

50 DAYS TO UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIANITY



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WEEK
ONE

LET THE
Word
OF
Christ

DWELL IN YOU
Richly.
COLOSSIANS 3:16

DAY ONE – THE BIG PICTURE

The Big Picture – God's purpose for creation

Many people wrestle with the concept of God. Is there a God or did everything come into existence in another way? The Bible does not make an argument for the existence of God. That is not its purpose. The Bible declares the Glory of God. From the very beginning it declares God is!

IN THE BEGINNING GOD
CREATED THE HEAVENS
AND THE EARTH.

[GEN 1:1 NASB95]

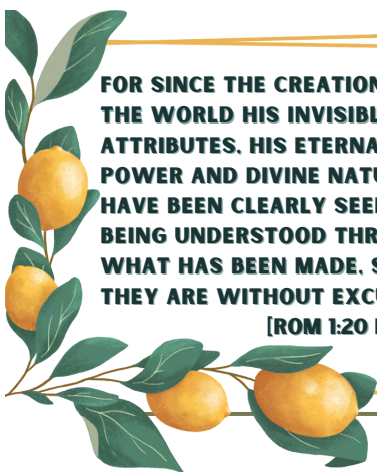
This simple fact is the basis of creation. God is who He says He is. He is not here for you to define or critique. He is God. He is the Almighty. He is the creator of everything and everything has a purpose. That purpose is to declare God's glory. Your purpose on this earth is to declare God's glory.

What is God's Glory? It is His identity, His nature. To declare God's glory is to proclaim with all that you are that you believe God is who He said He is. We do that with our voice and our lives. God is amazing and awesome and every other imaginable positive adjective that we can come up with to describe His greatness. He created the Universe and everything in it as an expression of who He is.

**FOR SINCE THE CREATION OF
THE WORLD HIS INVISIBLE
ATTRIBUTES, HIS ETERNAL
POWER AND DIVINE NATURE,
HAVE BEEN CLEARLY SEEN,
BEING UNDERSTOOD THROUGH
WHAT HAS BEEN MADE, SO THAT
THEY ARE WITHOUT EXCUSE.**

[ROM 1:20 NASB95]

Creation is a declaration of God's infinite greatness. Mankind is the peak of that creation. Man was literally made in the image and likeness of God.



DAY ONE – THE BIG PICTURE

THEN GOD SAID, "LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE, ACCORDING TO OUR LIKENESS; AND LET THEM RULE OVER THE FISH OF THE SEA AND OVER THE BIRDS OF THE SKY AND OVER THE CATTLE AND OVER ALL THE EARTH, AND OVER EVERY CREEPING THING THAT CREEPS ON THE EARTH."

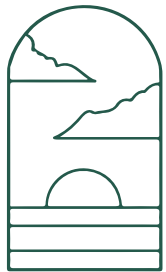
[GEN 1:26 NASB95]

God is infinite and outside of His creation. Humans were designed by God to contain and portray all the positive attributes of God that could be contained within His creation. We are not equal to God. We contain the same positive attributes of love, compassion, creativity and freewill that God also has. All of the bad attributes of man came from man rejecting who God is and how God designed us to live. Man was made to live by the design God made for us. When we do that, we declare God's glory. Living in God's design is living in peace, love, harmony and creativity. We proclaim with our lives, to all the creation, that we believe God is who He said He is and that His design for our lives is best. When we follow our own ways, we declare by our very lives that we don't believe God.

The creation makes us aware of the invisible attributes of God. The Bible reveals Him more deeply to us. It helps us understand His character, nature and ways. Pursuing a life that is in harmony with His design declares His glory. Declaring God's Glory is one of our most important purposes on this earth.

God is knowable –

Write a quick observation about how creation makes us aware of some of God's attributes.

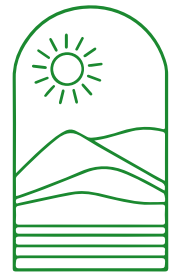


How does creation show us –

God's complexity?

God's immense capacity?

God's creativity?



God chose to reveal Himself to His creation.

Has God revealed Himself to you?

Share one way.



Take some time in prayer to ask God to reveal Himself to you.



DAY TWO - THE BIBLE - ORIGINS AND IDENTITY

The Bible is the most published and most read book in all of human history. It has been translated and published in more languages and countries than any other book ever written. Today we examine the Bible. Many people dismiss the Bible without any serious examination. If we seriously examine the Bible we will find an extraordinary written work that has supernatural attributes.

The Bible is a collection of 66 books and letters written by over 40 authors throughout a span of over 3000 years. The books and letters were collected and passed down throughout the years. The ritual for copying the Bible was extreme and taken very seriously. For many years, only certain people were allowed to make the copies and they had to follow strict guidelines. Some people dismiss the Bible as the writings of man and therefore in error. The Bible refutes this notion and declares God had His hand in the authorship of the Bible.

**ALL SCRIPTURE IS
INSPIRED BY GOD AND
PROFITABLE FOR
TEACHING, FOR REPROOF,
FOR CORRECTION, FOR
TRAINING IN
RIGHTEOUSNESS**

[2TI 3:16 NASB95]

The arrangement of books is divided into two sections. The first section is called the Old Testament and contains 39 books or letters. The second section is called the New Testament and contains 27 books or letters. The Old Testament is further divided into sections. These are the Law, the Historical books, Poetry, and the Major and Minor Prophets. The New Testament is divided as well. It contains the Gospels, History, the Epistles and letters and the Book of Revelation.

Many writings have been claimed to be a part of the Bible but are not included in the copy you have today. Some of these are the Gospel of Thomas, The Book of Enoch, the Gospel of Judas and many others. Some of these writings are even mentioned in the Bible. So why did some writings make it in the Bible while others did not?

In order to be included in the Bible, or what is commonly referred to as canon of scripture, the writings had to be accepted by the priests or religious community as they were circulated. The author and content would be scrutinized. This did not always result in agreement among the people. Over time, some books prevailed and others were rejected. This could be due to conflicting messages or a lack of credible authorship. The Books that demonstrated divine authorship were collected and passed on. Those that were rejected may remain but did not pass the same scrutiny as those that were included.

Due to the high level of scrutiny given to the authors and writings, we can rest assured that we possess in our Bibles what God inspired and intended us to have. The other writings that were rejected have not passed this scrutiny and should not be viewed with the same reliability as the those included in the Canon.

DAY TWO - THE BIBLE – ORIGINS AND IDENTITY



Have you read the Book? A careful examination of the Bible requires us to read the book. There are many reading plans to help you systematically read the Bible. I recommend you start at the beginning and read some every day. The Bible is an ancient and complex writing. It may not be easy to get through certain parts. This is a testimony to its divine authorship. A steady reading plan will move you through the book and you will find it very rewarding.

Homework –

Lay out a reading plan and begin today. Start in the beginning and work your way through the Bible in order. You may want to just read one chapter per day or a whole book. Make your plan something you can stick with. An overly aggressive reading plan may be hard to follow.

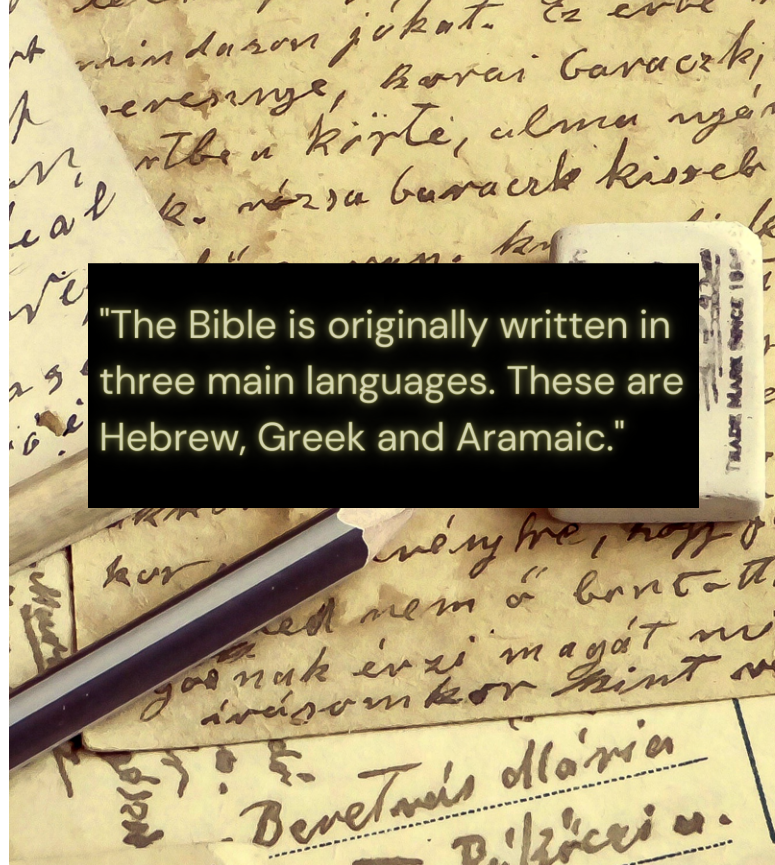


DAY THREE - THE BIBLE'S RELIABILITY PROPHECY, CONTRADICTIONS AND TEXTS

God moved upon men to write as He inspired them to write. He did not force them to write but He inspired the Bible. He then proved this point by including in it things only God could know. The Bible contains many prophecies that were given hundreds of years before they came to pass. The amazing number of prophecies are just one proof that God had a hand in writing the Bible. There are over 50 prophecies about Jesus alone. No other collection of writings even comes close to predicting the future as often or as accurate as the Bible.

Another testimony of the divine authorship of the Bible is the preserved accuracy. The Bible is the most copied and most published book in all of history. There are hundreds and thousands of portions of the Bible that have been recovered. These parts date from over thousands of years. When the copies are compared, we find that the Bible has been accurately preserved. In fact, the Bible is the most accurately preserved book in all of ancient literature. No other book is even a close second.

What does this mean for us? It means we can approach the Bible with confidence. We can rest assured that its message has been accurately preserved. That it communicates

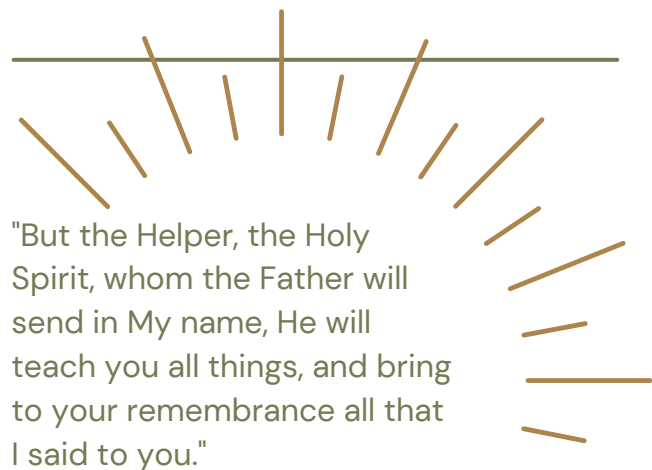


to us what God intended to communicate to us. It has divine origins to its authorship, even though God used men to move the pen. The Bible is God's written revelation of Himself and His master plan.

The Bible is originally written in three main languages. These are Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic. Our modern English language Bibles are translated from these languages. There are many methods used in translating from ancient languages to modern ones. There are many things to consider. The context of the original author was very different from the modern translator. Many of the words used in the Bible are no longer used today. Translators are forced to find other uses outside the Bible or to translate from context. This will result in differences in word choice among translations.

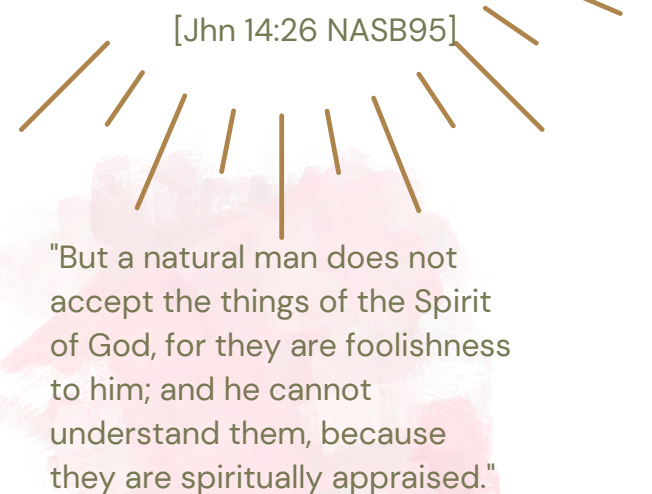
We should not rely only on the translation that we hold in order to understand the Bible. The Bible says that God's Holy Spirit will teach us and give us understanding.

DAY THREE - THE BIBLE'S RELIABILITY PROPHECY, CONTRADICTIONS AND TEXTS



"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

[Jhn 14:26 NASB95]



"But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised."

[1Co 2:14 NASB95]

Reading and understanding the Bible is a spiritual endeavor. We should approach it as such. Before reading the Bible, pray for God to give you His Spirit and understanding.



"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

[Eph 1:17 NASB95]



Wisdom



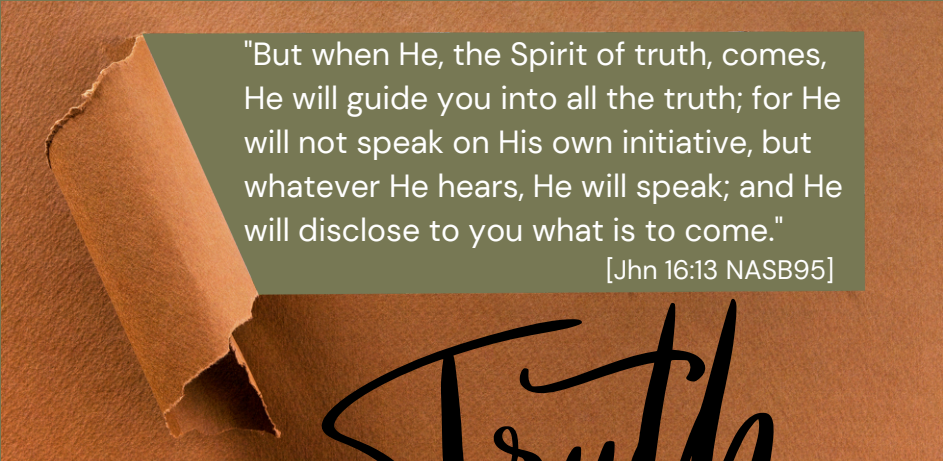
DAY FOUR - THE BIBLE IS NOT A REFERENCE OR OWNERS MANUAL. IT IS A REVELATION OF GOD.

