1-7 Now I say *that* **the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave**, though he is master of all, 2 but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. 3 Even so we, when we were children, were **in bondage under the elements of the world**. 4 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 **to redeem those** who were under the law, that we might receive the [appointment] as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 **Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son**, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

God speed that day!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[6] Eph. 6:12.
[7] Jas 4:7.
[8] 1 Cor. 15:26.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-12-13—GRAVE CONCERNS

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Peter said that the prophets revealed things even the "angels desire to look into." But he also said the prophecies were not revealed to themselves. Their message would not be fully understood until they were fulfilled at the coming of Jesus Christ:

> 1 PETER 1:12-13 To them ***[the prophets]*** **it was revealed** that, **not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things** which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven–things which angels desire to look into. 13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and **rest *your* hope fully** upon the grace that is to be brought to you at **the revelation of Jesus Christ *[as the sacrificial Lamb of God]***;

The message, of course, was "knowledge of salvation … by the remission of their sins."[1] That message of salvation unto the Gospel of the Kingdom of God has spread and touched the lives of many. Through that message, God has called many unto salvation and, for them, this life is the only TIME of judgment:

> 1 PETER 4:17-18 For **the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house *[household]* of God**; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 Now "If **the righteous one is scarcely *[lit., with difficulty]* saved**, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?"

Everyone who is in covenant with God does so with a vow of obedience because there is an intense anticipation of eternal life[2] of joy unspeakable[3]. The bad news is that salvation is so *difficult* that even a "**righteous** one is scarcely saved." Jesus said "**many** are **called**, … **few** *are* **chosen**"[4] but it is likely worse than you ever imagined:

> LUKE 13:23-24 Then one said to Him *[Jesus Christ]*, "**Lord, are there few who are saved?**" And He said to them, 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for **many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able *[lit., not have the strength]***.

It is stunning that "**many** … will **not** be able" to enter into the Kingdom. However, the more important point that Jesus made is that "**many** … will **seek** to enter" into the Kingdom but "will not be able." Jesus is not describing "the ungodly and the sinner" that Peter mentioned, but those who were called and are actively SEEKING the Kingdom. Of all who are in covenant with God, Jesus said many will not be saved. By comparison, only a few—a small number, hardly any, some—will be saved! By itself, the word *many* does not imply a majority; however, when *many* is contrasted with *few*, it means the majority of those in covenant with God will not be saved!

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[1] Luke 1:77.
[2] Rom. 8:19.
[3] 1 Pet. 1:8.
[4] Matt. 22:14. Also Matt. 20:16.

This should be a grave concern for everyone who is called. The Bible gives many more warnings than assurances. For example, in letters to the various townships in Asia Minor[5], Jesus wrote to those who were called, not ungodly sinners. It is highly doubtful that His warnings were prompted by a few in each township. Instead, it is likely that the majority in the townships were falling short of being saved. He warned EVERY township to overcome. Overcome what? EVIL[6]. Do you understand the full extent of all this? Jesus is saying that the MAJORITY of those who are in covenant with God will NOT be saved because they have not overcome EVIL. This is the point of several parables. Notice the Parable of the Sower[7]:

> MATTHEW 13:20-22 "But he who received the seed on **stony places**, this is he who **hears the word and immediately receives it with joy**; 21 "yet **he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while.** For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. 22 "Now he who received seed **among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word**, and he becomes unfruitful.

The seed that fell on "stony places" and "among the thorns" was initially received and sprouted; that is, they were in covenant with God. However, they stumbled or became unfruitful, losing salvation.

Likewise, the Parable of the Virgins[8] says all ten were called into covenant with God. The Five Foolish Virgins, however, were not prepared when Jesus Christ returned. When they realized what they needed to do (Who told them? Their fellow virgins!), they went away to prepare themselves; however, upon their return they discovered too late that they had been judged unworthy of salvation:

> MATTHEW 25:11-13 "Afterward the other virgins *[the five foolish]* came also, saying, '**Lord, Lord, open to us!**' 12 "But he answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, **I do not know you**.'

Then there is the Parable of the Talents[9], which describes how people spend their lives after they were called. Two of the three made gains by living righteously and 'entered into the joy of their lord'. One, however, simply ignored the work of their calling and was "cast … into the outer darkness."

