

Bible Studies to do at home

“This is Life Eternal”



“That They Might Know Thee”

David Sims

Bible Studies

to do at home



Updated – January 27, 2014
Australian Edition
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Cover design & book layout by Thomas Akens

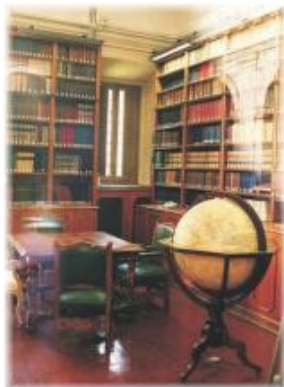
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“THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL”

IN John 17 we have the transcript of a prayer of Christ. He was even then standing in the shadow of the cross, yet His burden was for His disciples. In this touching prayer, rich with meaning, Christ gave a lesson which should be engraved on the mind and the soul. He said:

“This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” — John 17:3



This is true education. It imparts power. The experimental knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ whom He has sent is the power of God to transform man into his own image. It gives to man the mastery of himself, brings every impulse and passion of the lower nature under the control of the higher powers of the mind, and thus transforms its possessor into a son of God and an heir of heaven. It brings his mind into communion with the mind of the Infinite, and opens to his understanding the rich treasures of the universe.

This knowledge is not found without painstaking effort, for it is obtained by searching the word of God; yet it may be found by every soul who will give all to obtain it.

If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. — Proverbs 2:3-5

Human beings are infatuated with knowledge. Some spend years getting an “education”; others enjoy learning everything there is to know about sports, so that they can tell you every

statistic; others study automobiles, and can tell you the smallest differences in the different years and models; while still others inquire into the personal lives of all the movie stars. But what is the value of such knowledge? How can it compare with a knowledge that enables us to obtain eternal life?

A CASUAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD IS NOT ENOUGH

One day, as my daughter and I were playfully talking and laughing, she said something jokingly about someone, but I sensed that it was with some sarcasm. When I didn't respond, she exclaimed, "You are talking with your eyes!" So I asked,

"Well, what did I say?"

"You said I am being mean."

She knew me well. I didn't have to say anything. She already knew what I was thinking. Perhaps you too have a grandmother, husband/wife, sister/brother, or good friend, with whom you have or have had such a relationship. You know them so well that you can tell what they are thinking. You have been together so long, and admire one another so much, that you have come to think alike. When your eyes meet, you can read each other's thoughts. A look, a hand on the shoulder, a hug or a touch on the hand, all communicate a thousand things. You love to be together, and you hate being separated.

Have you ever thought of having such a close friendship with God? Have you ever imagined it possible to know and love Him, and know with a certainty that you too are loved by Him even more? Does it seem possible to you to trust Him so much that no circumstance can shake your confidence in His love? Do you expect answers to your prayers, and receive the things needed, because you asked exactly what He wanted to give you anyway? Do you think so much like Him, that before He asks, you have already thought of His desires for you, and are performing them? Does the thirst for His presence drive you like the weary deer to



the water? Jesus had just such a relationship with His Father, and it is our privilege to have it as well.

His intimate relationship with His Father and his desire for His followers to have the same relationship with their heavenly Father was the subject of Christ's last public prayer, recorded in John 17:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. — John 17:23

The closeness and intimacy that God desires with us was penned by the psalmist in the following language:

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. — Psalm 32:8

I had the opportunity once to ride a friend's horse. My friend was training this horse with a special method. The horse was trained to go in the direction its rider looked or pointed, without the rider having to direct it with the reins.

God longs for us to live so close to Him that when in thought or prayer we look to Him, we will know and understand His thoughts toward us, and be ready to carry out His will for us.

INTIMATE FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD IS POSSIBLE

In Hebrews we read of those,

Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection. — Hebrews 11:33-35

What kind of relationship was this, which gave them such experiences!

We read of Daniel that he was greatly beloved; Abraham was called the friend of God, and ate and talked with God; Enoch walked so closely with God, that God took him to be with Him; Moses spoke face to face with God as a man speaks with his friend; Job declared concerning God, "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him." John leaned on Jesus' breast, and so was referred to as the beloved (loved of Christ). We too can know God as did these godly men of old, and have that knowledge which "is life eternal."

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD WAS BROKEN

Adam enjoyed free and open communion with God. Morning and evening, in the "cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8), God came and talked with Adam and Eve; but sin changed all that. God, who dwells in glory unapproachable, could no longer commune with man.

With no communion possible, how was man to ever know God, much less have a close relationship with Him? We are helpless, powerless, and subject to the assaults of a powerful foe; but not so with God. We are constantly tempted, but He cannot be tempted. How are we ever to discover what He is truly like? How can we know how He would respond in an environment like ours, or how He thinks on any given matter? How can we, sinful, defiled creatures, ever hope to be able to enter into His presence, and communicate with the high and holy Creator; for we live in a world of sin so vastly different to the pure, holy, sinless, and glorious environment of heaven?

THE ANSWER

Jesus Christ is the answer to this all important question, for:

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. — 2 Corinthians 5:19

[God] Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds. — Hebrews 1:2

In Christ, we see and know God, because He whose character and attributes are the same as His Father's came to this sin darkened world and lived out the character of God in humanity.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.
— John 1:18

It is one thing to have a knowledge of God through another's life, but it is another thing to experience God's providence for ourselves – to commune with Him personally, to know our prayers are heard, and to recognize His leading and involvement in our lives. To have our faith so rooted and grounded in love that we will have an experience like those of Hebrews 11, "of whom the world was not worthy." God is calling us to this kind of experience!

THE PERSONALITY OF GOD

BEFORE we can have that deeper, personal experience with God, we must first start by seeking the knowledge of God. From Genesis to Revelation, God has revealed Himself as a personal God with a form; one with whom we can communicate freely; one whom we can know and trust:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God . . . — Genesis 3:8

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. — Revelation 21:3 (see also Revelation 4:2; 5:1)

The first step in knowing God is to believe that He exists:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. — Hebrews 11:6

Nature reveals the existence of God; whether we stoop to consider the minutest detail of the smallest flower, the awe inspiring complexity of the human body, or the perfect order in space; all testify of an intelligent Designer, a Creator.

Yet something more than mere belief in His existence is needed, for even the devils believe. To know *about* Him is not enough. Jesus tells us that we must know Him *personally*. We must know His character, not only *who* He is, but *what* He is like. We must know that He cares, and is involved in human affairs – “that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek him.” Our eternal life depends on this knowledge. Though it is a life and death issue, yet surprisingly many label both His character and His personality a “mystery”.

I once saw a set of audio recordings with the title “Our Fire and our Friend.” I am not condemning what the speaker had to say, but the title is itself a contradiction in terms, and serves to illustrate my point. A fire can warm us, but we cannot be friends with a fire. Fire cannot love us. It cannot understand our trials and difficulties, or sympathize with us in our weakness. We cannot have a meaningful relationship with a fire, neither can we have a relationship with an entity that is “purely spirit”. God would not tell us to know Him personally if He were simply a spirit – something as inanimate and intangible as fire. God is a person. This is the beginning of what we must know of Him, and it is a point which the Scripture makes plain.

GOD IS A PERSON

Someone once told me that he believed God was in the ocean, the trees, the flowers, etc. He went on to say that he himself was god, that I too was god, and that everything whether animate or inanimate was god, even a cup of water was god, or a “part of god”.



Such knowledge amounts to nothing, and makes the Creator simply a part of the creation. You see, without understanding the personality of God, we cannot have a vital relationship with Him. You simply cannot have a relationship with a tree, or a glass of water. Neither can we simply “look inside” ourselves for God. No, no, no!

MAN WAS MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. —
Genesis 1:27

In order for us to be made in God’s image and likeness, God must first have an image (form) or likeness. But doesn’t the Scripture say somewhere that God is a spirit?