The Bible has been called many things. It has been referenced as the owners manual or the reference book for life. It is said by some that all of life's answers are found in the Bible. That is just not true. The Bible won't tell you which job to take or which person to marry. It is not designed to answer every question. When people try to do this, they end up taking the Bible out of context and all sorts of errors occur as a result.

The Bible is God's revelation to mankind. It tells us who He is, what He is like and what He is doing. It does contain valuable wisdom on how to live. It can be used as a guide book for life. To try and make it apply to specific situations it was not designed to address is a tricky and dangerous practice.

The Bible tells us why God created everything. It tells us in big principles,

how we should live. It says to love your enemy, sacrifice for others, serve people and care for creation. It does not tell us specifically how to do these things in every way possible. I think the reason is simple. If it gave us specific instruction, that is all we would do. God knows life is complicated. He knows there are an infinite number of possible situations. This is why He offers us His Holy Spirit as a guide to lead us in the right way to live. The big picture principles are in the Bible. The details are in the Spirit.



"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come."

[Jhn 16:13 NASB95]

It is the Holy Spirit that will guide us into all truth. Having a Bible without having the Holy Spirit will not get you to an understanding of the truth. When you read the Bible you should ask yourself "What is this saying about God?".

Truth

Homework – Write out one verse that reveals something to you about God's nature or character and describe that thing.

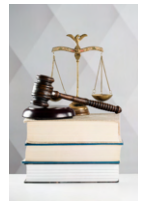


DAY FIVE – THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT – WHY TWO SEPARATE WORKS?



The letters and books of the Bible were written and collected over many years. These collections were carefully preserved and copied so they could be passed down through the ages. There are separations in the Bible that have been added for definition and easier use. The Old Testament was simply the Jewish sacred Scriptures prior to Jesus. After the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus the New Testament came about. It wasn't until the 1500's A.D. That chapter and verse divisions were added.

Jesus claimed to be the fulfillment of the Law.



"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

[Mat 5:17 NASB95]

The early church did not see itself as a new religion. It saw itself as the fulfillment of the Jewish faith and thereby a natural extension. Many Jewish people did not accept this. They kept their sacred texts and rejected the writings of the New Testament and Jesus as the Messiah. The early church circulated the writings of the Apostles who taught about Jesus. These were later gathered together into what is now the New Testament.

Those of the Jewish faith use only the Old Testament. Christians use both the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament describes the journey from Adam through the rise of the nation of Israel. It records history, genealogy, the Law of Moses, the Temple system and the writings of the Prophets. The New Testament gives accounts of the life and work of Jesus, the early church, the letters to the churches from the early Apostles and the prophecy of the Book of Revelation.



DAY FIVE – THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT – WHY TWO SEPARATE WORKS?



It is very important to remember that, when reading the Old Testament, the people it was written to were under the Law of Moses and the temple system. When reading the New Testament, the people it was written to were free from those rules and requirements as the requirements of the temple system were fulfilled by Jesus. The guiding religious practices of the Old Testament were found in the Law of Moses and practiced through the Temple system and Levitical Priesthood. The New Testament proclaims the priesthood of all believers and the emphasis is on Grace and the Holy Spirit not a temple system.



The Old Testament emphasizes the need for animal sacrifices and the mediation of the priests on behalf of men. The New Testament emphasizes the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross to fulfill all need for sacrifices. It also speaks of the return of the Spirit of God to man so there is no need for any other mediator but Jesus.



Grace

"For there is one God, [and] one mediator also between God and men, [the] man Christ Jesus"

[1Ti 2:5 NASB95]



DAY SIX - UNDERSTANDING SEPARATIONS AND WRITING STYLES

In order to understand the Old Testament it is necessary to understand the writing styles used in the books. The way people communicated long ago was very different from how we communicate today. There are many literary tools used in the Old Testament that are strange to us today. For example, the verse below is an ancient way of saying David was ten times better than Saul.

"THE WOMEN SANG AS THEY PLAYED, AND SAID, "SAUL HAS SLAIN HIS THOUSANDS, AND DAVID HIS TEN THOUSANDS."

[ISA 18:7 NASB95]

This verse is not meant to say that each man actually killed this number of people. It is a literary device of comparison. When you come across difficult passages in the Old Testament, you must try to discover the writing style being used before drawing conclusions. Remember that you are reading an ancient text written hundreds or thousands of years ago in a language and culture different from your own.

This is no different for us than it would be for others that are not familiar with our literary devices. For example, if I say it is raining cats and dogs, you do not conclude that canines and felines are falling from the clouds. I am simply saying it is raining very hard. The Bible has many such literary tools used throughout. Even our English translations can use these devices. One example is found in the Book of Acts in the English King James translation of the Bible.

"AND FROM THENCE WE FETCHED A COMPASS, AND CAME TO RHEGIUM: AND AFTER ONE DAY THE SOUTH WIND BLEW, AND WE CAME THE NEXT DAY TO SPUTEOLI"

[ACT 28:13 KJV]

The Old Testament contains a variety of writing styles. These include historical narrative, poetry, prophecy, wisdom literature and apocryphal writings. In order to understand the writings of the Old Testament, you must understand the writing style of what you are reading.

Think of some examples of modern day expressions that would be difficult for someone from another time or culture to understand. Does this help you to understand the ancient Bible texts?



DAY SEVEN - UNDERSTANDING THE NEW TESTAMENT - SEPARATIONS AND WRITING STYLES.

The majority of the New Testament is written in Koine Greek. This was a common language in the time of Jesus but has since gone out of common use. Understanding the New Testament requires us to understand the context of the writers and the purpose of the writings.

The first four books of the New Testament are called the Gospels. They were written by men that walked with Jesus with the exception of Luke. Luke was a companion of Paul. They were each written from their unique perspective but often cover similar events and information. These books recount the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

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The next book of the Bible is called the Acts of the Apostles or simply, Acts. It is a history of the early church as written by Luke, the author of the third Gospel. It appears to be a continuation of the first letter which is also addressed to Theophilus.

"It seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write [it] out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus"

[Luk 1:3 NASB95]

History



"The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach"

[Luk 1:3 NASB95]

This book follows many of the apostles as they travel around preaching the Gospel, making disciples and establishing churches.

The books that follow are called the Epistles. These are generally letters from an Apostle or early church leader that were written as instruction to a church or individual. It is important to remember that these were often written to address specific issues within specific churches or certain individuals. While the content is divinely inspired, the context must be understood to make it useful to us.



DAY SEVEN - UNDERSTANDING THE NEW TESTAMENT - SEPARATIONS AND WRITING STYLES.

In some cases we simply do not have enough information to completely understand what the author is trying to say. For example, Regarding the practice of baptizing for the dead.

"Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?"

[1Co 15:29 NASB95]

We have no other information in the Bible regarding this practice. Just because it is mentioned here does not mean we should practice it. The Bible is not condoning the practice simply by mentioning it. We do not know the purpose for the practice or the circumstances of its use. We just know that those Paul was writing this letter to would have understood it.

The last type of writing in the New Testament is apocalyptic literature. This writing style uses extreme symbolism and imagery to communicate in a prophetic way. The Book of Revelation is written in this style. Because of this, the Book of Revelation has been misinterpreted in every generation. People are often trying to fit the pages of this book into the newspaper headlines of their day. It is important to remember that even this book would have had clear meaning to the recipients of its day.




WEEK TWO



DAY EIGHT - THE LAW - THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE LAW OF GOD AND THE LAW OF MOSES

The Bible makes reference to the Law in many places. It is very important to understand what Law is being referenced in these passages. There is an eternal Law, called the Law of God. It was written by God's own finger on two stone tablets. The tablets were delivered to the people by Moses. See Exodus chapter 20. The promise of God is that through Jesus He will write His law upon our hearts.



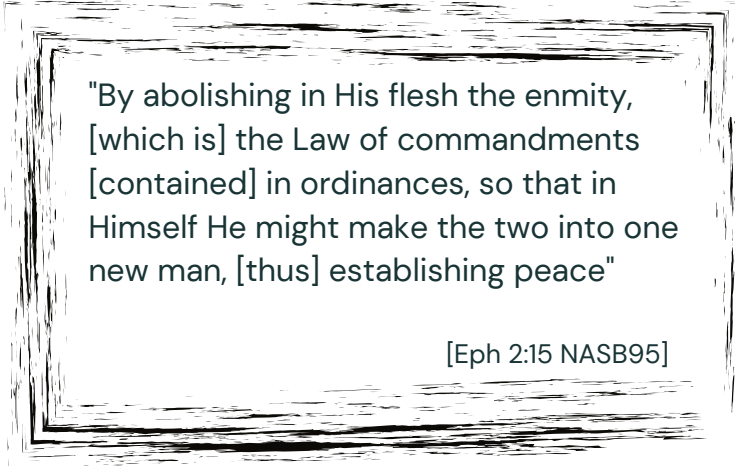
""But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

[Jer 31:33 NASB95]



The Law of God is eternal and always binding upon His people.

The Law of Moses describes the rules and regulations given to the nation of Israel, designed to regulate their lives, worship and temple system. This Law is not eternal. It is fulfilled in Christ who abolished it through His death, burial and resurrection.



"By abolishing in His flesh the enmity, [which is] the Law of commandments [contained] in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, [thus] establishing peace"

[Eph 2:15 NASB95]



DAY NINE - UNDERSTANDING GRACE - FREEDOM FROM THE LAW OF MOSES

To find favor and acceptance through the loving kindness of God. This is the Biblical concept of grace. In the Old Testament times, the nation of Israel was under the Law of Moses. Favor and acceptance by God was found through keeping the commandments and rituals of the Law. These rituals appeased God and caused Him to overlook the sins of the people and maintain relationship with them.

Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses by offering a sinless sacrifice and thereby leaving no sin remaining that would require another atonement.

Jesus did not do away with the Law of Moses. He fulfilled it by being the only one who was able to offer a sinless sacrifice. This left all sin atoned for.

26 For it was fitting for us to have such a high priest, holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners and exalted above the heavens; 27 who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the [sins] of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. 28 For the Law appoints men as high priests who are weak, but the word of the oath, which came after the Law, [appoints] a Son, made perfect forever.

[Heb 7:26-28 NASB95]

So there is no longer any need to follow the Law of Moses. Jesus has fulfilled its requirements. Through faith in Jesus, we can be free from the Law of Moses. We can find favor and acceptance with God through Jesus. This is grace.

8 After saying above, "SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND [sacrifices] FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE [in them]" (which are offered according to the Law), 9 then He said, "BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL." He takes away the first in order to establish the second. 10 By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

[Heb 10:8-10 NASB95]

Grace

Grace gives us freedom from the performance demanded by the Law of Moses. We find rest in Jesus because He has brought us near to God. We can enter the presence of God with a clear conscience due to Jesus. Under the Law of Moses, only the High Priest could approach the throne of God. This was only allowed once a year and only took place in the inner court of the temple. Jesus destroyed this separation and by grace we are now allowed to enter the presence of God in the Spirit.

Homework – describe a time where you experienced the presence of God.

DAY TEN - ENTERING INTO COVENANT WITH GOD

COVENANT VS CONTRACT

We come under grace when we repent of our sins and place our faith in the work that Jesus did on the cross on our behalf. This act of repentance is more than just saying you are sorry for what you did. It is entering into a covenant with God through Jesus.

"Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as [coming] from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6 who also made us adequate [as] servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."

[2Co 3:5-6 NASB95]

We enter into the new covenant that was made possible by the shed blood of Jesus. It cost Him His life to enter into it. The cost for you is the same. You enter into it by agreeing to serve God with your whole life. This is made possible by the Holy Spirit who is given to you at the time of your repentance.

A covenant is different from a contract. Both parties in a contract have responsibilities and get benefits. A contract can be broken. A covenant also gives both parties responsibilities and benefits. The difference with a covenant is that it remains binding on the parties, even if one breaks it. It is eternally binding.

When we enter into covenant with God through Jesus, we are agreeing to serve God with our whole life. When we fail to do that, it does not void God's responsibilities under the covenant. This is one reason God places His Spirit in use when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior. The Spirit is a deposit to show us that our inheritance under the covenant is guaranteed.



Entering into a contract gives you responsibilities. Entering into covenant gives up your life.



Homework – Have you considered the cost of your salvation? Have you fully understood your responsibilities when you entered into covenant through Jesus? Take a minute to count the cost of dedicating your whole life to God and reaffirm your commitment to God.

DAY ELEVEN - JESUS - WHO IS HE?

Jesus is the Christ. The Christ is the Messiah that was promised to Israel.

Jesus is the one who died for our sins and was raised from the dead. He is our intercessor.

"Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us."
[Rom 8:34 NASB95]

Jesus is the son of God.

Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

[1Jo 4:15 NASB95]

But Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this [Jesus] is the Christ.

[Act 9:22 NASB95]

It is Jesus who rules the kingdom of light. He provides us with redemption, forgiveness and life. Jesus is fully man and fully God. The aspects of God that could be contained in human form were present in Jesus. He is eternal and has been with the Father God from before the world was formed. He created all things. He sustains all things. He rules the church. He has made peace between man and God.