The Parable of the Wedding Feast[10] is interesting because it actually explains why so many will not be saved:

> MATTHEW 22:2-5, 8 "The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, 3 "and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and **they were not willing *[chose not]* to come**. 4 "Again, he sent out other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner; my

[5] Rev. 2-3.
[6] Rom. 12:21.
[7] Matt. 13:3-8, 18-23.
[8] Matt. 25:1-13.
[9] Matt. 25:14-30.
[10] Matt. 22:2-13.

> oxen and fatted cattle *are* killed, and all things *are* ready. Come to the wedding." ‘ 5 "But **they made light of *[neglected]* it** and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. … 8 "Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but **those who were invited were not worthy**.

The Greek behind the phrase "they were not willing" is that they CHOSE not to pursue their calling. Similarly, those who "made light of it" IGNORED their calling. Jesus said they are NOT WORTHY of the Kingdom! Again, this is the MAJORITY of the *ekklesia*, not ungodly sinners. It is also not my prediction nor my judgment—this is the prophetic judgment of JESUS CHRIST!

If you found out that you only had days or weeks to live, what would be your first thought? Would it be if you are worthy of salvation? If that is the first time you ask that question upon hearing the news of your pending death, one thing is certain—it is too late. Death can come upon any of us at any moment. Everyone in covenant with God needs to be striving—sincerely, intentionally, consciously—to be perfected in agape love, faith, and Good Works. Every. Single. Day.

In my experience, people spend much of their time judging OTHERS instead of themselves, but that comes with grave consequences:

> ROMANS 2:1-5 Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, **whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself**; for you who judge practice the same things. 2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things. 3 And **do you think** this, O man, **you who judge** those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you **will escape the judgment of God**? 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? 5 But **in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath** and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

Judging others is so widespread among the *ekklesia* it has almost become a recognized sport. Many even think that trials that come upon others are punishments from God! This is in spite of knowing that the Bible says over and over again that "all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."[11] This alone is immaturity and ignorance. The Bible makes it clear that no one has time to waste judging others or being angry, hateful, malicious, bitter, contentious, deceitful, meddling, condemning, prideful, gossipers, quarrelsome, critical, slanderers, unrepentant, or unforgiving. God promised to judge everyone including ourselves so we do not need to spend time doing it for Him:

> ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is [the whole duty of man]. 14 For **God will bring every work into judgment**, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

[11] And many other verses including: 2 Tim. 3:12. Also Rom. 8:17-18; 2 Cor. 1:7; Phil. 1:29; 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 2:12; 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:12; 2:19-21; 3:14; 4:13, 16, 19.

The *ekklesia* is under judgment NOW—today, tomorrow, and everyday after that, God willing. As Judge, Jesus Christ Himself prophesied that the MAJORITY are NOT WORTHY of being saved. That means that every time two people in covenant with God are together, it is likely that one of them will not be saved. If you were one of the two, is it YOU? Or will you be one of the FEW who are CHOSEN.

The Bible is filled with warning after warning. Still, God requires those who are ordained to warn the wicked of their pending death[12]:

> EZEKIEL 3:18-19 "When I *[the LORD]* **say to the wicked**, 'You shall surely die,' and **you give him no warning**, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked *man* shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. 19 "Yet, if you **warn the wicked**, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul.

But that is one of two warnings God requires. Did you know that God requires the RIGHTEOUS to also be warned?

> EZEKIEL 3:20-21 "Again, when a **righteous** *man* turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die; because you did not **give him warning**, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. 21 "Nevertheless if you **warn the righteous** *man* that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul."

Those who are in covenant with God but have not overcome evil will DIE. If salvation is so difficult that scarcely a righteous person will be saved, then every warning should be read as if our names were written in them. The prophecy of Jesus Christ is a GRAVE CONCERN because the majority of those with the Holy Spirit will end up in the Lake of Fire! Brethren, let us overcome evil by "speaking the truth in love *[and]* grow up in all things into Him who is the head–Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies *[Good Works]*, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love."[13] The work ahead is more difficult than can be imagined but the gift of God is more joy than can be imagined!

