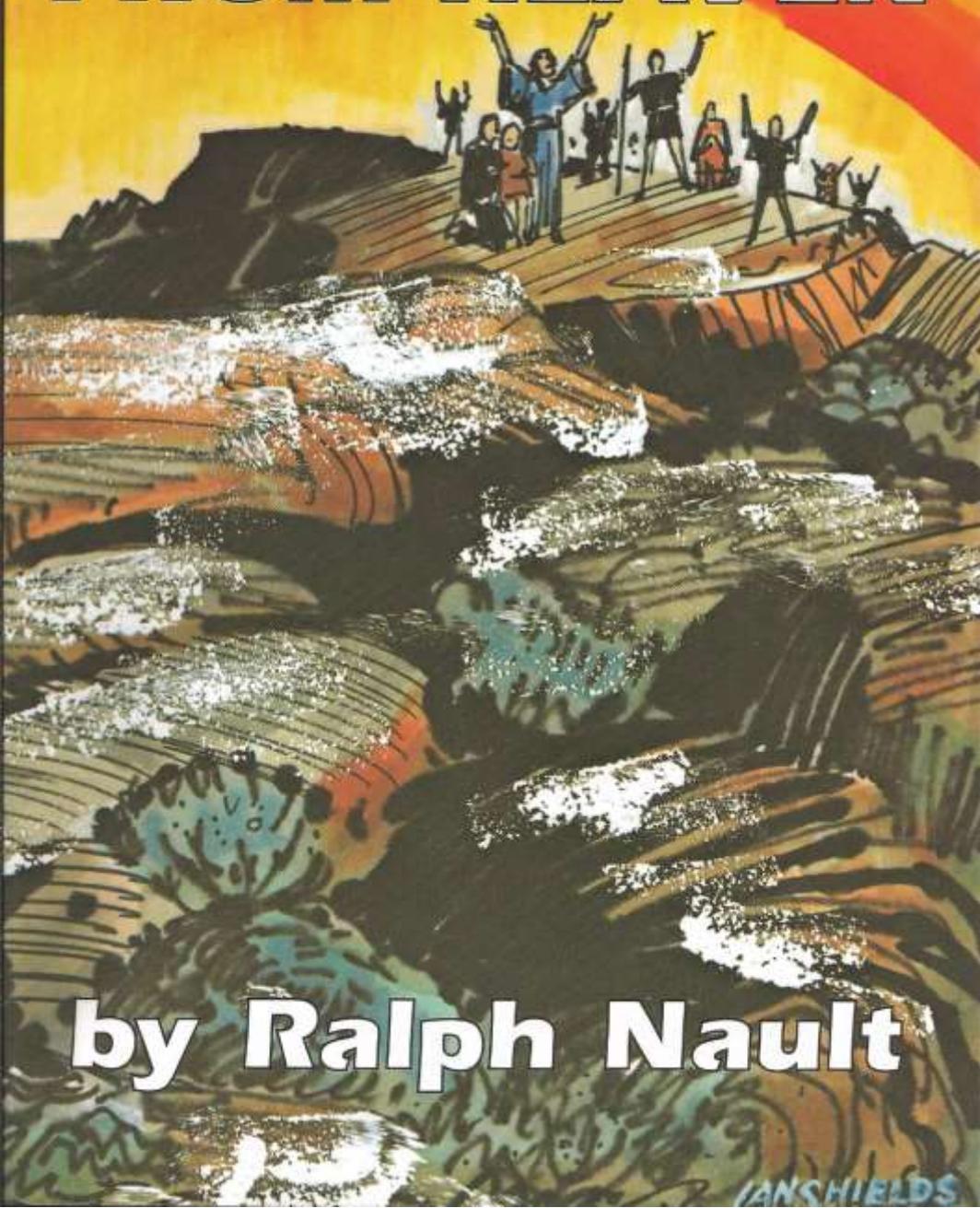


MANNA FROM HEAVEN



by **Ralph Nault**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE

	PAGE
<u>I Lost God</u>	1
<u>God Is Big & Is Nearby</u>	4
<u>That I Might See, Lord</u>	7
<u>Faith</u>	11
<u>Draw Near To Him</u>	15
<u>Seeing Jesus</u>	19
<u>Deny Yourself & Follow Me</u>	22

PART TWO

<u>The New Life</u>	25
<u>The Perfect Law</u>	29
<u>The Heart Word</u>	32
<u>2 Corinthians 11:3</u>	36
<u>Do I Have To?</u>	40
<u>God's Grace Sufficient</u>	43
<u>Choose Your Friends</u>	46
<u>The Hope of Glory</u>	49