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. — John 4:24

What did Jesus mean by this? Read His words to Nicodemus:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. — John 3:6

According to Jesus, the born again person is a spirit, but we know that a born again person has a physical form as well. God, therefore must have both a spiritual component and a physical component.

THEY KNEW GOD AS A PERSONAL GOD

The Scripture records many people who knew God as a person. Enoch and Noah are a couple of good examples:

And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him. . . . Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God. — Genesis 5:24; 6:9

GOD HAS A BODY, A FORM

Though no man can see the glory of the face of God and live, yet many have seen the form of God. The 70 elders at the very beginning of their commission and work were given a personal view of God. They saw Him, and He had feet:

And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness. — Exodus 24:10

The prophet Micaiah also saw God:

And he [Micaiah] said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. — I Kings 22:19

Daniel, the prophet, beheld God in vision, and He had a form with a head and hair:

I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. — Daniel 7:9

GOD HAS A DWELLING PLACE

Job reveals that God has a specific dwelling place:

Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. — Job 1:6

When God brought Israel out of Egypt and established them as a nation, one of the first things He did was to impress upon them the fact that He was a personal God, and that He had a specific dwelling place; for He told them, “. . . make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

This sanctuary was only a pattern of “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.” It was to be made after the pattern of God’s literal dwelling place (in heaven), to “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount” (Hebrews 8:2, 5).

God not only dwells in heaven, but in a specific place in heaven:

The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD’S throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men.
— Psalm 11:4

If God has no form or body, He then has no need of a physical dwelling place; and the Scripture record of a heavenly temple and even of heaven itself becomes a fantasy or fiction.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE

Isaiah’s personal experience with God is one of the most beautiful testimonies to the transforming power of the knowledge of God:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. — Isaiah 6:1-4

This vision inspired Isaiah with awe and reverence. It brought conviction of sin:

Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. — Isaiah 6:5

It changed his religion from one of cold formality to one of genuine worship. It affected his view of God and of himself. He had once denounced the sin of others; but now he saw himself exposed to the same condemnation. How little his wisdom and talents then appeared, as he looked on the sacredness and majesty of God. How unworthy he was! How unfitted for sacred service! We can hear his cry, like that of the apostle Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" It was this experience of knowing God that prepared him for his work:

Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. — Isaiah 6:6-8

“THAT THEY MIGHT KNOW THEE”

I RECENTLY heard a missionary story of a boy who got malaria. The widowed mother had previously lost her husband to the same terrible fever. She was given instructions by the witch doctor of how to cure her son. The prescriptions included beating him, forcing him to swallow terrible mixtures, building a fire on the boy's chest, and finally smashing out all of the boy's teeth. For all of this the witch doctor was paid handsomely. The widow's water buffalo (her only means of plowing and earning a living), her last bit of rice, even a beam holding up her house had to be removed to pay the "doctor's" bill.

Perhaps we don't go to the above extreme, but nevertheless our lives are shaped by our beliefs about God just as much as were those of that poor widow. Who is God? What is He like? How can we know Him?

CHRIST, THE IMAGE OF GOD

Christ Reveals the Personality and Character of the Father. Moses, though he "spoke face to face" with God, yet even he was not allowed to see the glorious face of the Divine Person, but only the "back parts." Others have seen His hair, hands, feet, and form, but since sin entered the world and brought with it a separation between man and his Creator, no man has ever been able to look upon the surpassing glory of the face of God (see John 1:18). For this reason, Christ, the Light of the world, veiled the dazzling splendor of His divinity, and came to live as a man among men. He did this so that we men might know our Creator once more. He (Christ) who is in the "express image of his [the Father's] person" (Hebrews 1:3) is the "one mediator between God and man" (1 Timothy 2:5).

Christ declares, "I and my Father are one." "No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save

the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (John 10:30; Matthew 11:27).

Christ came to teach fallen human beings what God desires them to know about Him. In the heavens above, in the earth, in the broad waters of the ocean, we see the handiwork of God. All created things testify to His power, wisdom, and love; but God saw that sin had cast a dark veil over nature, and so a clearer revelation was needed to portray both His personality and His character. He therefore sent His Son into the world, to reveal, so far as could be endured by human sight, the nature and the attributes of the invisible God, “that they might know thee” (John 17:3).

Christ’s identity was preserved in His humanity. In the gift of Christ, a channel of communication was opened between God and us. When Christ laid down His divine form and glory, and became a helpless babe in Bethlehem, did He lose His identity? Did He cease being the divine Son of God? No! He was “Immanuel,” God with us. He said, “if you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” He was still the divine Son of God, bearing the express image of His Father’s character, even though He had divested Himself of His divine form, which was in the express image of His Father’s person (Hebrews 1:3).

Thus, as we behold Christ in the varied circumstances, trials, and temptations “that are common to man” (1 Corinthians 10:13), we are seeing the mind of the Father. As we behold Him suffering the keenest hunger in the wilderness, and being tempted to satisfy his hunger by turning the stones to bread, and choosing rather to die than commit sin, we are beholding the abhorrence with which God views sin. When we behold Him nailed to the cross, and praying, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do,” or when we hear Him with tenderness tell Mary Magdalene, “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more,” we are beholding the forgiving heart of God. Jesus spoke and acted just as His Father would have were he there.

... but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. . . . Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. — John 8:26
28

When we see His life, one of constant self denial, hardly stopping to eat or rest, constantly healing the afflicted, and speaking encouraging words, we are seeing the loving, self-sacrificing heart of God.

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. — John 5:19-20

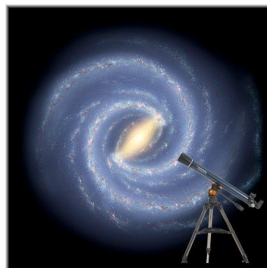
We see the mind of God in His attention to the little details, as Christ carefully folds with His own hands the napkin or scarf, which had covered his head, before leaving the tomb. And we behold the compassion of God in Christ, as He ministered to the physical wants of the people in the feeding of the 5,000, and when He thought of the emotional needs of His mother as he suffered upon the cross. In all of this we behold God's great heart of love.

Whether we look to the close personal friendship with John the beloved, who leaned on His breast, or when we behold Him humbly wash His disciples' feet, calling them "friends" (John 15:15); in all of these and more we behold the person of our Father. We are seeing just what the Father would do in the same situation.

More than this, we see in the life of Christ the character of God manifested in fallen flesh, under the very same circumstances we are placed in, and with the very same capabilities and liabilities. Only by studying the life of Christ can we get to know Him

intimately, and come to know the heart of God. It is by contemplating and appreciating His character, that we are transformed into the same image:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 3:18



That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. — 1 John 1:1-3

When we truly have this fellowship with God, our Father, and His Son, we will come to love them with all our hearts for what they are, and we will become like them.

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. — 1 John 3:2

Then, when “we shall be like him”, we will receive answers to our prayers, and will know that they are heard, and will work in harmony with those prayers. Then also we shall understand how His going forth is prepared as the morning, and will find the truthfulness of Christ’s words,

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. — John 17:3

THE FATHER & THE SON

PERHAPS the most compelling argument in all Scripture of God's infinite love is the wondrous gift to us of His Son; not a son by creation, as are the angels and we men, nor a son merely by virtue of His virgin birth in Bethlehem, but a Son begotten in ages past, long before any other being existed:

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. . . . When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: — Prov 8:22, 24-25 (see also John 8:42)

Other texts in the Old Testament clearly reveal the fact that God had a Son prior to Bethlehem:

Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell? — Proverbs 30:4

He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. — Daniel 3:25

The prophet Isaiah in some of the most elevated language in all of Scripture reveals the wondrous fact that God had a Son to give:

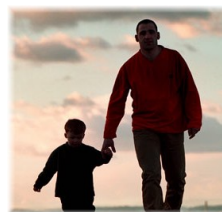
For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; . . . — Isaiah 9:6

HOW WAS HE BEGOTTEN?