"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the [Father's] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, [I say,] whether things on earth or things in heaven."

[Col 1:13-20 NASB95]

Jesus was born of earthly human parents but He was fathered by God. God Himself impregnated Mary. Jesus was without sin.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as [we are, yet] without sin.

[Heb 4:15 NASB95]

It is Jesus who allows us access to God the Father. He is the only way to gain that access.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

[Jhn 14:6 NASB95]

DAY TWELVE - JESUS' WORK ON THE CROSS

What Jesus did on the cross is the final atoning sacrifice for all sin. This offering up of himself for all humans, is a fundamental tenet of Christianity. Jesus is the only one that could have accomplished this feat. He was both a sinless human and the fullness of God in human form. He suffered for us, bleed for us, died for us and the rose from the dead to prove He was God.

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross."

[Act 5:30 NASB95]

The Bible speaks of the work on the cross as fundamental to our faith. It affirms that the sacrifice happened.

It proclaims it as the central work of God on our behalf and the reason we die to our own self and live for God.

"But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

[Gal 6:14 NASB95]

"Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

[Heb 12:2 NASB95]

It proclaims that it was on the cross where Jesus became the author and perfecter of our faith.

Notice that it says He endured it for the joy set before Him. This is an example to us. We endure suffering for the cause of Jesus for the same reason. We know that because of the cross, we will one day be seated with Christ just as we are currently seated in heavenly places.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus"

[Eph 2:4-6 NASB95]

"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

[Heb 10:10 NASB95]

It is through placing our faith in Jesus and His work on the cross, as well as His resurrection from the dead, that we are cleansed of our sins and have peace with God.

DAY THIRTEEN - THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION.

Why is the resurrection of Jesus such a big deal? Jesus himself raised people from the dead, so it had happened before, right?

"Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead."

[Jhn 12:1 NASB95]

"And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise!" 15 The dead man sat up and began to speak. And [Jesus] gave him back to his mother."

[Luk 7:14-15 NASB95]

There is a major difference between these instances and the resurrection of Jesus. These men died again later. Jesus has never died again and never will. The body of these men returned to the dust and decayed. Jesus did not. He is alive today!

"but He whom God raised did not undergo decay."

[Act 13:37 NASB95]

The resurrection of Jesus proves He has defeated death and has the power to give us eternal life as well. It declared He is the Son of God. It assures us of eternal life. It is why Christians use the term "Born Again". We die to our self when we place our faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Through the Spirit we are born again to eternal life in Jesus through the power of His resurrection.

"who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord,"

[Rom 1:4 NASB95]

"For if we have become united with [Him] in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be [in the likeness] of His resurrection,"

[Rom 6:5 NASB95]

The resurrection of Jesus sets Christianity apart from every other religion on earth. Only Jesus is raised from the dead and promising to give us that eternal life as well.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"

[1Pe 1:3 NASB95]

DAY FOURTEEN - THE APOSTLES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE

The Apostles walked with Jesus. There are two types of "apostle" in the Bible. There are the original twelve and there is the spiritual gift of apostle. The Greek word translated as apostle means sent messenger. In this lesson we will speak of the 12 original apostles.

The twelve were called by Jesus. They walked and lived with Him while He ministered on this earth. They learned from Him and worked side by side with Him. One of them turned on Him. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus for money. This also fulfilled prophecy. This left eleven remaining apostles.

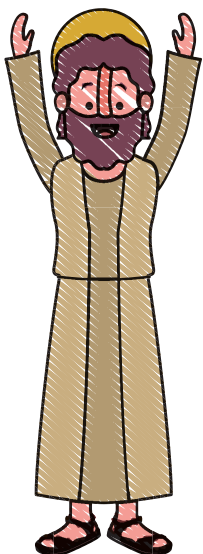
"Brothers," he said, "the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David.

[Act 1:16 NLT]

The remaining eleven chose a replacement from among the men that has also walked with Jesus from the beginning of His ministry.

"Brothers," he said, "the Scriptures had to be fulfilled concerning Judas, who guided those who arrested Jesus. This was predicted long ago by the Holy Spirit, speaking through King David. ... 26 Then they cast lots, and Matthias was selected to become an apostle with the other eleven.

[Act 1:16, 26 NLT]



The apostles were considered leaders and experts on the teachings of Jesus. They spread the Gospel and started churches. They all died as martyrs. Some died under horrible circumstances. The faith and service of the Apostles stands as a testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. They all watched Him die. It is hard to believe they would have all agreed to fabricate a lie about the resurrection, preach it around the world only to die in poverty through torture and execution. They all knew the truth. They spoke to the risen Jesus.

The truth of the resurrection changed their lives. It gave them the willingness to endure suffering and death in order to serve the cause of Jesus. It should do the same for us.

The Book of Acts is a historical writing in regards to the work and early ministry of the 12 apostles. These men hold a special place in the history of Christianity.

WEEK THREE



DAY FIFTEEN - THE LETTERS WHO RECEIVED THEM AND WHY

Of the 27 books in the New Testament, 21 are letters or what is commonly called Epistles. 17 of these letters are written to churches or groups of people and 4 are written to individuals. The letters are written by at least 5 different authors. I say at least, because the author of the letter to the Hebrews is debated. What we do know about the letters is that they each addressed specific issues or contained specific instruction regarding the Christian faith.

The letters were considered to have authority because they were written by the apostles. The letters were preserved and circulated among the early Christians until they were collected and organized into the New Testament much later. The letters are arranged in the Bible by size. The longer letters come first and the smaller letters come later. The arrangement of the New Testament follows. First the four Gospels. Then the Book of Acts. Then the letters, by size, from longest to shortest. Finally, the Book of Revelation.

The majority of the letters were written by the apostle Paul and directed to either churches he started or individuals he knew or disciplined. It is interesting to note that Paul was not one of the original twelve Apostles. He was not even the one chosen to replace Judas Iscariot. Paul was an early persecutor of Christians who was called directly by Jesus.

""As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; 4 and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" 5 And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He [said,] "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, 6 but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

[Act 9:3-6 NASB95]

When we read the letters, we must remember that they were written to real people living in a very different culture and time period than us. We do not always know the circumstances that caused the letter to be written. We may not even know the full reason for the writing. We certainly only see one side of the conversation. Learning to read the Bible in context is one of the greatest needs in Christianity today.

The point of context is to read the letter in the way it was intended. We cannot take verses and passages out of context and apply them universally to our time and culture. This is not to say that there are no lessons in the letters that are universal. There certainly are.

When we read the letter, we must understand the writing style. Some of the letters are historical fact. Other parts may be allegory such as Galatians chapter four.

"This is allegorically speaking, for these [women] are two covenants: one [proceeding] from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.

[Gal 4:24 NASB95]

There are also cultural differences and traditions that may be addressed without context. As with all of the Bible, you must approach it in the Spirit to gain full understanding.

DAY SIXTEEN - CONTEXT

WRITINGS ARE OVER 2000 YEARS OLD.

CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY DIFFERENCES

Another very important factor in reading and understanding the Bible is to place the writings in their proper time and place. The letters of the New Testament were written in the first century A.D. They were written to a culture that was very different from our culture today. They had no mass communication, no high speed forms of travel. They didn't even have a quick way to reproduce and distribute written documents.

The culture was highly patriarchal. Women were not given any equal status. Slavery, in some forms, was legal. Barter was common and wealth was measured more in possession of animals and material things like gold, silver or precious oils and incense. There was no stock market or retirement accounts. The religious system was the only social safety net. When you left that, you left security.

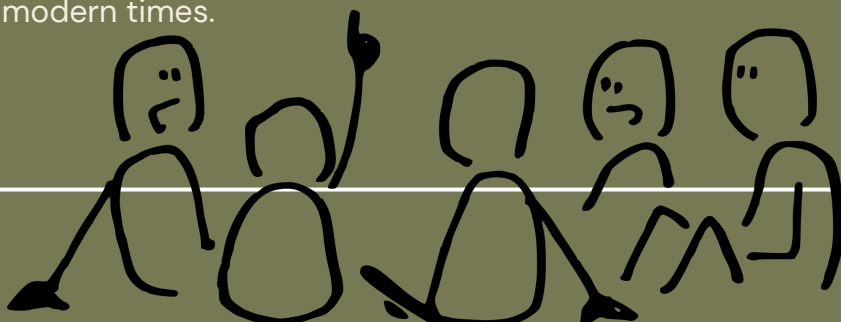
The early Jewish church members had to leave everything in order to follow Jesus. Their livelihood, inheritance and family were all tied to their religious life. To leave the faith was to leave everything you had known your whole life. By the second century, the government was persecuting the followers of Jesus and many were executed. In our present day America we cannot fathom the risk and cost it took to follow Jesus in the first century.



Not only did the followers of Jesus leave everything, they became targets of ridicule and persecution. We need to know this as we read the New Testament so we can understand the writings that reference tribulation and suffering. The types of suffering and tribulation they endured may be hard for us to relate to in our modern times.

The conditions of the culture where the early church was formed led to some very strong commitments. Becoming a martyr, dying for the faith, was considered the greatest honor of the kingdom. You won't find many today that view it in this way. The church was forced to rely on each other. They took each other into their homes and freely shared what they had with each other.

They could not call or email each other to introduce those traveling to new areas. Instead, they wrote letters of introduction from well know members. The early church was regularly taking in literal strangers and caring for them. This created a bond among the churches that is hard to duplicate in our modern times.



DAY SEVENTEEN - LANGUAGE ISSUES

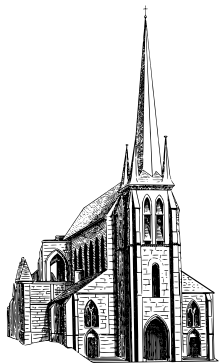
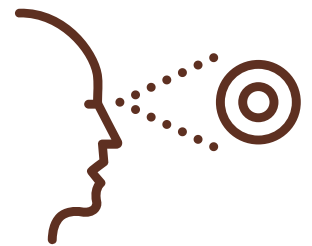
UNDERSTANDING WHO TRANSLATED YOUR BIBLE

The Old Testament was written primarily in the Hebrew language. The New testament was written in Greek and Aramaic. Most Americans are only familiar with the English translation of the Bible. These translations have been made at different times throughout history, by different people or groups of people.



The Bible has been translated into many languages. From early Greek versions to the Latin Vulgate. English has been the most common language for translations. There are multiple English versions of the Bible. Some were written in old English style, like the King James Version. Others tried to use more modern language such as The Message. All of these have some things in common.

The context of the translators always taints the translation. In the early church, there was no corporation or professional clergy class. The structure the Bible lays out for the church is very organic and leadership is based on spiritual gifts and not professional training. All of the existing English translations of the Bible come out of the age of the institutional church.



The problem with this context is that it is not the intended context of the Bible. Since no instruction for forming an institution or training a professional clergy class exists in the Bible, it is hard to see the writings in their original intended purpose through that filter. Many times this institutional context influences word choices when translating.

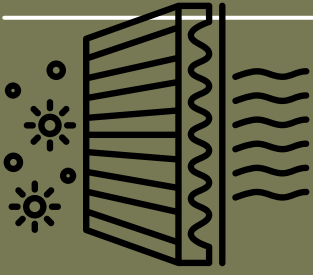


Most often, this plays out in practices of Biblical principles. One example is baptism. The command to baptize is not given to an institution or professional clergy. It is given in Matthew 28:18-20 in what is commonly called the Great Commission. In spite of this, most churches require that professional clergy perform baptisms.



Don't let the predominant institution taint your reading of Scripture. The burden to sustain their viewpoint is on those that add instruction to the Bible. When you approach the New Testament, you must keep in mind the organic nature of the church under the New Covenant. When a word doesn't seem right in the context, research it. You can find great tools on the internet like Blue Letter Bible or Bible Gateway that allow you to quickly compare several translations side by side.

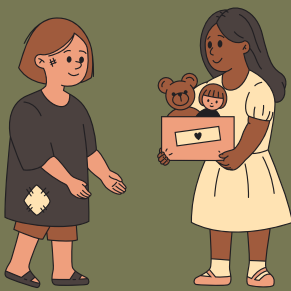
DAY EIGHTEEN - EVERYONE SEES THROUGH A FILTER – EVEN SCHOLARS



One challenge for any Bible reader is to try and see through the eyes of the writer and intended audience. Everyone sees through the filter of their own experiences and circumstances. This holds true for us and for those that made our English translations of the Bible.

By the time any English translations were made, the church had been dominated by an institutional form for over a thousand years. This filter or lens of perception, taints the translators view. There are some things we can remember that will help us to properly interpret the Bible.

One thing to note is that no institution is instructed by the New Testament. The Old Testament and the Law of Moses gave explicit and detailed instructions for a temple system, priesthood, daily worship and sacrifice as well as instructions for life and finances. The New Testament gives no instruction for an institutional form because those things were fulfilled in Christ.



When we see instructions in the New Testament for leadership, giving or references to priests, it is not intended in an institutional form. Doing things through an institution is rarely the intent for the New Testament instruction. One example is giving of money. The modern church institution has adopted the tithe as something it is to collect. Giving in the New Testament is never intended to be directed to an institution but rather from person to person.

Another great example of this distortion is the meaning applied to the term church. Modern scholars presumed this as a reference to the institutional forms that they were entrenched in. This is not the intent of the New Testament. The church is simply the collective group of believers. Sometimes it references a local expression such as the church at Corinth. It never references an institutional form such as we commonly see today. Those forms were designed by men and implemented apart from the instruction of Scripture.



One more thing to remember is that all of the letters of the New Testament were written to believers in Jesus Christ. This makes some of the passages more difficult to understand but it is the true context. Unbelievers were never mixed in the churches during the time of the writings of the New Testament. Allowing unbelievers in the worship gathering or churches is a modern practice of the institution that has no basis in the New Testament Scriptures.