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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[12] Also 2 Chr. 19:9-10.
[13] Eph. 4:15-16.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-12-20—GENUINE FAITH

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Faith is the cornerstone of salvation. Jesus Christ was sacrificed for sins but a sinner must have faith that His shed blood covers and cleanses sins and that He bore those sins to His grave through death. His sacrifice brings about complete remission of sins for eternal salvation:

> LUKE 1:77 To give **knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins**,

There are many other scriptures[1], all of which should be familiar. While the above verse mentions a "knowledge", that word in the Greek is a knowledge that is absolute, exhaustive, and rational. It is not based upon personal observation or a perception that comes through physical senses. In other words, "knowledge of salvation" is grounded in the assurance and confidence of something immovable and undeniable. It is what leads to baptism in which a person is joined into the death of Jesus Christ. Although a simple symbolic ceremony, it is an expression of absolute faith! But faith unto salvation was a foreign concept to Gentiles who likely did not even have a grasp of sin. Perhaps this is why Paul described salvation in such detail to the Romans:

> ROMANS 3:21-26 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, 22 even the righteousness of God, **through faith in Jesus Christ**, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; 23 for **all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace **through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God set forth *as* a propitiation by His blood, through faith**, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, 26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**.

The faith required for remission of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is rare. It is more than simple understanding; it is an extraordinary depth of conviction of both the heart AND mind. For that reason, faith must proven[2]:

> 1 PETER 1:5-9 who are kept by the power of God **through faith for salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the **genuineness *[proof-testing]* of your faith**, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, **yet believing**, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the **end of your faith–the salvation** of *your* souls.

Peter calls faith unto salvation Genuine Faith and says it is more precious than fine gold. No one knows the value of gold unless it has been assayed or proof-tested for

[1] Matt. 26:28; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; 10:43; et al.
[2] Also Jas. 1:2-4.

purity. God does the same for Genuine Faith through trials. But why does God need to assay and prove faith? If a person had Genuine Faith in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, why does faith need to be proven after baptism?

There are two primary reasons, the first being that Genuine Faith is required for more than remission of sins. Once sins are cleansed and remitted, the sinner must be forgiven—and that, too, requires faith:

> 1 JOHN 1:7, 9 But if we walk in the light as He *[God the Father]* is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**. … 9 **If we confess our sins, He *[God the Father]* is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**.

Remission of sins alone is insufficient for salvation because it also requires the forgiveness of God. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ was the ransom from the penalty of death for those who were convicted of sin[3], but salvation requires a sinner to BE the opposite of sin—righteousness[4]:

> ROMANS 10:4, 10 For Christ *is* the end of the law **for righteousness to everyone who believes**. … 10 For **with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation**.

The problem is that a sinner whose sins are remitted is still, at best, an ex-Convict who was ransomed from serving out the sentence. Therefore, God has to pardon the conviction of the sinner. In fact, His forgiveness is so complete that He imputes His own perfect righteousness to the sinner, making the ex-Lawbreaker into a LAWKEEPER after the perfection of God the Father. Genuine Faith is required to believe and accept that the blood of Jesus Christ and God's forgiveness makes sinners sinless to the extent that Believers wear a robe of the righteousness of God Himself[5]. As confirmation of this, God then seals the person with the Holy Spirit[6]:

> EPHESIANS 1:12-13 that we who first **trusted in Christ** should be to the praise of His glory. 13 In Him you also *trusted,* after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, **having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit** of promise,

The Holy Spirit marks those who belong to God the Father[7] because of their Genuine Faith. It is given only to those whose sins are remitted and now are Lawkeepers after the righteousness of God:

> ROMANS 8:10-11 And if Christ *is* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin, but **the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness**. 11 But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He *[God the Father]* who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His *[God the Father's]* Spirit [that] dwells in you.

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[3] Rom. 6:23.
[4] Also Rom. 3:22; Gal. 5:5; Phil. 3:9.
[5] Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:3-4.
[6] Acts 2:38; 10:45; Heb. 2:4; 6:4.
[7] Ps. 100:3; Rom. 14:8; Isa. 43:1; 1 Cor. 6:19; 1 John 4:4.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit in a person is the seed of begettal unto eternal life:

> JOHN 3:5-6 Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is **born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God**. 6 "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

God the Father seals those who have Genuine Faith with the Holy Spirit. But having the Holy Spirit requires faith in the doctrine of resurrection of the dead[8]:

> ROMANS 10:9 that if you **confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**.