It is not for us to know exactly how the Son was brought forth, because God has not seen fit to reveal it unto us. However, in the Genesis account of Creation we find a rather interesting account:

And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. — Gen 2:21, 22

This is one example of someone coming from the substance of another in a different way than children are born. I repeat, it is not for us to know exactly how the Son of God was brought forth, but the point is that the Son “proceeded forth and came from God” (John 8:42), that he was “brought forth” of the Father “before the hills” (Prov 8:24, 25).



JESUS, THE MEASURE OF GOD’S LOVE

The Father’s gift of the Son, is the measure of God’s love: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son; . . .” (John 3:16).

To doubt that God had a Son to give, is to fail to comprehend the love of God. The gift of God is given to us as a measuring line that we may comprehend the love of God. To know God, we must believe His word, and we must believe in His love for us.

TWO DISTINCT BEINGS

The Father and His Son are referred to in the Bible as two separate and distinct beings. In Christ’s prayer, recorded in John 17, Christ addresses His Father as a separate person:

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. — John 17:1

Jesus speaks of Himself and His Father as one in the sense of being united, but not as one being or person:

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may

believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. — John 17:21, 22

The oneness of the Father and the Son is the pattern whereby Jesus illustrates how you and I are to be one with other believers. Such a unity does not destroy individuality, but it does unite the heart.

CHRIST IS STILL THE SON OF GOD

After the resurrection, in Christ's glorified state, God is still the Father of Christ:

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. — John 20:17

Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. — 2 John 1:3

That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. — Romans 15:6

THE "CHRIST"

The term "Christ" was understood by the Hebrew people to signify the "Son of God":

And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. — John 6:69 (see also Matt. 16:16; 26:63; Mark 1:1; Luke 4:41; John 11:27; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor 1:19)

THE CONDITION FOR BAPTISM

Belief in Christ as the Son of God was the condition for baptism:

And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. — Acts 8:37

This was the first thing Paul preached:

And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. — Acts 9:20

THE REASON THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. — John 20:31

The Scripture testimony referring to Christ being the Son of God is plain. It never even hints that we are to understand these verses which refer to Christ as the Son of God to mean anything other than the obvious. If we deny this truth, we make God a liar, and we might as well deny the entire Bible.

ANTICHRIST DENIES THE FATHER — SON RELATIONSHIP

Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. — 1 John 2:22

The antichrist is a professedly Christian power which denies the relationship of the Father and the Son; it denies that Jesus is really the son of God. In so doing it denies that God is really the Father of Christ. Believing the doctrines of men as taught to us by pastor, priest, or the creeds of a church has no virtue or power to sanctify us. Only by believing the truth, as revealed in the Bible, can we be sanctified (John 17:17):

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth. — 2 Thessalonians 2:13

If we will simply take the word of God as it reads, without bringing our preconceived ideas to it, we will know the truth:

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. — John 8:32

THE GOSPEL

The Truth that Christ is the Son of God is the Gospel:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. — John 3:16

THE FOUNDATION OF THE CHURCH

This Truth is the foundation of the Christian Church:

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock [the truth that Christ is the “Son of the living God”] I will build my church. — Matthew 16:16-18 (see 1 Pet 2:4-8)

“THE ONLY TRUE GOD”

SINCE the fall, men have been making gods of their own. The only things which have changed with time are the materials from which our idols are made; for though most of us no longer worship wood and stone, yet many are making idols of their time, possessions, families, jobs, fears, appetites, and an almost infinite number of other like things, which can never give lasting peace, security, enduring happiness, or life.

As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. — 1 Corinthians 8:4-6

Sadly, for most of us, God is not first in our lives and hearts. We all too often put other things before Him, and give to them the time and attention which rightly belong to God. And though there are many in this world which are called “god” that men worship, yet there is only One who created the worlds, has supreme power, and can help us in all our circumstances – the true and living God, Creator of heaven and earth. Consider verse 6 again: “But to us there is but one God, the Father, . . .” Here we are plainly told that this “one God” is the Father. This truth is repeated in various Scriptures:

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. — Ephesians 4:6

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort. — 2 Corinthians 1:3

However, the Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate – a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. — John 1:1, 2

Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father – one in nature, in character, in purpose – the only being that could enter into all the counsels and purposes of God.

His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. — Isaiah 9:6

. . . whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. — Micah 5:2

THE BIBLE'S TESTIMONY CONCERNING CHRIST

And the Son of God declares concerning Himself:

The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting. . . . When he appointed the foundations of the earth: then I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him. — Proverbs 8:22-30

The Father wrought by His Son in the creation of all heavenly beings:

By him were all things created, . . . whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him. — Colossians 1:16

The Son of God, is also called “God”. The Father Himself calls His Son “God”. Other Scriptures too, clearly reveal Christ’s Divinity, and call Jesus “God”:

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. — Hebrews 1:8

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. — John 20:28, 29

How then do we harmonize these apparent contradictions? Who is Christ, if His Father is the only true God? Does that make Christ a false god? I can't believe that Christ, in His words addressed to His Father, "thee the only true God," was denying His own divinity. There must be a harmony in these passages. It was only after many months of prayer and study that my endeavor to understand what otherwise seemed to be a mystery was richly repaid, as my eyes were turned to see this precious light of the character of God that otherwise I would have altogether missed. No word of God's is unimportant, even if we don't readily discern its value. Whenever we come across a text that seems to contradict another, it is because we are by our own predispositions and partial blindness unable to see the harmony.

Here is what I found. We are told the following things concerning Christ:

- **He has inherited the name of His Father:**

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. — Hebrews 1:4

- **He has the very nature and all the attributes of His Father:**

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. — Colossians 2:9

- **He has life in Himself:**

For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. — John 5:26

- **He holds all things together:**

And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. —
Colossians 1:17

You will remember that in the previous chapters we took notice of His Divinity. Though all of these things are true of Him, notice what else is said of Him:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. — Philippians 2:6, 7

While on the surface this passage may seem to only describe what Christ did in His incarnation, yet it holds much more than this for us to learn. In it we find a clue as to why Jesus refers to His Father as the “only true God” (John 17:3), and why the disciples call the Father the “one God” (1 Corinthians 8:6). It also helps us to understand those verses that speak of Christ’s Divinity, such as Isaiah 9:6, which calls Him the “mighty God”. How does it reveal all this? Because it reveals to us how that Jesus, as a son, voluntarily submits to His Father’s greater authority. Though Jesus is rightfully called God by His subjects, yet He in turn recognizes/honors His Father as the highest authority (“... to my God and your God” John 20:17). Every human being ought to know and understand this most basic of truths – how that a child never reaches the age where he is no longer obligated to honor his father. So it is with Christ and His Father. As a Son, He will always voluntarily, honor and submit to His Father as First in all things, that “God may be all in all.”

Note the following things concerning Christ’s submission to His Father:

- 1. He was in submission to His Father while on earth:**

In this He has set the perfect example for us in how we ought to treat our parents:

I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things . . . I do always those things that please him. — John 8:28-29

2. He was in submission while in heaven:

Not only on earth did He set an example of submission, but even in heaven prior to His coming to earth as a babe in Bethlehem; for the Son wrought His Father's will in the creation of the world:

. . . [God] created all things by Jesus Christ. — Ephesians 3:9

And though Jesus said upon His ascension, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18); yet He is still in submission to His father. Jesus calls His Father, "my God":

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. — John 20:17

3. And His example of voluntary submission will continue even into eternity:

For although, ". . . it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us" (Isaiah 25:9); yet, ". . . when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28).

Just as my son receives human nature and attributes of humanity from his father, Jesus has the nature and attributes of God because He is the Son of God, yet He voluntarily submits to His Father, the Supreme Ruler, the Most High.

ELOHIM – A PLURAL WORD FOR GOD?