DAY NINETEEN - DON'T TAKE IT OUT OF CONTEXT - PRETEXTS AND PROOF TEXTS

A pretext is when you use a Bible verse to justify a course of action that the Bible verse was not intended to support in context. A proof text is when you use a Bible verse out of context to support a point of theology that the verse was never intended to support, Both of these practices are common today and both distort the true meaning of the word of God.

An example of pretext is

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. Many use this to condemn people who they think are judging others. This verse is not a condemnation of all judging. It is the beginning of a doctrine on proper judging. To understand the teaching of the Bible regarding judging others, we must understand all of its teaching on the subject.

[Matt 7:1 NASB95]

An example of proof texting is found in

"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Many use this verse out of context to encourage others through difficult tasks or trying times. The real context here is that Paul is proclaiming his ability to endure poverty and handle wealth in a God honoring way. Any other use of the passage is out of context.

[Phi 4:13 NASB95]

I think one of the reasons that so many use the Bible in this way is due to how they have been taught about the Bible. If you have been taught that the Bible is the "owners manual" or that it has all the answers, then you are looking hard for ways to support that view. In fact , the Bible reveals God and His plan to us. The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth. We must never get these roles confused.



Learning to read the bible in context is a very important thing for a Christian. Learning to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit is even more important.



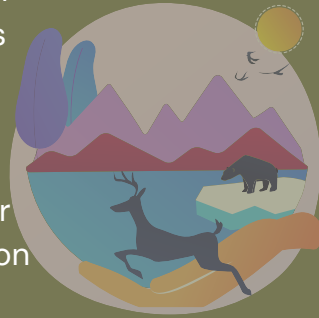
Homework – Find a difficult passage of the Bible and pray that the Holy Spirit would give you understanding. Write down your results.

DAY TWENTY - UNDERSTANDING OUR PURPOSE THE ORIGINAL TASK GIVEN TO MAN

"God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

[Gen 1:28 NASB95]

This command was given to Adam and Eve before they fell into sin. In spite of their transgression, the command has never changed. Mankind was made in the image and likeness of God. Man was designed to be an expression of God's glory. So was all of creation. Our purpose is to proclaim to all of creation that God is who He says He is. We show this by obeying His commands and stewarding His creation.



Our enemy has distorted this command so that God's glory is not declared but rather the glory of men is proclaimed. Many today use creation for their own benefit. They plunder natural resources in order to obtain wealth. This is a distortion of God's purpose for creation. He did create everything for man's use. He did not create it for man's to destroy but rather to steward.

We destroy an expression of God's glory when we fail to care for creation. We do the same thing when we fail to care for the poor, elderly, weak or foreigners. God's design is not for us to accumulate wealth and find a life of careless ease. This was the sin of Sodom.

God's design is for us to deny our self, take up our cross and follow Jesus. When we follow this command we find our purpose.

When we take care of the earth and all that is in it, we show the world we believe God and value Him and His creation. Coming into harmony with God and His creation is the purpose of mankind. Living sacrificially for the care of others is what Jesus modeled for us in His life. He also instructs us to live in this way.

"Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy.

[Eze 16:49 NASB95]



Homework – can you find any Bible verse that instructs us to use the creation to accumulate wealth for our self?

DAY TWENTY ONE - THE ISSUE OF SIN AND WHAT IT REALLY MEANS DOING OUR OWN THINGS

What is sin and why does Christianity appear to be so obsessed with sin? In the Old Testament, the Hebrew words for sin carries a meaning of violating a law. In the New Testament, the Greek word for sin indicates wandering from the path. In both cases, sin refers to a failure to follow God's laws and design for our lives.



There is a phrase in the Old Testament that is used several times. It is "Each man did what was right in his own eyes". In each one of these occurrences, things turned out very bad for everyone. This is, in fact, where all sin started. In the garden of Eden, Adam was told to follow one rule. Instead, he chose to do what he decided to do. This is sin.



This example gives us the very basis for what sin is and why it is dealt with so harshly by God. The results of Adam's sin were devastating. All of creation fell under the curse. Every human since then has been born under this curse and in sin. All God desired for Adam was to live in the way God designed for him to live. Because Adam was designed in the image and likeness of God he had the freewill to choose. When Adam chose to sin, he proclaimed that he did not believe God.

You too have freewill. You can choose to follow God's design and way of living or to follow your own ways. One way proclaims the glory of God. When we follow God's design and rules we proclaim that we believe He is who He says He is. We do this with our life. When we follow our own choices that are in opposition to God's design or rules, we proclaim that we know better. We in effect, put ourselves in the place of God over our lives. This is exactly what Adam did.

Why does God react so harshly to sin? You were created as an expression of God's glory. When we sin, we proclaim the opposite. God's rules are designed to give us a full and abundant life. He created us and He knows best how we should live. When we sin, our actions negatively affect ourselves and others. Sometimes our sin affects generations after us.

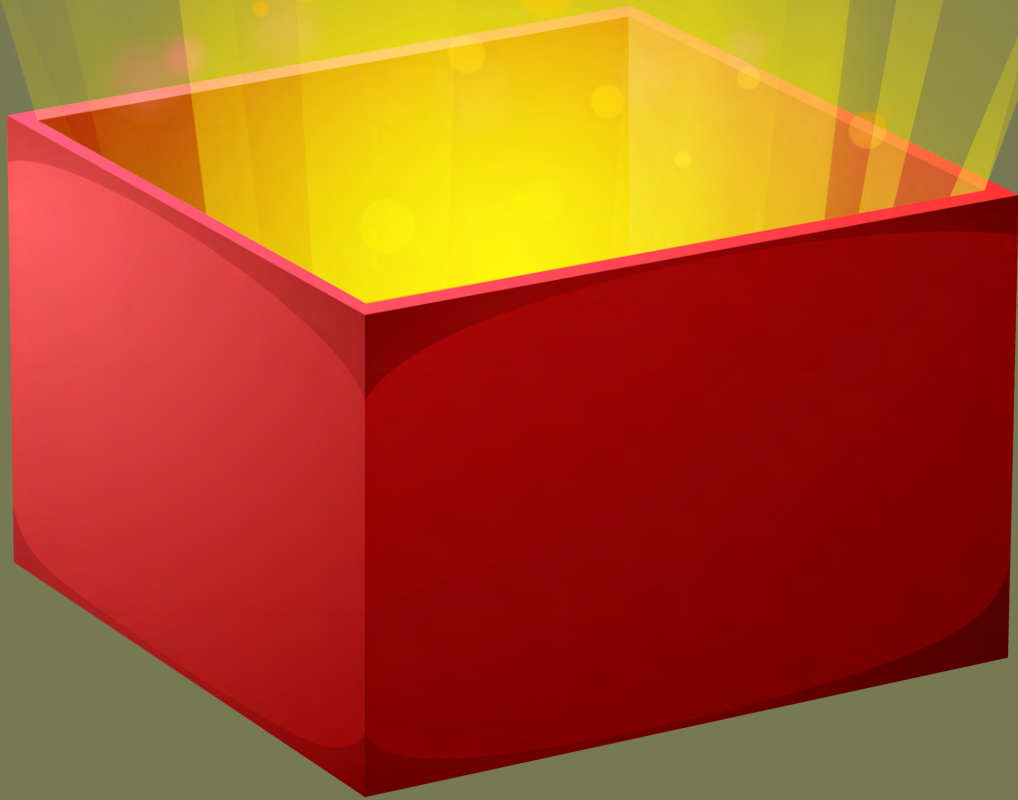


Under the New Covenant sin is often defined in principles instead of hard and fast rules. There are some literal rules but often it is concepts like love your enemies or care for the poor that are our instructions. These can play out in very different ways for different people. This is why we are given the Holy Spirit when we enter into the New Covenant through Jesus. The Spirit leads us into behavior that is in harmony with God's will and His ways.

The principles of the New Testament guide us in a direction. We are told to love others, live sacrificially, serve others, and so on. If we embrace these principles, we will do well. When we act in opposition to these things we sin. When we ignore the poor or serve our self, we are not following God's design or instruction. God does not do this so that you will have a set of rules to follow. He does this so the world will be a better place.



WEEK FOUR



DAY TWENTY-TWO - ALIGNING OUR LIFE WITH GOD'S DESIGN IS THE PURPOSE AND GOAL

God created everything. He did this with a complexity that we still don't understand. Everything was created to work together. God designed it all to work in harmony. The design was broken when Adam brought sin into the world. Disease, death, decay, violence, famine and destruction are all part of the curse brought on by Adam.



Jesus came to live a sinless life so He could become the final sacrifice for sin. He made it possible to overcome the curse by paying the due penalty for all sin and returning the Spirit of God to mankind. With the indwelling of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible to once again live by God's design. Living by God's design is the goal. When we live by God's design, we fulfill our purpose.

God designed the church to function in such a way that it becomes a living representation of God's design for all of mankind. When we fail to follow God's design for the church, we fail to declare His glory. This disrupts our ability to fulfill our purpose and return to God's design.



So what does this mean for us as Christians? It means we live according to the example of Jesus and the instruction of Scripture. To do anything less is to fail to fulfill our purpose. We cannot do this without each other. God's design is for humans to live together in loving community. It is for each of us to give up our own ambitions for the sake of others. When we live sacrificially together in community we are moving in the right direction.



DAY TWENTY-THREE - THE CONTEXT IS COMMUNITY

I have heard it said that there are no lone ranger Christians. This is true even though the lone ranger even had Tonto. The point is that Christianity is about community. In order for the Christian to live out God's design, it requires others. There are many aspects of the Christian faith that cannot be fulfilled or fully experienced without other people.

One example of this is the use of spiritual gifts.

"For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, [each of us is to exercise them accordingly:] if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith;"
[Rom 12:4-6 NASB95]

Our spiritual gifts work in conjunction with the other gifts in the community of believers. This concept is taught more than once in the New Testament. We are all interdependent. Without each other, we cannot operate by God's design.

Another Biblical concept that involves community is our relationship to the world, or those that are not Christians. God's design is for us to be a blessing to the nations. The instruction to care for others does not stop with the other Christians we gather with. The local gathering of Christians is to serve their community. We show the love of God to others when we become the hands and feet of Jesus.



God manifests in very real ways when a group of Christians gather together and use their spiritual gifts. The group is then built up into the fullness of Jesus. When this group goes out and serves their community, they manifest that fullness of Jesus to those that don't know Him. This makes the local church a manifestation of God's glory. A group can go out and serve a community but without using their spiritual gifts, God will not manifest.



DAY TWENTY-FOUR - THE OLD TESTAMENT COMMUNITY UNDER PHYSICAL RULES

"I will also walk among you
and be your God, and you
shall be My people."

[Lev 26:12 NASB95]

God has been setting apart a people to follow His ways. This is His design to proclaim His glory to all of creation. He sets apart a chosen people. He gives them instructions on how to live. When they follow that instruction, their lives proclaim the glory of God. This is simply living in harmony with the Law of God.

In the Old Testament times, this set of instructions was called the Law of Moses. The community was well defined. There were rules for joining and living in the community. The center of the community was the temple system and the Levitical priesthood. The laws were enforced by the priests. Penalties often involved atoning sacrifices. The priests had the power to remove people from the community or to allow new people to join through a well defined set of parameters.



When the nation of Israel followed God's design, it flourished. When the nation went astray after other gods and followed other ways, it suffered. The community even had its own financial rules and economic system that was defined by God. These rules ensured that those in the community were cared for, and those that were able, could benefit from hard work. They kept the people from impoverishing others by forgiving all debt and resetting the ownership of the land every fifty years.

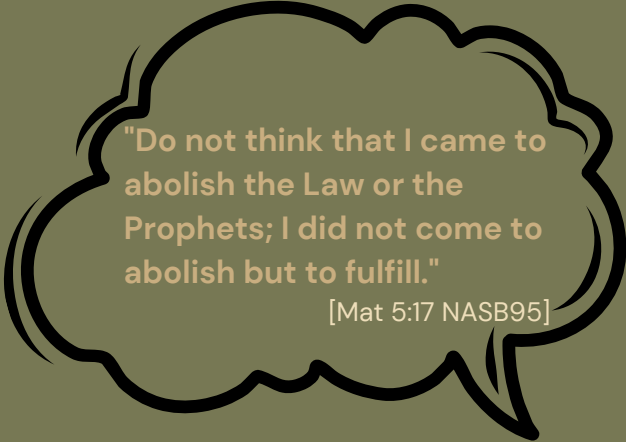
The rules of the Law of Moses were extensive and difficult. It is claimed in the Bible that no one could keep all the Laws. This demonstrated to the people that they needed God. They must rely on His grace and not their own strength or intellect. The sacrificial system of the Temple was designed to be a reminder of their need for forgiveness and their inability to live apart from God.

All of this was just a foreshadowing of what was to come. They all looked forward to a time when God would appear and take away their sins and once again walk among them as He did in the Garden.

"For the Law, since it has [only] a shadow of the good things to come [and] not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near. 2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, because the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have had consciousness of sins? 3 But in those [sacrifices] there is a reminder of sins year by year. 4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."

[Heb 10:1-4 NASB95]

DAY TWENTY-FIVE - THE NEW TESTAMENT COMMUNITY UNDER SPIRITUAL RULES

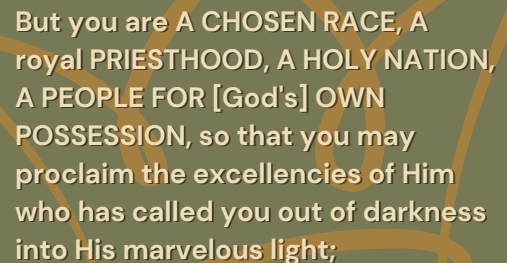


"Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill."