PART THREE

<u>The Kingdom of God Is At Hand</u>	52
<u>Not Far Away</u>	55
<u>I Am The Way</u>	58
<u>Faith Versus Unbelief</u>	62
<u>Prepared to Go</u>	66
<u>It Is Finished</u>	69
<u>Grace</u>	72
<u>A Christmas Gift</u>	75

PART FOUR

<u>A Fragrance of Christ</u>	77
<u>I Show You A More Excellent Way</u>	80
<u>Fixing My Eyes On Jesus</u>	83
<u>Grace & Peace To You</u>	86
<u>My People</u>	89
<u>There Is One Body</u>	92
<u>He Will Raise Us Up</u>	96

PART FIVE

<u>Lord, Challenge Us</u>	99
<u>Let Us Go On To Maturity</u>	102
<u>I Want More</u>	106
<u>Coming Of Age</u>	109
<u>Help, I Am On Fire!</u>	113
<u>Now Abide Faith, Hope & Love</u>	115

PART ONE

"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." (EPHESIANS 1:17)

I LOST GOD

Several times in the past month I have heard people say, "I can't find God; I don't seem to be able to touch Him anymore." There is a strange thing about this; most of these people are Christians and are active in the body of Christ. Some of them say, "I belong to the most spirit-filled or the most alive church in town." They go to all the praise meetings and to the Bible studies. They are very involved in Christian work and activity. I am aware, one of the reasons that they are so active: they are trying to find God, to touch God again. Most of these people have found God and have touched God in the past, but in a sense they now have lost God. They have lost their contact, their awareness of God.

Several years ago an elderly lady came up to me after a meeting in a Baptist Church. Pauline and I had been sharing how the Lord had spoken to us and how we had come to know His voice. This lady said to me, "I am jealous and envious of you." I asked her why. She said, "Many years ago I was able to hear the Lord in the way that you do, but now I don't hear Him anymore."

Why doesn't this lady hear Him anymore? Has the Lord left her? Has God ceased to speak to her? Is God farther away from her than He was at first?

Looking to the Scriptures, we find that this lady is not the only one who has run into this problem. The Corinthians had a like problem. Even though they had the gifts of the Holy Spirit they were living in

confusion. They were not aware of God's direction nor of the leading of His Spirit. The Galatians were in no better condition. They began by the Spirit and then went back to the flesh trying to perfect themselves.

The Hebrews were in no better condition. After several years had gone by they should have been teachers. They had to be taught all over again the basics; that as many as are sons are led by the Spirit and have come to know God's voice. At one time they heard, but they lost their hearing and could no longer hear the God who was right in their hearts.

The Church today is in no better condition than the Corinthians, the Galatians, or the Hebrews. A large percentage of the Church do not touch God, even though He is in them. I mean by touching God that they are not aware of His presence or know His voice. Although for many of these people they are the same as the elderly woman I spoke of. At one time they did hear God, and they were aware of His presence. Somehow, we lose God even though He is in us.

Why is it that we lose God? Why do we lose contact with a God who is right within us? I think mainly because we start trying to touch Him outside.

Another person in the body of Christ came up to me a while ago and said, "I can't seem to touch God anymore. I go to a good church. I pray. I read my Bible and I go to the prayer meeting, but I just don't seem to be able to find God again."

I asked this person if he had asked Jesus Christ to be his Savior and to come into his heart. This person said yes. I said, "Did He come?" "Yes." "Then, where is He now?" "He is in my heart." "Then why are you looking everywhere else to find Him?" This person was able to touch God on the spot, because He began to look in his heart.

There is a time when the Lord will allow you to touch Him through the praise meeting, through the church service, through the pastor, through reading the Bible, and through others. There is a time when that will stop, and you will only touch the living God because you search for Him in your own heart.

GOD IS BIG AND IS NEARBY

"If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."
(Colossians 3:1-2)

I have come to the realization that my mind is on the earth more than it is in heaven. Is yours?

I also find this to be true: when I think worldly God seems to be a long way off and very small. When I set my mind on the things above, or when my mind is in heaven, God seems very close and very, very big.

Did you ever feel small? Has someone else made you feel small? Have you ever made someone else feel small? I am sure that this has probably happened to all of us.

Jesus was big, mighty big. He went about making others big. He wants to make you big, too. He wants to make us big in our thoughts, big in our actions, big in our heart, big in our giving, big in everything. Can you believe that?

As long as we seek the things on earth, we are going to remain small. As long as we set our minds on the earth, the things below, we will remain small.