Elowah or simply **El** (singular) is the Hebrew word for God. Sometimes its plural form **Elohim** is used (as in Genesis 1) and is also translated "God." Why is this? With Hebrew, as in English,

words in the plural form do not always indicate plurality in number. In fact, when referring to the true God, *Elohim* is almost exclusively accompanied by singular verbs, and does not indicate “Gods” (plural), rather it indicates the comprehensiveness and majesty of God. This use of the plural is common in Hebrew.

Here are some examples:

Bamah (singular) is translated “high place,” and even “high places” at times, but in the plural it is translated both as the name of a place (singular) and as “great high place” (also singular).

Uwr (singular) means fire. However, when found in the plural form, it is translated **urim** (one of the stones on the breastplate of the high priest).

Behemah (singular) means “beast” or “cattle”, but in the book of Job it is used in its plural form (***Behemoth***) to describe the most powerful and fearsome of land animals.

Shamayim, the word for “heaven” or “sky” is only used in its plural form, but is used most times to designate “heaven” in the singular. This practice was used by the writers of the New Testament also; for when they wished to distinguish the “heaven” where God dwells from the our “heaven” or “atmosphere” they invariably use the plural form of the Greek word ***ouranos*** (heaven).

In reference to God the word *Elohim* simply denotes the *greatness* and *majesty* of the true and living God, not a plurality of persons. Jesus is God by nature, and has all the attributes of God, yet he acknowledges His Father as “my God”, and calls him the “only true God”. These statements by Christ are not contradictions; for God cannot lie. They are homage paid by Jesus to His Father as the supreme being, the “one God” of 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 4:6, and other passages.

“AND JESUS CHRIST”

THE blessings of redeeming love – our Savior compared to a precious pearl. He illustrated His lesson by the parable of the merchant seeking goodly pearls, “who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.” Christ Himself is the pearl of great price. In Him we find all the glory of the Father, the fullness of the Godhead. He is the brightness of the Father’s glory, the express image of His person. The glory of God’s attributes is expressed in His character. Every page of the Holy Scriptures shines with His light. The righteousness of Christ, like a pure, white pearl, has no defect or stain. No work of man can improve the great and precious gift of God. It is without a flaw. In Christ are “. . . hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). He is “. . . made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).



All that can satisfy the needs and longings of the human soul in this world and in the world to come is found in Christ. A knowledge of Christ is eternal life. It is more important than anything else in this world. In considering this knowledge the apostle Paul was led to exclaim, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8).

CHRIST IS THE MEANS OF OUR RE-CREATION

The knowledge of Christ is the means whereby the sinner is re-created:

And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him. —
Colossians 3:10

Through this knowledge we partake of the divine nature:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue. — 2 Peter 1:3 (see also Ephesians 3:19)

We are commanded to grow or increase in the knowledge of Christ:

But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen. — 2 Peter 3:18

CONSIDERING CHRIST

We are told to consider Christ – to keep Him in mind and contemplate His life of ministry on earth and in heaven:

Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus. — Hebrews 3:1

It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we meditate on His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will grow, and we will be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.

As we consider Jesus continually we will be transformed into the likeness of the One we adore:

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 3:18

Paul tells us how important the knowledge of Christ was to him as a minister:

For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. — 1 Corinthians 2:2

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ. — Ephesians 3:8

THERE IS SALVATION IN NO OTHER

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. — Acts 4:12 (see also John 14:6)

Christ is to be lifted up in all His beauty:

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. — John 3:14-15 (see also 1 Corinthians 1:24)

Christ, the Son, is to be honored, even as we honor the Father:

For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. — John 5:21-23

CHRIST'S EXISTENCE PREDATES ALL CREATION

Christ existed before His birth in Bethlehem, and all things were created through Him. Christ, the Word, was with God in the beginning – so far back in the days of eternity as to be far beyond the grasp of the mind of man. He was before this world and before the angels:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was

not any thing made that was made. — John 1:1-3 (see also Micah 5:2; Colossians 1:14-19)

The ages comprehended in this phrase cannot be grasped. It is not for us to know when or how Christ was begotten; but we know that He was the Divine Word before this world was created. The last prayer of Christ (John 17) also reveals that Christ existed with the Father before the worlds were created:

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.
— John 17:5

CHRIST IS DIVINE

In many places in the Bible Christ is called God. God has, in direct address to the Son, called Him by the same title:

Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. — Psalm 45:6

The casual reader might take this last verse to be simply the psalmist's ascription of praise to God, but when we turn to the New Testament, we find that it is much more. We find that God the Father is the speaker, and that He is addressing the Son:

But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. — Hebrews 1:8

The name "God" was not given to Christ in consequence of some great achievement, but it is His by right of inheritance; for, says the writer to the Hebrews, "He hath **by inheritance** obtained a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:4). A son always rightfully takes the name of the father, and Christ, as "the only begotten Son of God," has rightfully **inherited** the same name. To a greater or less degree a son is a reproduction of his father. He has, to some extent, similar features and personal characteristics to his father. Christ however, is the "express image" of the Father's person (Hebrews 1:3), and as the Son of the self-existent God, He has by nature all the attributes of Deity.

CHRIST IS WORTHY OF WORSHIP

And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.
— Hebrews 1:6

CHRIST TOOK HUMAN NATURE

When Christ came to this world, He came as a human being, not as some sort of half God, half man. He was fully divine, and fully human. He took upon His sinless nature, our sinful nature, degenerated by thousands of years of sin, with all the liabilities of humanity:

For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. — Hebrews 2:16-17 (see also 1 John 4:1-3)

Christ was “made like unto his brethren”. As one Christian author in the 19th century stated, “He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to every son and daughter of Adam” (“The Desire of Ages,” p. 638.4); for “the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).

Not only did Christ take a human body, but he took upon Him a human mind, capable of being tempted in every respect as is ours, all the while retaining His divine nature:

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. — Hebrews 4:15

As God, Christ could not be tempted any more than He was not tempted from His allegiance in heaven. But as Christ humbled Himself to the nature of man, He could be tempted. He had not taken on Him even the nature of the angels, but humanity, perfectly identical with our own nature, except without the taint

of sin. He had a human body, and a human mind. He trod our earth as man. He had reason, conscience, memory, will, and affections – faculties of the human mind – which were united with His divine nature. He formed a righteous character as we must do, and thus became our pattern or example – the second Adam.

It is important for us to distinguish between character and nature. Character is not made up of the various faculties of the mind we have mentioned, for those are common to all of us – they are a part of our nature – character, on the other hand, is formed by how we choose to use those faculties. The choices we make and the actions we take form habits, and these habits form character. Christ left us an example of the character we must have. The following verses depict how Christ is miraculously able to give us a new start, erasing the evil character we may have previously formed, enabling us to form a new character, united with the Divine nature.

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. — 1 Peter 2:21

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. —
Philippians 2:5 (see also Romans 12:1-2; Ezekiel 36:26-27)

Christ exercised no divine power that is not available to us; for He says, “. . . the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12), and again, “I can of mine own self do nothing” (John 5:30).

Christ became one of us (in human flesh) for several specific reasons:

1. That God could communicate to man through Christ:

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. — 2 Corinthians 5:19

Communication was cut off between man and God because of sin. Intercession, Christ's mediation to restore that

communication is one of the great objects in the plan of salvation. He began this work from the moment Adam fell.