Considering that only a handful of Believers witnessed Jesus Christ alive after His death, Genuine Faith is required to accept that God raised Him up from the grave and will do the same for all Believers.

All of this—remission of sins, ransom from death, pardon of the conviction for sin, transformation by the righteousness of God from a Lawbreaker to a Lawkeeper, and the resurrection from the dead—is the grace of God[9]:

> EPHESIANS 2:8 For **by grace you have been saved through faith**, and that not of yourselves; ***it is* the gift of God**,

God's grace of all that is required for salvation is an outpouring of His love for eternal children. Genuine Faith is required for salvation because only a few have actually witnessed the grace of God through His Son while He was on earth. A Gospel delivered by an unseen Creator God to fallible human beings produces Genuine Faith because it is life-changing. For that reason, Genuine Faith must be proven.

But there is another reason for testing Genuine Faith—over time it can grow or weaken. One of the threats that diminish faith is fear:

> JAMES 2:19 **You believe** that there is one God. You do well. Even **the demons believe–and tremble**!

There is no place for fear in faith. Instead of confident assurance that God will manifest the promised gift of eternal life to us *(personally)*, Fearful Faith anticipates or expects eternal death. Fearful Faith is NOT rooted in a sound mind[10]. It is faith tormented[11] by the same fear of the demons because it denies the whole desire of God is to save people[12]. Worse than Fearful Faith, however, is Futile Faith[13]:

> 1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-4, 12-13, 16-18 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you–unless **you believed in vain**. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that

[8] Heb. 6:2. Also Acts 17:31.
[9] Also Acts 15:11; 16:31.
[10] 2 Tim. 1:7.
[11] 1 John 4:18.
[12] John 3:16; 2 Pet. 2:1
[13] Also Heb. 10:38-39; 2 Thess. 2:8-12.

> He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, … 12 Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do **some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. 14 And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching *is* empty and your faith *is* also empty.** … 16 For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. 17 And if Christ is not risen, **your faith *is* futile *[useless]***; you are still in your sins! 18 Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

Every single aspect of the grace of God—remission of sins, ransom from death, pardon of the conviction for sin, and transformation by the righteousness of God from a Lawbreaker to a Lawkeeper—is part of salvation. Questioning any of these, like the Corinthians who doubted the resurrection—is Futile Faith because it denies the possibility of salvation. But the worst of all is Dead Faith:

> JAMES 2:17, 20 Thus also **faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead**. … 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that **faith without works is dead**?

Dead Faith is the result of a lack of agape love and Good Works. Someone can have Genuine Faith in remission of sins, ransom from death, pardon of the conviction for sin, and transformation by the righteousness of God from a Lawbreaker to a Lawkeeper for salvation but lack in agape love and Good Works—which are required for salvation and not matters of faith. This brings death instead of life. Genuine Faith without agape love and Good Works is pointless, useless, and *dead*.

Futile Faith, Fearful Faith, and Dead Faith are likely the main reason why too many Believers will not be saved. In reality, someone cannot truly have Genuine Faith WITHOUT also having agape love and Good Works. Genuine Faith, agape love, and Good Works cannot be separated:

> GALATIANS 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but **faith working through love**.

Genuine Faith is more precious than fine gold; as such, God assays or proof-tests the purity and steadfastness of faith because it is through trials that faith is purified even more. Unlike gold that does not change when it is assayed for purity, Genuine Faith actually becomes more pure during testing because it is "God who works in you"[14]:

> TITUS 2:14 *[Jesus Christ]* who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and **purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works**.

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[14] Phil. 2:13.

SABBATH THOUGHT 2025-12-27—The REAL Reason Christmas is Wrong

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

Christmas is one of the most revered celebrations of modern Christians. Along with Easter, in many ways it defines their beliefs. Most sincerely think they are honoring and worshipping God and Jesus Christ by keeping these days.