[Mat 5:17 NASB95]

The goal for God was still the same. He is setting apart a people that live by His ways, His design for life. The way He is doing this has changed but the reason is still the same. He wants His people to declare His Glory by the way they live.

These words spoken by Jesus tell us of a change in the rules. The Law was no longer in effect under Jesus. The Law of Moses was being replaced by the Rule of the Holy Spirit or as it is often called, the covenant of Grace.



But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR [God's] OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

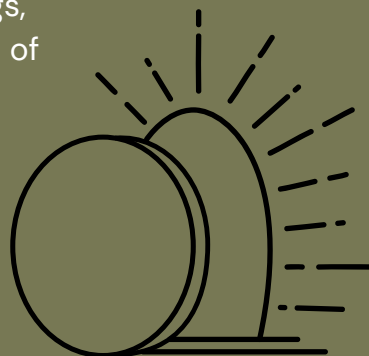
[Phi 4:13 NASB95]

The New Covenant still has rules for life and its own financial system. These rules are broad principles and the financial system is self-sacrificing. Instead of adhering to rules and regulations in order to enter the community, one must possess the Holy Spirit.

The rules are challenging. Sell all you own and give it to the poor. Love your enemies. Serve other. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus. Lay down your life for the sake of others. All of these require the presence of the Holy Spirit because they are divine actions. When we do these things, we will stand apart from the rest of the world and be a living proclamation of God's Glory.

"For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

[2Co 4:11 NASB95]



I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the [life] which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

[Gal 2:20 NASB95]

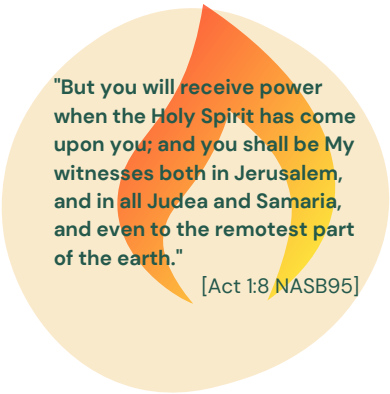
DAY TWENTY-SIX - ONLY THE HOLY SPIRIT CAN MAKE THIS POSSIBLE

**"I baptized you with water;
but He will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit."**

[Mar 1:8 NASB95]

This promise was given by John the Baptist. He was referring to Jesus and the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It would be nearly three years after this promise before it was fulfilled. This emphasizes the importance of what Jesus came to do. He came to return the Holy Spirit of God to mankind. He came to return life!

With the Holy Spirit returned to mankind and the power that comes with Him, we can be witnesses. Without the Holy Spirit we are still dead in the results of the curse Adam brought upon us. Through the Holy Spirit we can live in hope and joy regardless of our circumstances.

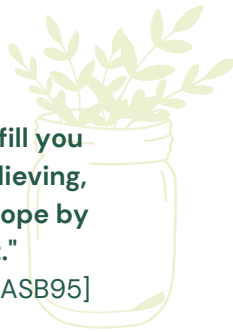


**"But you will receive power
when the Holy Spirit has come
upon you; and you shall be My
witnesses both in Jerusalem,
and in all Judea and Samaria,
and even to the remotest part
of the earth."**

[Act 1:8 NASB95]

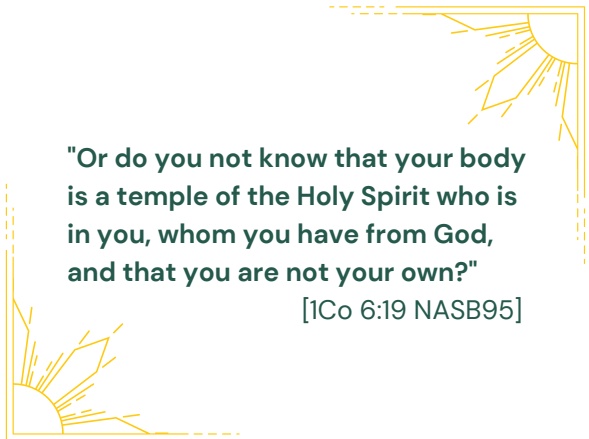
**"Now may the God of hope fill you
with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you will abound in hope by
the power of the Holy Spirit."**

[Rom 15:13 NASB95]



The requirements of living under the Law of God in the Spirit are more demanding than the Law of Moses. We must literally recognize that we have given up our life in order to receive the Holy Spirit.

This is the best trade we can ever make. We give up our own life, which is something we eventually lose at death. And in exchange, we receive eternal life and communion with God. This gives us the power, desire and pleasure of living by God's design in harmony with His ways. Through this life, we proclaim to others that God is who He says He is and that His ways are better than our ways. This is called the covenant of grace, because we did nothing to earn it. It was offered to us as a free gift.



**"Or do you not know that your body
is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is
in you, whom you have from God,
and that you are not your own?"**

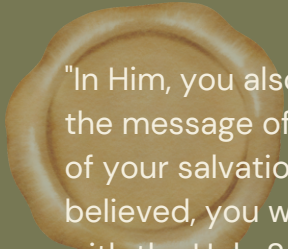
[1Co 6:19 NASB95]

**"He saved us, not on the basis
of deeds which we have done
in righteousness, but
according to His mercy, by the
washing of regeneration and
renewing by the Holy Spirit"**

[Tit 3:5 NASB95]

Without the Holy Spirit we can never live according to God's ways.

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN - UNDERSTANDING THE HOLY SPIRIT - GIFTS, POWER AND PRESENCE



"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise"

[Eph 1:13 NASB95]

One of the things Jesus accomplished through His death, burial and resurrection, was to return to us the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is given to us when we enter into covenant with Him by faith. The work of the Holy Spirit is unique to Christianity. The Holy Spirit is a person and not an it. The Holy Spirit seals us and guarantees our inheritance of eternal life in Jesus.

Another work of the Holy Spirit is to give us power to witness the Glory of God and the Good News of Jesus to others.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

[Acts 1:8 NASB95]



"For the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say."

[Luk 12:12 NASB95]

This power can come in the form of boldness or supernatural knowledge of what to say in certain situations.

Another form of power that comes from the Holy Spirit is through spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are real supernatural enablements that come from God. They work to reveal Jesus, minister God's love or build up the church.

Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

[Eph 4:8 NASB95]



Every person who has entered into covenant with Jesus receives the Holy Spirit and His seal. They also receive the gifts that God desires them to have. Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit they receive power to be a witness. All of this translates into God's Holy Spirit working in us and through us. This is one way we experience the presence of God.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT - GIFTS - THE BASICS

"As each one has received a [special] gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

[1Pe 4:10 NASB95]



God gave us spiritual gifts so we could use them to serve others. He provide each of us with a variety of different gifts. He gathers us together so that our gifts will work to make the church complete.

There are many gifts listed or demonstrated throughout the Bible. Most can be found in three passages. Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. This is not every gift available but it covers the basics.

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all [persons.] 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good."

[1Co 12:4-7 NASB95]



The gifts can be understood as being separated into three categories. There are personality gifts. These display the character of God and reflect parts of His nature through us. There are the ministry gifts. These perform functions within the body and the world that build up others, defeat the enemy or minister to others in some way. There are manifestation gifts. These are the most demonstrative of the gifts. They appear the most supernatural and are often the most abused. These gifts demonstrate the power and presence of God through the believer.

There are a few things to note about spiritual gifts. First, every believer gets gifts from Jesus. If you have entered into covenant with Jesus through faith and have received the Holy Spirit, then you have been given gifts. Second, it is your responsibility to learn about your gifts and to use them.



Using your gifts will help establish you in the church and to find your ministry.

" For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established"

[Rom 1:11 NASB95]



Using your spiritual gifts allows you to feel the presence of God as His power flows through you as you use the gift He gave you. There is an intimacy you get from using your gifts. We have much more detailed training on this subject and can help you discover and learn to use your spiritual gifts.

WEEK FIVE



DAY TWENTY-NINE - POWER - THE BAPTISM OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - FOR EVERYONE

"Peter [said] to them, "Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself."

[Act 2:38-39 NASB95]



The Apostle Peter spoke these words in reference to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit that happened on the Day of Pentecost. This Baptism is the fulfillment of the promise referenced by John the Baptist.

The Holy Spirit that baptizes you is the same Spirit that seals you.



"As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."

[Mat 3:11 NASB95]



"In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation--having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise"

[Eph 1:13 NASB95]



They are just two of the many functions of the Holy Spirit. As Peter points out in the verse above, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is for anyone that God calls to Himself. The promise of God is to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

He fills us for a reason. It is not for our own pleasure, although that can be a benefit. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is given so we may have power to be witnesses.

"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will [your] heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

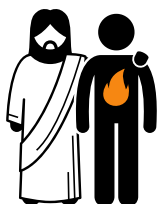
[Luk 11:13 NASB95]



"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

[Acts 1:8 NASB95]

Here are some tips for receiving the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. First and foremost – repent! Ask God for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Open your mouth. Praise Him while you ask. You may also ask someone who is in authority over you, that has received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, to lay hands on you and pray for you.



Remember that the gift is not a mark of approval or maturity. It is a free gift from God that is given at His discretion. It is available to you. I encourage you to seek it.

DAY THIRTY - THE PRESENCE OF GOD THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT- REST



""As the cattle which go down into the valley, The Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So You led Your people, To make for Yourself a glorious name."

[Isa 63:14 NASB95]

The Holy Spirit gives us the promised rest. Through the Holy Spirit our sin, guilt and burdens are removed. Faith is a powerful tool to overcome the weight of the world. When we learn to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and follow Jesus, we stop striving after our own efforts. When we join God in what He is doing and use the spiritual gifts He has given us, we find rest.

""Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS."

[Mat 11:28-29 NASB95]

This rest was spoken of throughout the Bible. In the book of Hebrews it is discussed in detail. The writer uses the example of the nation of Israel entering the promised land looking for rest. The conclusion is that Joshua could not provide the rest. It only comes through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

""So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For the one who has entered His rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from His. 11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through [following] the same example of disobedience."

[Heb 4:9-11 NASB95]

So many people have been raised to believe their value as a person comes from their ability to perform to a certain level. In the Kingdom of God this is not true. We are all honored as God's creation. It is the spiritual gift that God gives us that brings our function to the church and the world. We can rest in our value and our function when we rest in the Holy Spirit and the presence of God.



In the Kingdom of God, no one is disposable. Everyone is needed. Jesus said it this way when speaking about resting in Him.



""On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those [members] of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable."

[1Co 12:22-23 NASB95]

""Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither [can] you unless you abide in Me."

[Jhn 15:4 NASB95]



Abiding, or resting, in Jesus through the Holy Spirit, allows us to know and use our spiritual gifts. This is the only way to bear fruit in the Kingdom.



DAY THIRTY-ONE - THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT - FOR WHAT?

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

[Acts 1:8 NASB95]



"And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and [began] to speak the word of God with boldness."

[Act 4:31 NASB95]

There are many ways the Holy Spirit works. One of them is to provide the power for ministry. The primary way this works is through the spiritual gift(s) God gives you. He also works to empower us with boldness to act. This is often referred to as being filled with the Spirit. This is not to be confused with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a one time occurrence that produces a visible result in the person. Some in the Bible are said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit on more than one occasion.

Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit to do good, heal people and cast out demons.

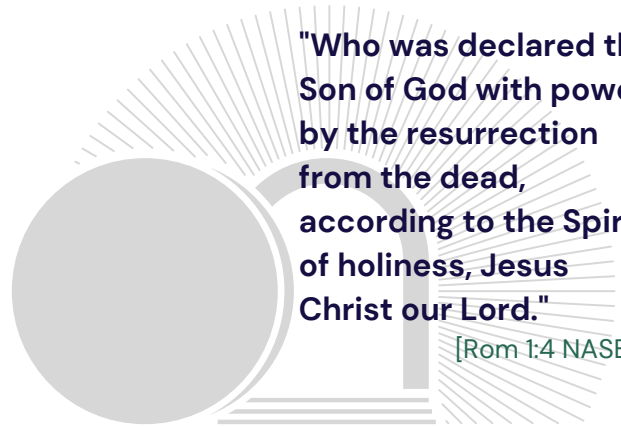
"[You know of] Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and [how] He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him."

[Act 10:38 NASB95]



"Who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord."

[Rom 1:4 NASB95]



It appears Paul also received the power to do this.

Wisdom

"And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

[1Co 2:4 NASB95]

Another function of the power of the Holy Spirit is to strengthen us to endure hardship and tribulation.

"That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man."

[Eph 3:16 NASB95]

The Bible says the Holy Spirit empowered men to do great deeds, create great artistic works and endure miraculous circumstances. He allowed Joseph to interpret dreams. He inspired the Prophets to speak. He raised Jesus from the dead. The Spirit reveals secrets and the future to us. It is the Spirit that gives us access to the Father and His throne.

DAY THIRTY-TWO - THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

"This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come."

[Mat 24:14 NASB95]



We are given power by the Holy Spirit to be witnesses to all the earth. What we are supposed to witness to the world is the Good News of Jesus or the Gospel of the Kingdom. This Good News is that the Kingdom of God has come. It is here on earth now.

"And saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'"

[Mar 1:15 NASB95]



The Good News starts with the return of the Holy Spirit to mankind. It ends with the restoration of everything Adam lost in the garden when he sinned. The Gospel of the Kingdom is huge. It involves healing, removal of guilt and shame, forgiveness of sins, the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the future in heaven where Christ will reign.



In these modern times it has become popular to try to boil the Gospel down to a sound bite. People try to make it shorter and easier to make a yes or no answer when it is presented. Jesus did not preach this way. He invited people to join Him in the Kingdom of Heaven. He offered them healing and power in the Holy Spirit. We should be careful to do the same.



We have made a short video to present to you the Gospel of the Kingdom. It can be found on the sunministries.org web site under training/video training. I recommend you go there and make yourself familiar with the presentation. Practice presenting to others.