2. That He could reconcile man and God:

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. — 1 Timothy 2:5

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. — 1 John 2:2

He was "... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

3. That He could be tempted:

... for God cannot be tempted ... — James 1:13

But, as a man He could be tempted. It was necessary to see God's character tested by our earthly, sinful environment in order to really know God:

For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted. — Hebrews 2:18

4. That He could be our perfect example:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps. — 1 Peter 2:21

5. That He could die for our sins:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. — Hebrews 2:9

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. — Philippians 2:8

6. To fulfill the role of both prophet and priest before reigning as king:

- **Jesus while on earth held the office of a prophet:**

To be a prophet – one who speaks to man on behalf of God – the glory of God must be veiled in human flesh:

This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. — Acts 7:37

• **When He ascended, He took up the work of priest:**

A priest is one who speaks to God on behalf of men. Jesus is qualified to be a priest:

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. — Hebrews 5:1-2

• **And when Jesus comes again He will reign as king:**

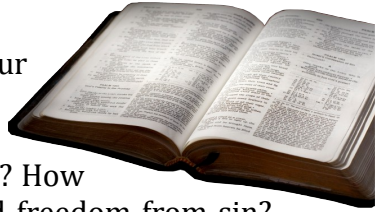
And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of lords. — Revelation 19:16

Jesus exercised no power we cannot have. He had trials, was tempted, and knows by experience what we must endure. We can overcome only by taking up His cross and following Him; receiving by faith the same power by which He overcame. Thus He left us a perfect example, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1Peter 2:21).

Dear reader, “. . . seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Hebrews 12:1-3),

THE HOLY SPIRIT

WHEN we have confessed our sins and given our hearts to Jesus, how do we grow into mature men and women in Christ? How can we obtain victory in our lives and freedom from sin? "Abide in me," said Jesus (John 15:4); for "whosoever abideth in him sinneth not" (1 John 3:6). But how do we abide in Him, and how does He abide in us?



Does the person Christ Jesus come down from heaven to us, and physically take up residence in our bodies? Does He 'possess' us in the way that demons did in the New Testament times, speaking through our mouths and taking us where we don't want to go? Certainly not!

CHRIST AT HIS ASCENSION

Shortly before His ascension, Christ said "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). He is not lacking any power. This includes the power to be with us wherever we are. Though Christ still bears His humanity, He says, "... lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 28:20; 18:20).

"... lo, I am with you always, ..."

He is just as much divine now as He ever was. He can still be with each of us, wherever we are. He is our Comforter. He promised, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (John 14:18).

How is Jesus with His children all over the earth while at the same time he is at the right hand of the Father? He is with us by His spirit:

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. . . . Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. — Psalm 139:2, 7-8

With modern technology I can be seen and heard by others a continent or more away, and both see and hear people all over the earth, all from one specific location. My voice, image, and my thoughts can be transmitted to many places at once, while I am physically in one place. In a limited sense, my spirit is present with others many miles from my physical location. How much more then can God and Christ hear, see, communicate, and even act anywhere, and yet still have a physical form, a body in the temple in heaven?

Jesus illustrates how He is present with us in spirit in John 15, by His illustration of the vine; thus showing His disciples the importance of abiding, saying, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you . . .” (John 15:7). Words convey thoughts. Christ abides in us and we in Him, at least in part, by our listening to His voice through His written or spoken Word, taking it into our minds, and meditating upon it. It’s all about the mind!

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. —
Philippians 2:5

The mind is the intangible part of the body – you can’t touch it, see it, or handle it. What is it that dwells in the mind? Is it not the thoughts? And words are the expression of the thoughts; for, “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). The following Scriptures speak of this same experience of having the mind of Christ, or having Christ abide in us:

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. — Colossians
3:16

Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature. — 2 Peter 1:4

So we see that it is by God's promises (His thoughts or words) that we become partakers of the divine nature. It is thus that He dwells in us.

CHRIST ABIDES IN US IN SPIRIT

While Christ cannot be physically present with us all at the same time, yet He can and is with us in Spirit or mind. Consider the following verses:

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith . . .
— Ephesians 3:16-17

THE COMFORTER

Jesus speaks of the coming Comforter in John 14:

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. — John 14:16-23

Jesus speaks of this Comforter in the third person, but, in describing who this Comforter was, He said, "you know him, for he dwelleth with you and shall be in you." Jesus was that

“Comforter” in a personal, physical way, while He was with them, “. . . for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified” (John 7:39).

He was to continue to be their Comforter, but now instead of their being able to see Him with their eyes, and hear Him with their ears, they would see Him in their minds, and hear Him in their thoughts. He confirms this in the very next verse (18), saying, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you,” and again, in verse 20, “I in you,” and yet again in verse 23, “my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”

The Greek word used for Comforter in John 14 is *parakletos*, the same word used in 1 John 2:1, where it was translated “Advocate,” and clearly refers to Christ.

Cumbered with humanity, Christ could not be in every place personally; therefore it was altogether for their advantage that He leave them, go to His father, and send His Spirit to be His successor on earth. Thus, no one could then have any advantage because of his location or his personal contact with Christ. By the Spirit the Savior would be accessible to all. In this sense He would be nearer to them than if He had not ascended on high.

HOW DOES GOD POUR HIS SPIRIT UPON US?

Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit
unto you, I will make known my words unto you. —
Proverbs 1:23

In the Scriptures we often find a style of writing known as parallelism, which is used to restate a thought in a different way. The above passage is an example of this. It uses “words” as a synonym or parallel for “spirit.” This again harmonizes with the fact that words are the expression of the mind. It is by making known (or giving us understanding of) His thoughts that we become partakers of His Spirit – as we mediate on them, fill our minds with them, and they become our thoughts.

This conversion of our thinking is not immediate. Our heart is naturally evil and at variance to God, and desperately wicked. In fact, our thoughts are so naturally different to Jehovah's that He tells us:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. — Isaiah 55:7, 8

We need a new heart, a new mind, a new spirit. This God has promised us, but we have a part to play in this – that of co-operation. When Jesus was explaining this truth to a crowd at Capernaum, they were offended, and many of His disciples left Him. Let us examine this message of Christ's in John 6:53-54, 56 that brought such opposition:

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

What did Jesus mean when He spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood? We know he was not speaking of a literal cannibalistic meal. He was speaking figuratively of His abiding in us and we in Him, which we have seen is through His word.

Jesus goes on to clarify this fact by saying,

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life. — Verse 63

Once again (now in John 6) Christ shows us that it is by reading and listening to His word, that we receive His Spirit, are spiritually nourished, and receive that life which will never end.



Pay special attention to the fact that God's word contains a power and life that ours does not. When God speaks, things happen. There is creative power in His word. Likewise, when we partake of His word, and it thus becomes a part of us, then it is that it changes us. Christ's words taken into the heart have a power to recreate us, and stamp on us the impress of the divine.

TWO ASPECTS OF MAN

The two aspects of man we call the body (the tangible) and the mind (the intangible), or the flesh and the spirit:

They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes: Because they provoked his spirit, so that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. — Psalm 106: 32, 33

The children of Israel did not hurt Moses' physical body by their murmuring, but his spirit. It nevertheless goes without saying that it was Moses himself which they provoked, not another than Moses.

There is a similarity between God and man, for we know that man was made in the image of God (Genesis 5:1). And in writing to the Corinthians, Paul likens God's Spirit to our spirit:

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. — I Corinthians 2:11

Two parallel Bible verses also witness to this connection. By the prophet Isaiah the question is asked:

Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? — Isaiah 40:13

In quoting this Old Testament passage from its Greek translation (the Septuagint), Paul wrote:

For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? — Romans 11:34

Notice that in quoting this verse, the Septuagint gives the word “mind” in the place of “Spirit”. So when inspiration speaks of God’s Spirit or the Holy Spirit, it is speaking, at least in part, of His mind, not another being. Just as when it speaks of Moses’ spirit, it refers to his mind, not another person.

THE REAL BATTLE

The battle for our eternal life lies in our minds. We are not only admonished to put the Word of God into our minds, but we are also warned to guard what goes in. We are to painstakingly protect our minds:

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. — Proverbs 4:23

How is it that God communicates with us? It is through our minds. But how will we ever hear that “still small voice” if our minds are always occupied? The experience expressed in the following verse needs to be ours:

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. — 2 Corinthians 10:5

We need to train ourselves to think on heavenly things. Have you ever noticed how difficult it is to have quiet time with God immediately after watching television, or to meditate on Scripture after reading the news? There is a battle over our minds, and we must diligently guard the entrance to our mind, so that only the good will have a place there.