On the other hand, those who are opposed to this holiday usually note that, among other things, the birth of Jesus Christ was not in the winter and the Bible nowhere states that His birth is to be celebrated but, rather, His death.

However, the real reason that Christmas, and by extension all other 'religious' holidays, is wrong is much more primitive than the many intellectual arguments. Over the millennia, there have existed countless pagan religions, gods, and 'holidays'. A few are mentioned in some detail in the Bible, but in most cases God simply and vehemently condemns the gods of the pagan nations. Instead of addressing the evil of each pagan religious system, there is one specific incident in the Bible that is a stark example of why Christmas and other man-made 'feasts' are an abomination to God. That story is of the golden calf, which is seen by many as when the Israelites rejected God and turned back to worshipping pagan gods. Surprising as it might be, that is not what the Israelites did nor is it the reason God was so angry with them. Understanding what led to the golden calf is crucial because it almost led to the destruction of the whole Israelite nation (Exo. 32:10). It also is a warning against all days that men set aside to worship God. Read the main story of the golden calf:

> EXODUS 32:1, 4-6 Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us **gods *[Heb.* Elohim*]*** that shall go before us; for ***as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him**." … 4 And he *[Aaron]* received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and **made a molded calf**. Then they said, "**This *is* your god *[Heb.* Elohim*]***, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" 5 So when Aaron saw *it,* he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "**Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD.**" 6 Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

When reading these verses, people usually assume that the Israelites were making an image of an Egyptian god. While there were Egyptian influences going on, there is much more to the story. First of all, notice that the whole matter hinged on the fact that they were worried something had happened to Moses. Why would they be concerned about him? Because he was their MEDIATOR with God. They were so dependent upon him that, in their minds, it was actually MOSES who brought them out of Egypt (v1). They feared that Moses was dead and that was a serious matter because they utterly relied upon him for all communication with God. Recall that God had spoken to ALL the Israelites when they were at Mount Sinai. They were so filled with fear and terror that they said to Moses, "**You speak with us**, and we will hear; but **let not God speak with us**, lest we die." (Exod. 20:19).

By the time of the golden calf incident, the Israelites had heard God and witnessed many powerful miracles even though they repeatedly showed little faith that He would continue to provide for them. So, it would be surprising if the Israelites had forgotten about God a mere 40 days later.

If Moses had died on the mountain, the Israelites had a serious problem—how could know what God wanted them to do? So, they needed some other way to communicate with God. This is where they fell victim to their Egyptian influence and decided to make an image. However, it was not an image of a pagan god—verse 1 clearly says they wanted an image of ELOHIM, which most texts translate as "gods". The Israelites obviously knew the names of the Egyptian gods but Elohim is NOT the name of an Egyptian god, it was the name of THEIR God!

Unconvinced? Then note what the Israelites said: "make us **[Elohim]**" (v1). They did not use the name of any Egyptian god; they said ELOHIM, the name of their God. Notice also what Aaron said after making the image: "This *is* **your god *(singular)* *[Heb.* Elohim*]***, O Israel, **that brought you out of the land of Egypt**!" (Exod. 32:4). Again, Aaron named God. The Israelites were clearly NOT making an image of a pagan god.

Because the golden calf was an image of their God—Elohim—Aaron then dedicated it by having "a feast to the **LORD**" (v5). The word 'LORD' (all caps) in many translations comes from the Hebrew Tetragrammaton YHVH (Yehovah). Who was YHVH? Speaking to Moses, God said:

> EXODUS 3:13-15 Then Moses said to God, "Indeed, *when* I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What *is* His name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " 15 Moreover God said to Moses, "Thus **you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD *[YHVH]* God *[Elohim]*** of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. **This *is* My name forever**, and this *is* My memorial to all generations.'

The "LORD God" is YHVH Elohim in Hebrew and it is the name God told Moses to tell the Israelites! So, the Israelites KNEW the name of their God and their golden calf was an image of THEIR God.