DAY THIRTY-THREE - THE CORRUPTED MODERN GOSPEL

Many people in America have never heard the Gospel of the Kingdom presented in its entirety. A little over a hundred years ago a different Gospel was popularized. This Gospel focused on two things. The forgiveness of sin and securing a place in heaven when you die. It literally removed any mention of the Holy Spirit from the presentation.



We see some glaring differences when this modern Gospel is compared to what Jesus and the early Apostles preached. This modern Gospel places the emphasis on the individual and eternity. Jesus always preached a Gospel that impacted the entire creation and had immediate impact and benefit. This change has led many to a self-centered view of the Gospel instead of a community or creation wide focus.

Paul warned in his writings that a different Gospel would arise.

"But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!"

[Gal 1:8 NASB95]

The Gospel preached by Jesus and the Apostles spoke of wholeness. The modern translators have translated this Greek word "Sozo" into the English word "Saved". This allows the focus to shift from the immediate benefit of entering into covenant with Jesus to one focused on what happens at the end of your life. Sozo is for now and later.



The other thing that is missing from the modern Gospel is the community. The modern Gospel speaks of a "personal savior". Jesus never spoke this way. The modern Gospel speaks of forgiving sins but not removing guilt or shame. The Gospel of the Kingdom preaches complete healing from sin and its effects.

DAY THIRTY-FOUR - THE GOSPEL IS DESIGNED TO BRING YOU INTO A COMMUNITY OF OTHER SPIRIT FILLED BELIEVERS



He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

[Col 1:18 NASB95]

Jesus continues to set apart a people for God's glory. He gives instruction for gathering together, using our gifts together, leadership and discipline. All of this revolves around gathering together. In the Old Testament times, under the Law, God set apart His people from those outside the covenant. He did this by giving them rules and instructions for living set apart lives. In the New testament, under grace, God is doing the same thing with different rules.

The Gospel is designed as an entry into God's family. This family is referred to as a body, a gathering, the called out ones and many other terms that reference people together. Christianity in its purest form is about living in community under God's leadership and ways. When our Gospel removes this aspect from the presentation, it loses its purpose. When the Gospel loses its purpose it fails to lead people to its desired goal.

The institution that has promoted the preaching of the modern Gospel has replaced the intended inclusion into a sacrificial and serving community with the organization it calls church. The desired result of their Gospel is to get you to join their church and follow their rules. This often replaces God desire which is to join His family under His leadership.

It is impossible to follow the instructions of the New Testament without doing it in community. We cannot properly use our gifts, be under proper spiritual authority, build each other up, carry each others burdens, follow the instruction for discipline or share our resources as described. The modern Gospel leads us to another outcome.



"Then the LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'"

[Gen 2:18 NASB95]



DAY THIRTY-FIVE- THE GOSPEL IS DESIGNED TO GIVE YOU BACK WHAT ADAM LOST COMMUNION WITH GOD THROUGH CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

God created man and placed him in the Garden of Eden where he had fellowship with God. When Adam sinned, he was cast out of the Garden. He still had access to God at the entrance to the Garden but it was not the same. Offerings were a part of the interaction. This eventually evolved into the Law of Moses and the temple system. In the temple there was an inner court where a sacrifice would be offered once a year. Only the High Priest was allowed in the inner court and only once per year.

The temple was constructed with a very large and thick veil across the entrance to the inner court. It was nearly three and a half inches thick and made of woven material. The veil was a reminder to the nation that there was a separation between them and God. Once the Holy Spirit was removed from man in the Garden so was intimacy and communion with God.

Jesus came to return the Holy Spirit to mankind and thus repair the separation between God and man. In the Gospel of Mark, it tells of the tearing of the veil at the death of Jesus. This happened supernaturally.



"And the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom."

[Mar 15:38 NASB95]



Through Jesus, we have the ability to once again approach the throne of God.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as [we are, yet] without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

[Heb 4:14-16 NASB95]



"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

[Rom 5:1 NASB95]

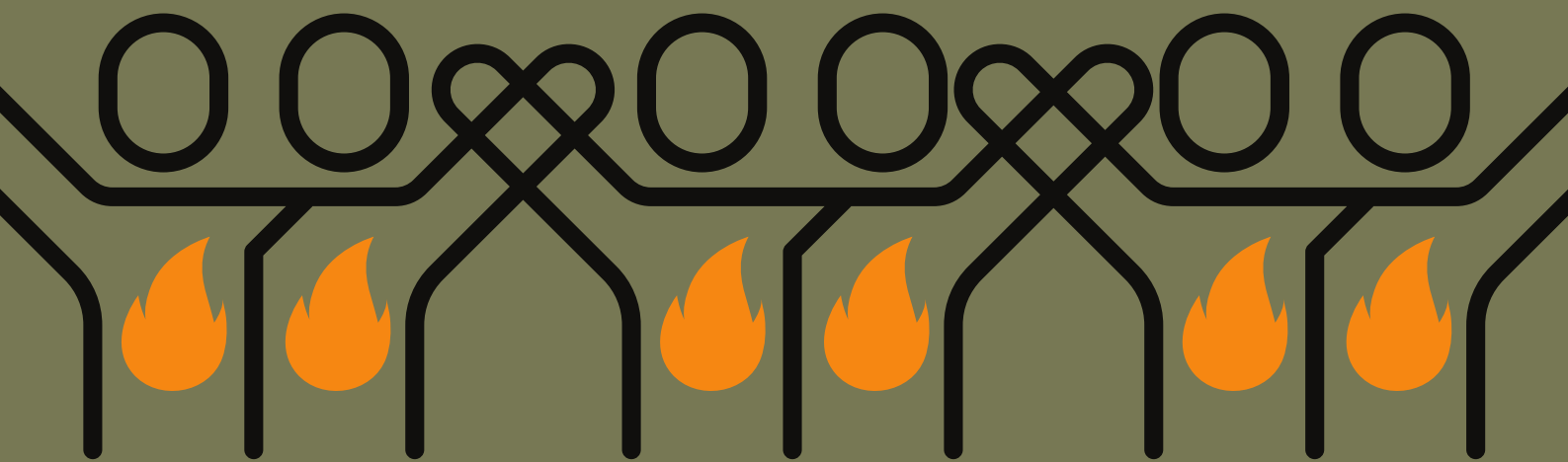


"God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord."

[1Co 1:9 NASB95]

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, and the return to us of the Holy Spirit, we have been restored to our place in communion and fellowship with God.

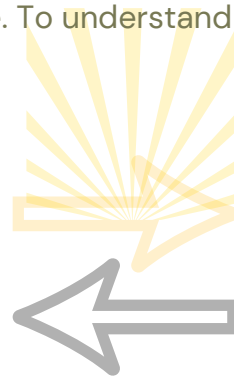
WEEK SIX



DAY THIRTY-SIX - UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH EKLESSIA – THE CALLED OUT ONES

The Greek word that is translated as church in the Bible is the word "Ekklesia". The English word church was decided upon long after the writing of the Bible. A more accurate translation is "the called out ones". The word church refers to a place where Christians gather. The word "Ekklesia" denotes a gathering set apart from something else. To understand the Biblical church, we must examine what we are called out of.

It is the Gospel that calls us out. Having accepted the Gospel we are delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of Jesus.



"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son."

[Col 1:13 KJV]

"Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. 'AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.'"

[2Co 6:17 NASB95]

The called out ones must live differently. We are called out of the ways of the world and into the ways of God.

The called out ones become bond servants of God. They are stewards of what He has entrusted to them. Living by God's design will prevent us from living for the things the world values.

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

[Rom 12:2 NASB95]



"But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

[Gal 6:14 NASB95]

It is a work of the Spirit to transform us to the point where we value what God values. This is what it means to be called out. It is not about going to church. It is all about living in a different way and for different values.

We can look at it like Paul does here. His desire for the things of the world had died in him. Jesus crucified those desires. As a result of that, Paul was given new desires. He desired to serve God and live according to His ways. This is the Ekklesia. We gather together as a group of people that have been transformed by the Spirit to value God's ways as stewards and bond servants of Jesus.

"You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

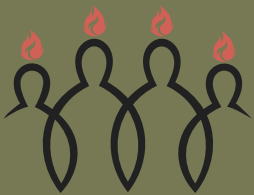
[Jas 4:4 NASB95]



DAY THIRTY-SEVEN - ORGANISM NOT ORGANIZATION

In the Old Testament, under the Law of Moses, the nation of Israel was ruled by a theocracy. The rules were well defined. The leaders and priest roles were also well defined. The nation's structure resembled an organization. This changed in the New Testament under grace.

grace



After Jesus fulfilled the Law, the structure of the church changed. It no longer had a defined temple system. There was no priestly orders to function on behalf of the people. Under grace the church became more organic and flowed naturally from the spiritual gifts of the people. It resembled a living organism more than an organization.

Over time, men once again took control of the church and placed organizations and rules over it in order to control it. These organizations are not defined by the Bible and many of the rules oppose the design of God for His church. One thing most church organizations have in common is the defining of acceptable doctrine. Another is the leadership by paid professional clergy.



Neither of these things are supported by the Bible teaching of the New Testament. Modern church organizations often use Old Testament principles to justify their rules. One such teaching concerns money and centers around the tithe. The tithe was part of the Law of Moses. It no longer applies to the church under grace. Organizations teach and promote it in order to fund their paid leadership and sustain the unbiblical church system. The tithe is never taught in the New Testament after the resurrection of Jesus.



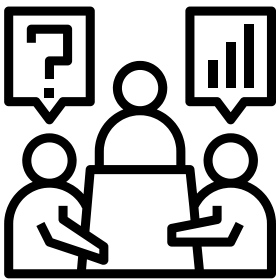
The tithe is never taught in the New Testament after the resurrection of Jesus.

When the church functions under the instructions of the New Testament it will not form an organization. It will instead operate on the basis of spiritual gifts and leadership that is demonstrated by acts of power. When we allow leadership to emerge in this way, through spiritual gifts, we assure that the Holy Spirit will be leading through those who demonstrate the power.



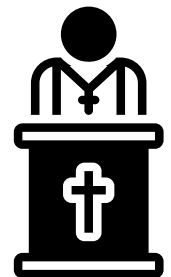
DAY THIRTY-EIGHT - THE CORRUPTION OF THE CONTEXT INTRODUCING THE INSTITUTION

In its infancy, the New Testament church was illegal and very organic in nature. Its illegal status caused it to operate in certain ways. When the church was made legal in 313AD, it changed all of this. The church was made into an institution literally overnight. It became something that could own property, accumulate wealth, hire salaried clergy and be controlled by men. This was not God's design for His church.



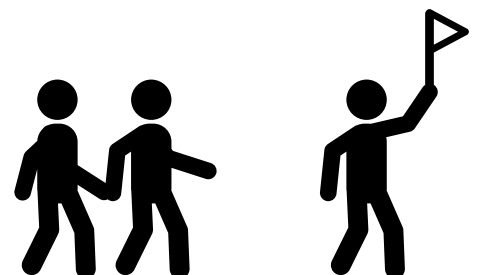
As the institution matured, it took more and more steps designed to control people. It decided what doctrine was correct and what was blasphemy. It designed institutional training requirements for leaders. It instituted a new priesthood of paid professionals with educational requirements. It introduced rules for what to do in each church service. It changed what communion was and how it was observed. It standardized what songs could be used in the church gathering. It opened the church service to everyone.

For the first time since its inception, the New Testament church was a mix of believers and unbelievers led by professional clergy and operating in a controlled environment with strict rules. This completely changed the context of the church. The leadership of the Holy Spirit became an assumption relegated to service prep and elder board meetings.



The church service was standardized to represent the prevailing religious and secular services of the time. Seating was installed with all facing a stage. A podium was used for the speaker. Choirs were formed to lead the congregation in the accepted songs. The tithe was once again taught and collected. Communion was controlled and only the Priest could partake in the cup.

This contextual change caused many bad things. It taught the people to rely on others for their spiritual worship. It enslaved people to a clergy class that claimed powers God did not give them. Over time, the once active, Spirit led church became a collection of passive man led attendees.



DAY THIRTY-NINE - RETURNING TO THE CORRECT CONTEXT REQUIRES US TO RETURN TO COMMUNITY

One of the major impacts of the institutionalization of the church was its effect on the community. What started as a group of spirit-filled believers that shared everything they had with each other, had become an institution that collected tithes to sustain and grow the institution. It also became a mix of believers and unbelievers. This violates the very purpose of God to set apart a people.

In order to fulfill our purpose and declare God's glory, we must return to God's design for His church. This will require us to give up the institution and return to the community. What does it mean to return to the community? It means many things. It means no unbelievers in the gathering. The church is a community of those who have joined Jesus in covenant. It means a return to a free sharing of resources among the community.

"And they [began] selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."

[Act 2:45 NASB95]

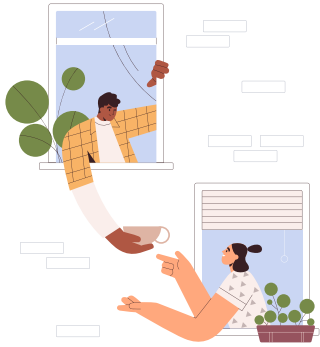


Another aspect of the institution that must be rejected is the way in which communion is observed and distributed. The early church observed communion as part of a meal. As the institution grew, it found this impractical. Instead of questioning its approach to creating larger gatherings, they changed the very nature of the communion meal.



To return to the organic nature of the church will require us to return to the leadership of spiritual gifts. With the implementation of the paid professional clergy came many controls of man. The entire process of training and ordaining leaders is man made and man controlled. The early church relied on the manifestation of power through the Holy Spirit in order to approve leaders.