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever

things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. — Philippians 4:7-8

If we desire to partake of God's Spirit, then we have our part to play. We must choose to listen to that "still small voice," and not crowd it out with other thoughts. We must choose to be in communication with God. We must choose to read His word, and go where it is being studied and preached. Rather than merely reading it for proofs to support our own ideas, or treating it as history, or as ordinary words on paper, we must recognize it as God's communication to us personally. We must choose to familiarize ourselves with it by meditation and memorization, and we must choose to trust His promises and obey His commands.

What agencies does God use to communicate His Spirit (His thoughts, feelings, and word) with men?

THE AGENCY OF ANGELS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

We are told that the Word of God was given by Inspiration:

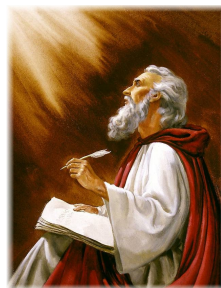
All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. — 2 Timothy 3:16

This process of inspiration is described by Peter, when he said,

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. — 2 Peter 1:21

This inspiration/communication from God, this impartation of the Holy Ghost comes through certain channels, and John, under inspiration, reveals this line of communication:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John. — Revelation 1:1





God the Father gave the revelation to Jesus, His Son, who then sent it by His angel to John, and John in turn delivered it to the churches. When the writers of Scripture were “moved by the Holy Ghost” or “inspired of God,” it was God who was speaking through Christ and/or angels to men. This communication of God’s thoughts or word, proceeds from God to Christ, then to angels, and finally to men. Peter calls this process, being “moved by the Holy Ghost”. An example of this moving of the Holy Ghost, or this line of communication is found in the following passage, where Christ commands His angel to speak to Daniel, who then wrote it for us:

And it came to pass, when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man’s voice between the banks of Ulai, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. — Daniel 8:15-16

We need to become familiar with the ministry of angels, for they are God’s ordained means of communication with man after his fall:

And he (Jacob) dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. — Genesis 28:12

This same chain of communication is represented thus:

And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. — John 1:51

Christ is the ladder, the mediator which spans heaven and earth, and the angels are the messengers which travel by virtue of

His intercession. Angels are thus ministering spirits – God’s messengers; for the word angel itself denotes a messenger.

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? — Hebrews 1:13,14

In Zechariah 4, angels are figuratively represented as olive trees, through whom the golden oil is poured, representing the means through which the Holy Spirit in God’s word, is communicated to men.

THE AGENCY OF MEN & THE HOLY SPIRIT



When Christ sent His disciples out to preach the gospel, He gave them the promise that God would speak through them:

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. — Matthew 10:19-20

To each of us is given a measure of God’s Spirit, that we might be a blessing to others:

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. — 1 Corinthians 12:7

Each believer is heaven’s appointed channel for the revelation of God to men. Angels wait to communicate through you heaven’s light to souls perishing in sin. And what if you refuse to be that channel? Then to that degree is the world robbed of the promised influence of the Holy Spirit!

It is not because of any restriction on the part of God that the riches of His grace do not flow earthward to men. If all were willing to receive, all would become filled with His Spirit. There is nothing that Christ desires so much as agents who will represent

to the world His Spirit and character. And there is nothing that the world needs so much as human examples of the Saviour's love.

Dear reader, look upon Jesus. Take time to fill your soul with His word, and commune with Him as you walk life's pathways. By looking to Him, He will draw near to you, and ravish your heart with the joy and peace that alone can come with the abiding presence of Christ in the soul. As your thoughts are exchanged for His, you too will be changed, and will reflect the beauty of His character.

Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us,
because he hath given us of his Spirit. — I John 4:13

A DAY WITH GOD

THE BEST GIFT

WE should be ever thankful to God for the gift of life and everything good and lovely, but the most precious of all gifts He has given man is the gift of Himself. His presence and involvement in our lives is the greatest of His gifts. In the garden of Eden the Scripture tells us how God walked in the garden in the cool of the day (morning and evening) to commune with our first parents. He knew we needed instruction, guidance, and fellowship. You see, not only do we have a need for fellowship, but God too desires our fellowship; for He created man with a mind and heart which could appreciate and comprehend heavenly things, so that He could enjoy communion with man:

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created. — Revelation 4:11

Perhaps the greatest of all the gifts that one can give in a relationship is the gift of their time. All the gifts that money can buy will not equal the spending of time together. Thus time is perhaps the most valuable gift God gave to man. Besides spending the morning and evening with man every day, God also spent man's entire first full day of life with him, as well as every seventh day after that. (Man was created Friday, and at sunset, the seventh day, the Sabbath began.)

Have you ever considered the fact that time is governed by the heavenly bodies and their relationship one to another?

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years. — Genesis 1:14

The day is determined by the rotation of the earth, the month by the rotation of the moon around the earth, and the year by the rotation of the earth around the sun, but where does the week come from? The only reason we can point to for the week is the history of creation week with its seven days. But, asks one, it only took God six days to create the heaven and the earth, so why are there seven days? Answer – There are a few reasons for the existence of the Seventh Day:

1. As God's memorial of His perfect work, and as a pattern of rest for man:

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. — Exodus 20:8-11 (see also Genesis 2:3; Hebrews 4:1-10)

2. As the sign that it is God which sanctifies us:

Moreover also I gave them my sabbaths, to be a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them. — Ezekiel 20:12

3. God is jealous of our time on this day. He says:

If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. — Isaiah 58:13-14

A PARTICULAR DAY

God has set apart His time for us, one whole day out of the week, for the people of this planet to commune with the Majesty of heaven. Ought we not to set apart our time for Him? However, not just any day can be set aside. God has not left it for us to decide which day is convenient for us to give Him. He didn't simply say, "Remember to spend time with Me," instead He ordained the seventh day of each week, a very specific time. So that time and language should not serve to confuse any in regard to which day it is, He calls it by its number, the **seventh**. This day of the week is His memorial of creation, and serves as a reminder to all mankind of His creative power, not only to create the heavens and the earth, but, as we spend this time beholding Him, it serves to re-create, and transform sinners like us, who have born the stamp of this world, to once more bear the image of the Divine.



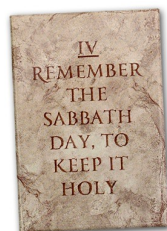
What day is the seventh? Answer – it is the day the Bible writers, the prophets and apostles, as well as Jesus Himself kept – the day we call Saturday. This day has been continually kept from the time of Christ by Jews and Christians alike. There can be no confusion as to which day is the seventh day, the Sabbath; for the Scripture tells us that Jesus rose on the “first day,” and the whole world recognizes that day as Sunday, and the seventh day from Sunday is Saturday, the seventh day of the week.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Contrary to what some claim, Scripture is entirely silent concerning a change of the Sabbath to any other day. While some claim that the law was done away with at the cross, such is only an excuse, and is without any true Scriptural evidence, not to mention that it is unreasonable. The Sabbath is the fourth commandment of the Moral Law. Some have gone so far as to claim that the moral law was abolished; yet such would mean that we are now at liberty to kill, steal, commit adultery, lie, worship

idols, take God's name in vain, and covet. No one who cares for their own well being and the well being of others would assume that the Moral Law was done away with. But, asks one, Don't some Scriptures tell us that the law was done away with? Answer – No. The law to which these texts refer is the law of types and shadows (the ceremonial or sacrificial laws) that was for the specific purpose of bringing to mind and explaining the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ and His work of redemption, such as the feasts of Passover and Pentecost, together with the sacrificial system, and to those civil Laws that pertained specifically to the Jews as a nation.