But why a calf? The word for *calf* (Heb. `*egel*) can also mean a young male ox, especially one that has not yet been tamed with a yoke[1]. It is doubtful that the Israelites made an image of a helpless newborn calf to represent their God who was mighty and powerful. Instead, the image was of a young male ox in the prime of its strength that had never been tamed or put under a yoke. If you have ever seen pictures of oxen, they are large and powerful beasts. When provoked, a young and wild ox can be a frightful animal. The Israelites saw with their own eyes the power of God and, in their minds, He could not be tamed or defeated. A young wild ox is even how GOD described Himself[2]:

[1] Jer. 31:18.
[2] Also Num. 23:22.

NUMBERS 24:8 "God brings him *[Israel]* out of Egypt; **He has strength like a wild ox**; He shall consume the nations, His enemies; He shall break their bones And pierce *them* with His arrows.

Now the story of the golden 'calf' makes more sense. The Israelites needed to communicate with their God—YHVH Elohim—but Moses, their Mediator, was missing going on 40 days. In their minds, the solution was to make an image of Him. This was the method commonly used by the Egyptians and other nations to communicate with their gods. That God would communicate directly with them was something they still struggled to understand. Under the circumstances, they needed an image of YHVH Elohim and what better one than an all powerful and unbreakable young ox, just as God described Himself; the same One who brought them out of Egypt!

In all this, the Israelites had good motives or intentions, but making that image was a very serious mistake that cost the lives of 3,000 men[3]. They had not, at least in their minds, broken the first commandment ("have no other gods before Me") but they obviously violated the second commandment:

EXODUS 20:4-5 "**You shall not make for yourself a carved image**–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; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. …

Even though they made an image to YHVH Elohim and had dedicated it by declaring a feast day that included burnt and peace offerings (Exod. 32:5-6), God was furious. From the beginning, He had wanted a direct relationship with the Israelites. They were ALL to be His priests to the other nations:

EXODUS 19:6 'And you ***[the children of Israel]*** **shall be to Me a kingdom of priests** and a holy nation.' These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

But the Israelites were too fearful of God so they demanded that Moses be their mediator and lost that direct relationship. Moreover, as a result of the golden calf, all the tribes except Levi were disqualified from being priests. The Israelites failed from the start to be—and do—what God commanded them.

With this understanding of the golden calf, it is easy to understand the real reason that Christmas is wrong. First of all, note that the primary centerpiece of Christmas is the evergreen tree. While there are mangers, etc., the universal symbol is the tree itself. What does it signify? While most who keep Christmas cannot answer that question, God actually describes Himself like an evergreen tree!

HOSEA 14:8 "Ephraim *shall say,* 'What have I to do anymore with idols *[images]*?' I *[the LORD]* have heard and observed him *[Ephraim]*. **I *[the LORD] am* like a green cypress tree; your fruit is found in Me.**"

[3] Exod. 32:25-28.

The Christmas tree reflects God likening Himself to a cypress tree, just as the young ox portrayed YHVH Elohim. So, a Christmas tree is exactly the same as the golden calf—it is a violation of the second commandment.

Christmas is also a day that PEOPLE have made into a 'feast' to God—just as the Israelites did. In both cases God did not authorize those days to honor and worship Him. It does not matter that God characterizes Himself as an ox or an evergreen tree nor does it change anything if these days are dedicated by people in a feast with burnt and peace offerings. When God says NOT to make an image of anything in the entire universe or bow down to it, He means it! When He says to keep His Sabbaths and holydays, He means it! THIS is why Christmas is wrong—remember what God wanted to do to the Israelites! To ensure it never happened again, God later commanded:

> DEUTERONOMY 12:29-32 "When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, 30 "take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' 31 "**You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way**; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. 32 "**Whatever I command you, be careful *[take heed]* to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**"

God warns to precisely observe ALL His commands regarding how He is to be worshipped and served. No one is to add to or take away from them, no matter how good their intentions! God is NOT pleased with Christmas or any other manmade 'religious' holiday. He has commanded His people to worship Him on the weekly Sabbaths and holydays and NO OTHER DAYS! And that still applies to today:

> JOHN 4:23-24 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will **worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him**. 24 "God *is* Spirit, and **those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth**."

GOD tells us how to please Him, worship Him, and honor Him. No one is to add to what He has commanded or take away from it. To obey God REQUIRES a humble and contrite spirit:

> ISAIAH 57:15 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 spirit**, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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