DAY FORTY - CORRUPTIONS OF THE MODERN INSTITUTION – TITHE, PAID CLERGY AND UNBELIEVERS IN THE OPEN ASSEMBLY



The New Testament only mentions the Tithe twice. Both mentions are in parallel passages describing the same event. In this passage, Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees for strictly adhering to some parts of the Law of Moses while neglecting the Law of God. There are a couple of things to note here. This occurred before the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus while the Law of Moses was still unfulfilled. It was a rebuke of the Pharisees being hypocrites. There is no mention of the Tithe in the rest of the New Testament. There is no historical account or evidence that the early church collected Tithes or taught the principle. It is clear that they taught a free sharing of all things among those in the community.



The leadership of the early church was often uneducated by worldly standards. They were followed because they demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit through their lives and ministries. In modern times, the institutional church requires seminary education in order to lead a church. They turned the spiritual gift of Pastor into an office to be filled by educated men. The requirements for most Pastoral positions have little to do with Spiritual gifts. The training centers on counseling and running an institution.

One of the most egregious corruptions of the modern institution is allowing unbelievers to gather in worship. This is a clear violation of the principles and teachings of the Bible. Under the Law of Moses, no one could enter the temple unless they were part of the covenant. In the future, no one will be allowed to enter heaven unless they are in covenant with Jesus.

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? 16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE."

[2Co 6:14-16 NASB95]

The church gathering is designed by God to be a living declaration of His glory, who He is. Unbelievers cannot declare this as they do not acknowledge it. The institution only started doing this as a tool of control over society. In order to return to God's design we must cease this practice.



DAY FORTY-ONE - CORRECTING THE CONTEXTS OF THE CORRUPTIONS RULED BY GIFTS, CLOSED TO UNBELIEVERS AND FREE WILL GIVING OR SHARING WHAT WE HAVE WITH THOSE IN NEED

Returning the church to God's design will require more from us than just leaving the institution. It requires us to be active stewards of the instructions we find in the Bible. Passivity is a curse placed on us by centuries of institutional church corruption.

"And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?"

[Luk 12:42 NASB95]

In order to return to God's design for His church, men must give up. We must give up control to the Holy Spirit. We must give up our pursuit of wealth for our own use. We must give up our need to include those outside the covenant. We must actively steward and follow the instruction of the Bible.

Allowing the spiritual gifts to operate freely is a scary thing for many leaders. It is essential if we want Jesus to be the head of the church. Many times new believers or those with unholy motives will fake or corrupt the gifts. This is why mature believers must be active in the worship gathering. We must allow the Spirit to manifest so that those who are approved will become evident.



"For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you."

[1Co 11:19 NASB95]

Another aspect of allowing spiritual gifts to lead is perspective. When we allow all the congregation to have part in the gathering through their spiritual gifts, we will hear the Spirit speak through different perspectives. This prevents the church from being led astray by one or two strong leaders.

Correcting our attitude towards and use of money is also essential to God's design. In the institution we may find a very wealthy person sitting next to someone in great need. There is no teaching of free sharing, just the Tithe. So the wealthy believes their obligation to their brother in need is relieved through their adherence to the Tithe. It then becomes the responsibility of the institution to care for the other brother in need. This builds the wrong bond and distorts true community.

We can dispose of the institution and the high cost of maintaining it. This does not correct the root problem unless we then use our own money to care for each other.

"And they [began] selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need."

[Act 2:45 NASB95]



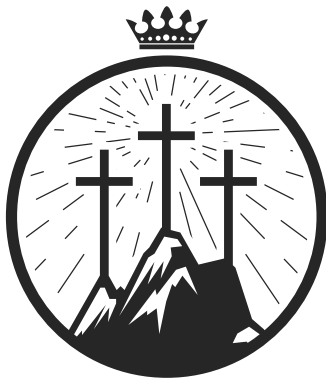
DAY FORTY-TWO - THE COMMUNITY FULFILLS THE COMMAND TO ADAM AND EVE AS THEY LIVE SACRIFICIALLY TOGETHER

Only the restored community can fulfill the command given to Adam and Eve. Be fruitful, multiply, subdue, steward and rule. This is the joint responsibility of the church under grace. In a properly functioning biblical community we can see this fulfilled.

The first thing we must steward is our own spiritual gifts. This is the way God builds up and equips the entire body of believers to declare His glory. Once we are walking in the Spirit and working in our spiritual gifts we must take on the responsibility to oversee our roles in the church. We must care for each other, carry each other's burdens, Administer discipline, allow restoration, and many other things outlined in the Bible. Being a part of a Christian community is not a passive endeavor.

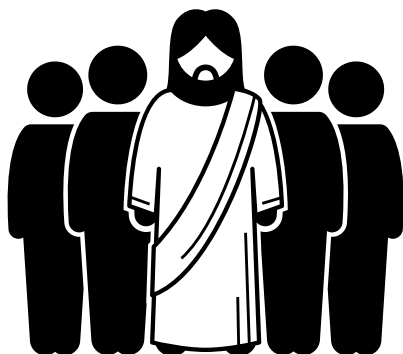


After we learn to do these things, we can take on our enemy and begin to be a blessing to the world around us. We will be an example of unconditional love and service to those we encounter. All of this will require sacrifice. It takes time, energy, our money, emotions and effort to follow Jesus and fulfill the command to Adam and Eve.



As we go out into the world we will preach the Gospel and make disciples of Jesus. We must actively teach these disciples to follow the instructions of the Bible. They will all have the taint of the institution on them even if they never attended one. The institution has been so prominent for so many years that it has tarnished everyone's view of the church. We must help them deinstitutionalize their faith and worldview.

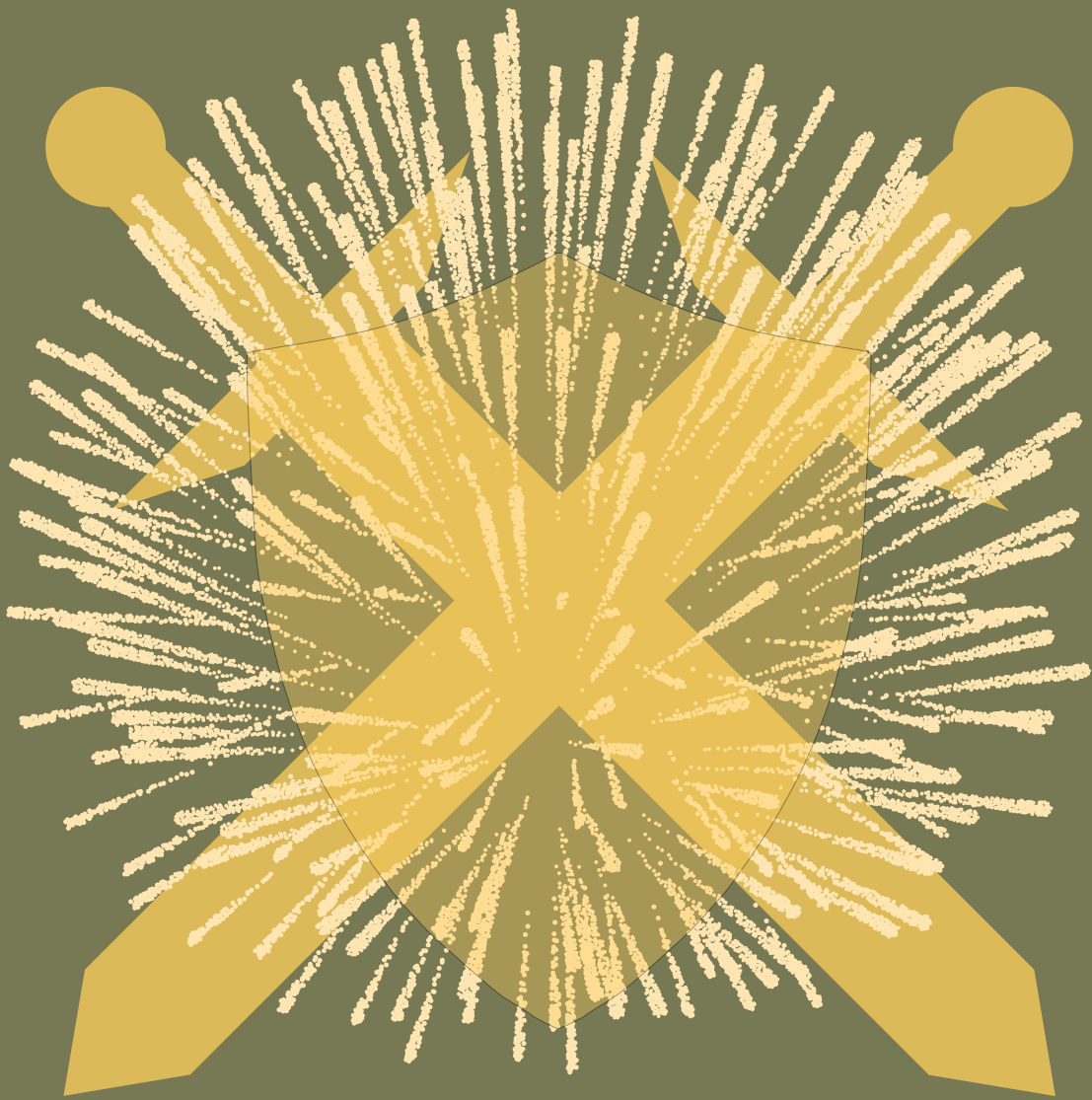
The key to fulfilling the command given to Adam and Eve is to live sacrificially. This is why Jesus said that you must deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him.



**"Then Jesus said to His disciples,
"If anyone wishes to come after
Me, he must deny himself, and
take up his cross and follow Me."**

[Mat 16:24 NASB95]

WEEK SEVEN

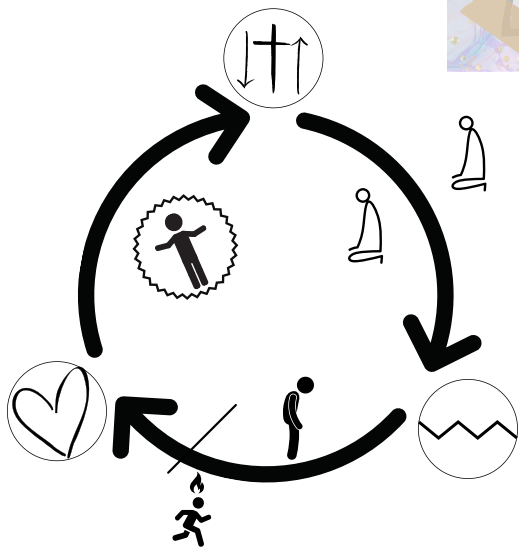


DAY FORTY-THREE - WE HAVE AN ENEMY TRYING TO PREVENT THIS

Adam and Eve did not just wake up one day and decide to disobey the only rule God made for them. They had another entity there to lead them to it. There was an angel in the Garden called Lucifer. He lied to the couple and told them God was withholding something very good from them. He knew if he could get Adam to disobey God and obey him, he would then rule over him and everything Adam had been entrusted and commanded to rule over. When this happened, Lucifer, or Satan as He is commonly called, became the god over this world. Even today he continues to oppose the Good News of Jesus.

"In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

[2Co 4:4 NASB95]



Jesus' sacrifice on the cross took back what Adam lost. Through the Gospel, we regain the Holy Spirit and our rightful place as heirs and stewards of God's creation. Satan has lost what he deceived Adam and Eve into giving him. He is not happy about it and does not want to relinquish his control over it. So he does what he can to keep people from seeing the truth of the current situation.

He opposes the people of God in many ways. He tempts them to lead them into sin, as he did with Adam and Eve. He binds them in sickness and pain. He sets up strongholds in their minds that oppose the truth of God. He is looking for influence in your life and your mind.

We must always remember that Satan was defeated on the cross. He can only hold power over us if we let him. By renewing our mind through the Word of God, we can defeat him in our lives. Full reliance on Jesus and His ways will free us from the control and influence of Satan. Jesus has given us the power in the Holy Spirit to be victorious over Satan.

DAY FORTY-FOUR- UNDERSTANDING SATAN AND HIS WORK

Who is Satan?

Satan is a created being (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).



There are many passages in the Bible which are associated with Satan.

- Genesis 3 – He is the serpent who tempted Eve.
- 1 Chronicles 21:1 – He is the one who provoked David to number the people.
- Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6 – He accused and attacked Job.
- Zechariah 3:1-2 – He stood at God’s right hand to accuse Joshua, the High Priest.
- Matthew 4 and Luke 4 – He tempted the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Matthew 12:24; Mark 3:22; Luke 11:15 – He is called “Beelzebul” (or Beelzebub), the prince of the demons.
- Matthew 13:19; 1 John 2:13 – He is the “evil one” who steals away the truths of God’s Word from the hearts of men.
- Matthew 13:36-43 – He is the one who sows “tares” (those who “commit lawlessness”) in the world and Church.
- Luke 10:17-18 – He has fallen from heaven “as lightning”.
- Luke 10:19 – He is the leader of evil spirits.
- John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11 – He is the prince of this world.
- John 13:27 – He entered Judas Iscariot.
- 2 Corinthians 4:4 – He is the god of this world.
- 2 Corinthians 6:15 – He is called Belial, the personification of evil or foolishness.
- Ephesians 2:2 – He is the prince of the powers of the air.
- Colossians 1:13 – He is the power of darkness.
- 1 Peter 5:8 – He is our adversary.
- Revelation 9:11 – He is (or controls) the angel of the abyss, named Abaddon in Hebrew, Apollyon in Greek.
- Revelation 20 – He will be bound for a thousand years and then be loosed, will lead the nations in a rebellion against God, and then be cast into the lake of fire.

How Does Satan Work?

- He is crafty (Genesis 3:1).
- He is the deceiver (Genesis 3:13; John 8:44).
- He is an avenger against the people of God (Psalm 8:2).
- He is the destroyer (Isaiah 54:16).
- He tempts (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5).
- He is a murderer (John 8:44).
- He is the evil one (Matthew 6:13; John 17:15).
- He is the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4).
- He appears as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14).
- He is the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2).
- He is the dragon and serpent (Revelation 12:7-9).
- He is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10).