The Ten Commandments written with the finger of God on tables of stone, are expressive of the whole duty of man to God and of man to man, they were not and can never be done away with, so long as there are men left upon earth; for the moral law as written by God on the tables of stone are only a transcript of His own character, which is the standard to which all men are to be held accountable in their relations toward Him and toward one another. They are summed up in the two principles:



And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. —
Mark 12:30-31

Ask yourself, Can I love my neighbor as myself and still steal from him, commit adultery with his wife, or kill him, breaking the last six of the commandments? God forbid! And neither can we love God with all our hearts without observing the first four commandments, including the fourth, which requires us to set apart the time that He has asked us to spend with Him.

GOD'S LOVE ON TRIAL

A WRONG view of God's character is one of the main reasons why people have trouble getting to know and trust Him. The teaching of eternal torment has done more to drive people to atheism and insanity than any other invention of the devil. It is slander and blasphemy to portray the loving character of a tender, gracious heavenly Father as a cruel vindictive tyrant. God Himself tells us that He has no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11); it is called a strange work (Isaiah 28:21). The very idea of a fair and just God visiting eternal torment upon everyone regardless of their sin is wholly contrary to God's love and mercy and to the Scripture testimony regarding Him. What just and fair judge upon earth would sentence a criminal, regardless of his crime, to be beaten continuously, and roasted slowly over a fire for any length of time? The very thought should send shivers of disgust down one's spine. Shall not "the judge of all the earth" "judge righteously?" (Genesis 18:25; Psalm 96:10); for "the wages of sin is death," **not** eternal torment (Romans 6:23).

So then, what really happens when someone dies? and what will happen to the wicked? First we need to consider

THE NATURE AND SPIRIT OF MAN

After sin entered the world, mankind lost the right to eat of the fruit of the tree of life:

And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever ... — Genesis 3:22

By sin man was doomed to die, but praise God that we can once more eat of the tree of life and have immortality through Christ. This, however, is granted to us on certain conditions:

Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city. — Revelation 22:14

MAN IS MORTAL

We don't have life inherently. We are mortal:

Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? — Job 4:17

The soul that sinneth, it shall die. . . . — Ezekiel 18:20

Put not your trust in . . . the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. — Psalm 146:3-4

Lest we should forget this fact, Paul speaks of God as the one "who only hath immortality" (1 Timothy 6:16). We only receive immortality as a gift through Christ:

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. — 2 Timothy 1:10

Immortality is received at the "last trump," when Jesus returns and resurrects those who sleep in Jesus:

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. — 1 Corinthians 15:51- 53

This mortal "flesh and blood can not inherit the kingdom of God," yet there is an immortal body, called a "spiritual body," that will (1 Corinthians 15:50; see also verses 35-56). The righteous must be resurrected before going to heaven (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18), and the wicked must be resurrected before they are

judged (Revelation 20:5, 13). Until the resurrection they are said to be sleeping:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring (Grk. *lead*) with him. — 1 Thessalonians 4:14

DEATH IS A SLEEP

When Lazarus died, Jesus called it a sleep:

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep . . . Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. — John 11:11, 14

The idea that man's spirit can have a separate conscious existence from his body, either before or after death, is an idea borrowed from paganism. It is founded on Satan's first lie to Eve in the garden, "ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4). The Scripture testifies that when a man dies, "in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:4).



Man's spirit is not conscious when he dies and his body decomposes. Without the body the spirit has no consciousness of its own. It therefore becomes obvious that it would be impossible to communicate with the dead. This is why we are told:

The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything. — Ecclesiastes 9:5

MAN ONLY RECEIVES IMMORTALITY AT THE RESURRECTION:

We have already seen that man is mortal, and receives immortality only upon the condition of his acceptance of Christ as his Lord and Savior. We have also seen that the righteous receive immortality when they are resurrected (1 Corinthians 15:51-53; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Let's have a look at some further evidence for this.

David expected to receive immortality when he awoke in the resurrection, not when he died:

I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness. —
Psalm 17:15

Peter tells us that king David, who died a forgiven sinner, had not yet gone to heaven, a thousand years or so after his death:

Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens: . . . — Acts 2:29, 34

Peter, in order to prove that David was not in heaven, stated the fact that David's body was still in the tomb. Clearly revealing that he understood there is no such thing as disembodied souls in heaven or hell. Christ, Elijah, Enoch, and Moses all ascended to heaven bodily. Other than a few exceptions, the righteous dead have not been raised, and have not yet gone to heaven.

Consider also the words of Paul, who did not expect to receive his crown until the day of Christ's second appearing, along with the rest of the righteous:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. — 2 Timothy 4:7, 8

THE REWARD OF THE WICKED IS COMPLETE ANNIHILATION:

Take careful note of the following facts regarding fate of the wicked:

1. The soul that sins shall die:

Behold, all souls are mine; . . . the soul that sinneth, it shall die. — Ezekiel 18:4

2. This death is a total destruction:

But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. — Psalm 37:20

3. They are “consumed” by fire:

Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it. — Isaiah 47:14

4. Which turns them to ashes:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. — Malachi 4:1-3

5. Which is referred to as “a perpetual sleep” from which they shall “not wake”:

In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the LORD. — Jeremiah 51:39

6. Resulting in their being as “though they had not been”:

For as ye have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been. — Obadiah 16

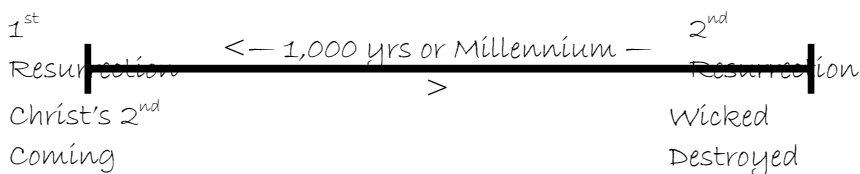
WHEN ARE THE WICKED DESTROYED AND WHERE?

No one is burning in hell-fire right now. This destruction is spoken of as in the future:

For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . . And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts. — Malachi 4:1, 3.

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished. — 2 Peter 2:9

The final destruction of the wicked is a thousand years after the resurrection of the righteous. Revelation 20:4-6 describes the resurrection of the righteous, and says, “the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years are finished.” A blessing is then pronounced on him “that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power . . .” Next is described the final judgment of the wicked: “And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).



It is important here to note that the lake of fire (commonly referred to as “hell”) happens on this earth:

Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth:
much more the wicked and the sinner. — Proverbs 11:31

Malachi 4:3, which we quoted earlier, tells us that the wicked will be “ashes under your feet.” This passage is speaking of the saints in the new earth, and clearly shows us that the place where the wicked suffer their final destruction is this earth (Matthew 5:5). Revelation 20:8, 9 gives us the details of this final

destruction, when the resurrected wicked are gathered from “four quarters of the earth,” then we are told that, “. . . they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.”

The fact that the wicked are destroyed in the very place that is the eternal habitation of the righteous clearly shows us that there is no such place called “hell” where the fire is always burning, but that the “hell-fire” together with the lives of the wicked must be extinguished before the righteous can inhabit the earth.

The condition of the earth as a result of God’s judgment upon sin and sinners is described in Isaiah 24:1, 9. Jeremiah also, describes it in these words:

I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man . . . and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the LORD, and by his fierce anger. — Jeremiah 4:23-26

After the destruction of the wicked and the world by fire, the earth will then be recreated or renewed:

Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.
— 2 Peter 3:12-13

While the Bible does speak of a “hell” to come, yet it makes it clear that there is *no hell burning right now*; rather we see that the wicked *will* (future) be judged, and destroyed in the lake of fire after the 1,000 years, so sin and sinners will cease to exist. They will not burn and suffer throughout eternity. There are scriptures that seem to say otherwise, but God does not contradict Himself. We need to study deeper for ourselves, and adjust our understanding to encompass, not just *some*, but *all* the light which God has given us in His Word.