DAY FORTY-FIVE - SPIRITUAL WARFARE IS FOR EVERY FOLLOWER OF CHRIST



"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 [We are] destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and [we are] taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ"

[2Co 10:3-5 NASB95]

The spiritual battle is fought in the mind. Every person is involved in this battle whether they know it not. Satan is always trying to build his influence in people. He does this in many ways but one principle is constant. What you believe and obey is what rules over you. Believing and obeying God is life in His kingdom, the kingdom of light. Believing and obeying the lies of Satan is living under his rule and authority, the kingdom of darkness.

Things to know about the spiritual battle.

1. We walk in the flesh; we war in the Spirit.
2. Our weapons are
 - o Not of the flesh
 - o Divinely powerful
 - o Destroy (demolish; pull down) fortresses (strongholds)
 - Satan builds strongholds through which he attacks and controls you.
 - Jesus builds His kingdom through which He transforms and blesses you.
3. The weapons of spiritual warfare destroy strongholds by
 - Destroying "speculations" = "thoughts, imaginings, reasonings"
 - Destroying "every lofty thing" (every thought) raised up against the "knowledge of God"
 - It does this by bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.
 - Thus, satanic strongholds are torn down through the destruction of reasonings and any patterns of thinking which are contrary to the knowledge of God, as every thought is brought under obedience to Christ.

Strongholds are built on the ground of what we believe.

1. Strongholds are built on thoughts – what men and women think and believe.
2. We build our lives on the "ground" of what we think and what we believe about God and ourselves.
3. Where we believe the truth, Jesus builds His kingdom (Matthew 16:13-18).
4. Where we believe lies, Satan builds his strongholds (John 8:43-45).



Jesus came to take back what Satan stole. He gives us the Holy Spirit and the ability to defeat Satan. We have a part to play in this battle. We must renounce Satan's lies and believe and obey the truth of God. This is victory. This is true freedom.

DAY FORTY-SIX - IT MUST BE PERSONAL FIRST – PUTTING ON YOUR ARMOR

One of our jobs as a Christian is to prepare ourselves for the spiritual battle.

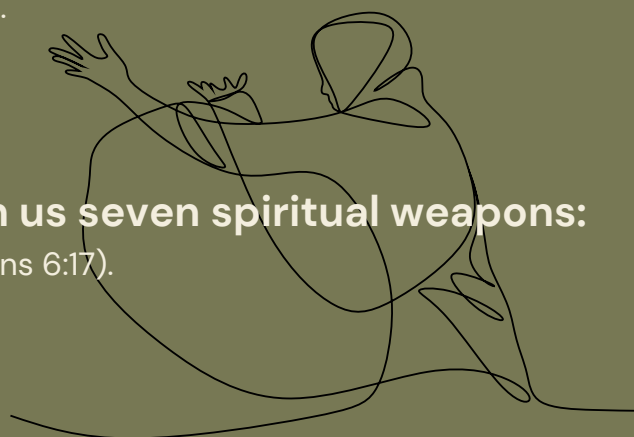
Preparing for Spiritual Warfare

1. Be in a right relationship with God:
2. Confess all known sins (1 John 1:8-10):
 - Use Galatians 5:19-21.
3. Seek deliverance for root sins:
 - Fear (Romans 8:15; 2 Timothy 1:7).
 - Bitterness (Ephesians 4:31; Hebrews 12:15).
 - Pride (Proverbs 16:18; Isaiah 14:12-17).
 - Lust (Matthew 5:28; Galatians 5:16; 1 Corinthians 10:6).
 - Greed (1 Timothy 6:10).
4. Be under proper spiritual authority:
 - Parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3).
 - Employers (Ephesians 6:5; Colossians 3:22).
 - Governments (Matthew 22:15-22; Romans 13:1-7).
 - Spiritual authorities (Matthew 18:17-18; Ephesians 4:11).
5. Make restitution (Exodus 22:1-3; Luke 19:1-10).
6. Fast (Daniel 10:3; Matthew 4:1-2).
7. Put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20).



Spiritual Weapons: The Holy Spirit has given us seven spiritual weapons:

1. The sword of the Spirit (rhemas) (Matthew 4:1-11; Ephesians 6:17).
2. Prayer (Matthew 17:14-21; Ephesians 6:18).
3. Fasting (Daniel 10:3; Matthew 4:2; 17:21).
4. Jesus' name (Mark 16:17; John 14:14; Acts 4:12).
5. The blood of Jesus (Colossians 2:14-15; Revelation 12:11).
6. Agreement with others in prayer (Leviticus 26:8; Deuteronomy 32:30; Psalm 91:7; Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; John 18:19; Acts 1:14).
7. Praise (2 Chronicles 20:19-22; Psalm 104:33; 108:3; 135:3,21; 138:1; Acts 16:25; Philippians 4:8).



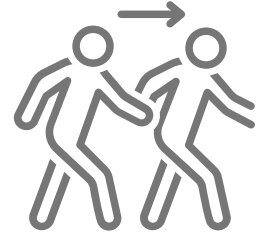
"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual [forces] of wickedness in the heavenly [places.] 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil [one.] 17 And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints."

[Eph 6:10-18 NASB95]



DAY FORTY-SEVEN - YOU MUST BE EQUIPPED TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Christianity is an active pursuit. You cannot do it passively. Following Jesus pursuing love, righteousness and peace are all active endeavors. Terms such as press on, persevere and strive together all indicate active actions. Christianity is filled with active instructions.



It is our job to flee youthful lusts, consecrate our self, put on our armor and get equipped. God gives us the Spirit and spiritual gifts, but it is our choice what we do with them. Failing to be an active participant in the Christian faith is to fail to experience the fullness of the kingdom.

Here are some ways to get equipped for the active Christian life.

1. Become spiritually disciplined. There are ten basic spiritual disciplines. These are taught in my book *Disciple Driven Church – The Coming Reformation*.
2. Learn to put on the armor of God. Read about it in Ephesians Chapter Six and apply it.
3. Get Consecrated. Forsake sin. Embrace righteousness. Forsake lies and embrace God's truth.
4. Read your Bible. You are now following a faith that places its trust in the written word of God. You should read it all from beginning to end.
5. Pray. Learn to pray and practice it often.

I have developed an acronym to help you understand and remember these things. It adds spice to your life.

S – Spiritual disciplines

P – Prayer

I – Intentionality

C – Consecration

E – Equipped



The more intentional you are about actively pursuing Christ, the more you will find of Him.

DAY FORTY-EIGHT - YOU MUST BATTLE TOGETHER

The context of the New Testament covenant of grace is community. You cannot complete the first act of obedience without someone else. It is impossible to baptize yourself. The sacred ordinance of Baptism is considered to be the entrance into the church body, the Eklesia. Through this ritual, Jesus is reminding us of the communal nature of the church.



When describing spiritual gifts, Paul uses the body as a word picture. He compares gifts to eyes, head, feet etc... He tells us we cannot say we do not have need of all the parts. It requires all the parts to complete the temple God is building. The same is true for the functioning of the body of Christ, the church.

We need each other. We need the gifts we do not have so we can effectively demonstrate the glory of God. These gifts are a primary tool in the spiritual battle. Therefore they are required to work together in overcoming the enemy and tearing down his strongholds. Think of all the things the church is instructed to do that cannot be done alone. Here are some examples.

Baptism

Communion

Laying on of hands

Ordaining leaders

Let prophets speak and others judge

Bear each others burdens

Love others



Jesus even demonstrated this when He sent out the seventy in Luke 10. He sent them out in pairs. The entire design of the kingdom of God is community based. It is not one individual following Jesus. It is a family of believers living life together.

DAY FORTY-NINE - ALL THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE NECESSARY



"But now there are many members, but one body. 21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." 22 On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary."

[1Co 12:20-22 NASB95]



The gathering together of the church is the place for the gifts to work together and be celebrated. The gifts represent the diversity of God and His grace in bestowing on us spiritual power. If we fail to function in our spiritual gift when we gather then we fail to fulfill God's purpose.



"Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery."

[1Ti 4:14 NASB95]



The use of our spiritual gift can cause us to be valued in the body and bring unity. Failing to use it, takes away one way God designed for the body to function together.



"On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 23 and those [members] of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, 24 whereas our more presentable members have no need [of it.] But God has [so] composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that [member] which lacked, 25 so that there may be no division in the body, but [that] the members may have the same care for one another."

[1Co 12:22-25 NASB95]

Another essential element of the gifts working together is the building up of the body. Satan seeks to destroy the body of Christ and each of us individually. Thereby, that which builds up the body, defeats our enemy.

We cannot live our Christian faith alone. We need each other in order to thrive and fulfill God's purpose through us.

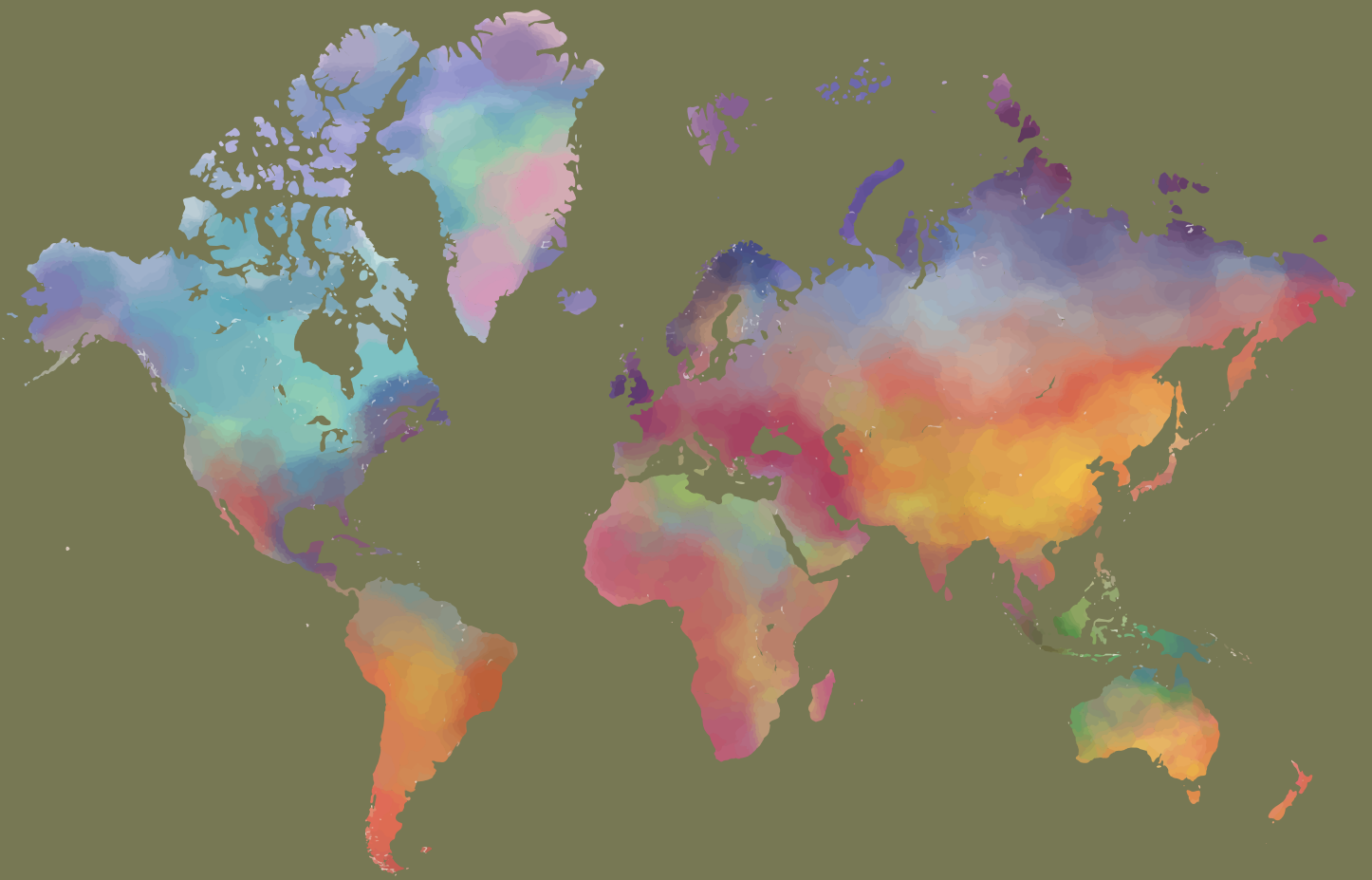


"From whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."

[Eph 4:16 NASB95]



SUMMING IT ALL UP



DAY FIFTY - TAKING BACK WHAT SATAN STOLE AND OCCUPYING THE LAND WHILE WAITING FOR THE RETURN OF CHRIST

"God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

[Eph 4:16 NASB95]

The original intent of God was for man to fill the earth, occupy it and rule over it. That has never changed. Even though Adam lost our right to rule, Jesus has regained it. The Holy Spirit gives us back what Adam lost. Jesus again commands us to go.

"And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

[Mat 28:18-20 NASB95]

As we follow Jesus we will go and make disciples. As we make disciples, we will gather them together. As we gather, we will use our spiritual gifts and occupy the land. As we do this, we will again fulfill the command to Adam and Eve.



This is what we are instructed to do throughout the Bible. We are told to do it until Jesus returns. One promise of the Bible is that Jesus will return. He is coming back for His church, His bride. This is an important distinction. Jesus is not coming back for you individually, alone. He is coming back for a bride that is ready for her husband.

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."

[Rev 19:7 NASB95]

The bride is not ready today. The bride has been corrupted by centuries of man made rules and institutions. It has become filled with passive spectators instead of active participants. If we are diligent to do our part, we may live to see the day that Jesus comes back for His bride.