EVERLASTING FIRE, ETERNAL TORMENT?

The Scriptures have been understood by some to teach that there is an everlasting fire and eternal torment:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire. — Matthew 25:41

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
— Revelation 20:10

The issue in these passages is in regard to the words “forever and ever” and “everlasting”.

The sense in which the Bible writers use the words “everlasting,” “forever,” and “eternal” is much like we would use the word “tall” to describe a person. For as the word “tall” describes an unmeasured or indeterminate height, so the words “everlasting,” “forever,” and “eternal,” denote something as being of an unmeasured or indeterminate extent. The meaning varies depending on what is being described. We have *tall* mountains and *tall* men, but they are not the same height; so too we have “everlasting hills” and an “everlasting God,” but you can be sure that the hills are not as “lasting” as is God; for they have their end, where God does not. It is the same with the word “for ever”. The prophet Jonah, when describing his experience of being swallowed by a whale, initially tells us that he was in the belly of the whale for “three days and three nights.” Later on in his book he describes this same length of time as “for ever”:

Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights. . . . I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. — Jonah 1:17; 2:6

Another example of this is found in Deuteronomy 23:3, where *forever* means 10 generations. In other cases, it meant “as long as he lives” or “until death”:

... He shall be thy servant for ever. — Deuteronomy 15:17
(See also 1 Samuel 1:22, 28; 28:2; Exodus 21:6; Psalm 48:14)

As we’ve already mentioned, hills that might only be a few thousand years old, dating back to the time of the flood, or possibly to creation, are called everlasting:

The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. — Genesis 49:26

The Hebrew words for “everlasting” are also translated in other ways that obviously do not mean “without beginning” or “without end.” Examples of this are where they are translated days “of old,” referring to the time Israel entered the promised land, a few centuries previous (Micah 7:14), the creation of the world (Job 20:4), and Moses’ time (Isaiah 63:11).

UNQUENCHABLE FIRE

He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. — Matthew 3:12

The fire spoken of is unquenchable because it cannot be put out by man, God Himself will not put it out, the wicked cannot put it out, and there is no celestial fire department that will come to their rescue. Everything that is wicked will be consumed, and only then will the fire “go out” or “be quenched,” when that which it is to consume is “no more”. There are parts on modern planes that are made of combustible metals, that if ignited, cannot be quenched by any fire extinguisher. They will simply burn until they are entirely consumed. There is no known way to quench these metals once they are ignited.

We were given an example of this unquenchable, eternal fire at work in the story of Sodom and Gomorrha:

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha . . . are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. — Jude 1:7

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes . . . making them an example to those that after should live ungodly. — 2 Peter 2: 6



Just as we all know that Sodom and Gomorrah are not burning today, so also we may know that the wicked will not “burn for ever and ever”.

WHERE THEIR WORM DIETH NOT

And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. — Mark 9:43

If we take this verse literally, we must conclude that worms are immortal, but such a conclusion is neither a sound explanation, nor a fair reading of the text. The worm still symbolizes spoilage and decay to us today, just as it did to those who penned the words of Scripture so many centuries ago. To them as to us the worm was synonymous with corruption, mortality, and death:

I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. — Job 17:14

For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool: but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. — Isaiah 51:8

An undying worm is simply a symbol for corruption and decay, whose results are, like unquenchable fire, unchangeable and eternal.

WHAT DOES “HELL” MEAN?

The Hebrew word for *hell* is pronounced ***sheoul***. This word simply means the grave. It was translated 31 times as “hell,” 31 times as “grave” and 3 times as “pit.”

There are two Hebrew words translated hell in English: ***abbaddon*** which simply means *destruction*, and ***sheoul***, which denotes the *grave*. The word *sheoul* is accurately translated *grave*, *hell*, and *pit*, and actually has no inference to a place of burning, but to the place where dead go – into the ground, i.e., the *pit* or *grave*.

Likewise in the New Testament *hell* is translated from two different Greek words: The first is ***hades***, and like its Hebrew counterpart *sheoul*, it signifies the *grave*. The other is ***gehenna***, which was the word for the *valley of Hinnom*, the city dump, where the garbage was burned. Therefore it soon came to symbolize *destruction by fire*, but not eternal torment. This is why it can be said of hell that it will be destroyed along with the wicked, in the lake of fire after the thousand years.

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. — Revelation 20:14

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. I — Corinthians 15:26

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. — Revelation 21:4

Next time you read the word hell, remember it refers to the grave, and the certain mortality of man. Soon there will be no more death. I encourage you to do your own word study of the above words.

THE RICH MAN & LAZARUS

In this parable Christ tells of a rich man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Both die. The poor beggar goes into Abraham's

bosom, while the rich man lands in hell, and there cries in his torment unto Abraham, who is in paradise, desiring to be relieved from his torments. Shall we conclude that Christ was teaching his listeners that the righteous will witness the agony of those in hell throughout eternity, and hold conversation with them? Was he instructing them that the dead go straight to heaven or hell at death? Certainly not! Jesus certainly did not intend each minute detail of an illustration to be taken literally. What about the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, the great banquet, or the workers in the field? Shall we take these literally also? Is Christ teaching that coins are saved or lost? Are we going to be re-incarnated as sheep? Is heaven just one grand supper? Are there just 12 hours that we are to work for Jesus?

This parable is intended to teach the folly of riches and how a physical lineage with Abraham or a mere profession of faith won't save anyone (See John 8:39; Matthew 19:23). It was not given to teach about death, heaven, or hell.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise. — Luke 23:43

Jesus was not here saying that they would both be in heaven that same day, for He told Mary, soon after His resurrection, "I have not yet ascended to my Father" (John 20:17). So why the seeming contradiction? The answer is really very simple. In the original Greek, punctuation was not used. The translators, not the inspired Bible authors, inserted it. Try reading this verse again in your Bible with the comma placed after the word "today." A modern English translation of this text would be: "Today, (when it seems that you are forsaken of God and man, dying for your criminal acts), I can truly say, you will be with me in paradise."

ABSENT FROM THE BODY AND PRESENT WITH THE LORD

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 5:8

There can be no issue with this verse if it be understood as the apostle intended it to be. Consider his words just two verses prior to the above statement:

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord. — 2 Corinthians 5:6

The apostle's argument is clear – If being at home in our bodies (being mindful of earthly things) makes us “absent” from the Lord, then it makes perfectly good sense that being “absent” from our bodies (that is, being unmindful of earthly things) is to be “present” with the Lord. While it is true that the apostle speaks of his being present with the Lord after his death, yet this is only in the sense of being physically present; however, the burden of the apostle's remarks is to show how that we can be present with him in mind and heart while here on earth. One day we shall all be “present” with the Lord physically, but we can begin to be “present” with him now by learning to “mind” heavenly things, and by keeping our eyes focused on Jesus.

Let us not be guilty of putting a construction upon the apostle's language which was clearly not his intent. He was not attempting to contradict what he told the church in his previous letter to the Corinthians, where he said that death is a “sleep,” out of which we will be awakened “at the last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:50-52).

He was looking past the time of his sleep in the grave, to the time when he would receive an immortal body at Christ's return and be present with the Lord:

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. — 2 Timothy 4:8

NO SECOND CHANCE:

While the punishing is not eternal, the punishment or result (death) is]:

And these shall go into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal. — Matthew 25:46

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. — Psalm 37:10

Dear reader, God is love. He is just and kind, He is a personal being with emotions and He desires to receive our love and acknowledgment. He is a God we can trust. He has displayed His love for us in a way that could not have been expressed more strongly, in the gift of His only begotten Son. I want to live forever with this kind of God. I want to live in a place where there will be no more tears, death, sorrow, crying or pain. Will you join me there?

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. — Revelation 21:4

And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. . . . And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. — Revelation 22:12
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