Did God make the Church small? I don't think so. I believe the Church is larger than most of us think it is. I do believe that many men have made the Church small by trying to fit it into a form, or a doctrine, or an organization, or a set of do's and don'ts. Many of us have unintentionally made and kept other people small through using some of these methods listed above.

Are you aware of our need to break free from things of yesterday? God has new manna every day. Something which blessed you last year may not bless you this year. Look at the Church for example. It is changing. God intends for it to change. Some people have a very hard time with that change. Do you? Why? Are you set in your way? Has the wine skin become hard and brittle? Have you drank of the old wine? Good! Now drink of the new wine, you will find it tasty and refreshing.

My theology and doctrine is different than it was last year. It is much different from five years ago, and very different from twenty years ago. People who are not willing to allow God to change their thinking, their theology, their action, have become a dry wineskin, hard and brittle, and cannot contain the new wine.

Several years ago, the Lord brought us outside the Catholic Church we were brought up in. I do not mean we left the Church, we went outside the Church to share our faith and to do the work God has called us to do. In doing this I realized the Church was bigger than just the Catholic Church; it is made up of many other churches, also. They have differing doctrines and traditions and ways of doing things, but they are also the Church. At the same time I came into contact with people who were not affiliated with the organized church. I found that they were also part of the Church.

A strange thing about all of this: Each one seemed to think like this, "We are the ones who really have it together." "We have the right doctrine." "We do it the right way."

It took me quite a few years to realize that I was thinking small, I was being small, and I was making others small. I had made the Church small, and I had even made God small.

I have noticed this; small people try to make others as small as they are. Big people try to help others become big also.

I thank God He has made me bigger than I used to be; He has made the Church bigger than I used to know it. He has enlarged my heart, and my thinking, and my theology. I have also noticed this: as I have allowed God to enlarge me, God has become bigger, too. Not only has He become bigger, but He has become much closer.

I pray that our Father in heaven will help us, the Church, to see as spiritual men, to act as spiritual men, to be greatly enlarged; and for us to help one another become larger and not smaller.

God is big, and He wants us to be big also.

THAT I MIGHT SEE, LORD

I don't begin to see and understand all the things that are happening in the world today. Just about the time that you think you know what one thing is about, something else happens and you were not correct; you did not understand things after all.

For the Christian person this seems to be multiplied, because we are not only natural men now but spiritual men also.

We have been brought from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. In the past we served the prince of darkness, now we serve the prince of light, Jesus Christ.

In this transfer from one master to another master, from one kingdom to another kingdom, our whole value system, our whole way of thinking must change.

It is not just a change of master or of kingdoms. We are brought into a spiritual realm from a natural realm.

In the past, many of us have tried to know God. We have been to church, studied the Bible, and tried from a natural mind and ways to get to know God. We failed.

One of the things that I failed to do in my search was to separate church laws, rules, traditions and rituals from my renewing knowledge of the kingdom of God.

Let me explain this way. As we enter into our new spiritual walk, the church rules, laws and traditions don't change; but our relationship with God our Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit does change.

We can understand church laws and rules, traditions and rituals with the natural mind. I believe that we need them to keep order in the Church. I believe the spiritual nature of man realizes the need for the laws and traditions in the Church. The Bible says as many as are sons are led by the Spirit. Can you imagine the Church with everyone doing their own thing? No laws or rules? It would be great if all men were so mature each one would be perfectly united to each other. Maybe there are some men like this, but I haven't seen many. The outcome is that we need our church laws and traditions, and they can greatly enrich our spiritual walk.

As we enter this spiritual walk a big change should take place in our knowledge of God and in our knowledge of the kingdom of God. These are spiritual things and take spiritual understanding.

I pray for the Father to give you understanding of what I am trying to get across. It could remove some of the confusion from you.

The intellect can understand certain things. The heart can understand certain things.

Only the heart can know God. The intellect can only know about Him.

If you ever want to get your theology and your doctrine about God right, you must approach Him with your heart. Only the heart can know Him.

Many of us make the mistake of coming into a meaningful relationship with Jesus and then set about trying to change the Church. What should happen is as we are brought into a new

relationship with God, it should bring us into a new relationship with the Church.

A few months ago, I was talking with a young pastor about the New Testament Church. I asked him what the New Testament Church is. I started thinking about that question myself. I had encountered several people in the past ten years that came out with this statement, "We are starting a New Testament Church." It never sounded quite scriptural to me.

One day a while back the Holy Spirit began to speak to me about this 'New Testament Church'.

He reminded me of the book of Acts, of the community they started, and He said, "That is the New Testament Church." He then said, "The foolish Galatians who had begun by the Spirit and now were perfecting themselves, they are the New Testament Church. The Corinthians with all their problems and their carnality and many babies, they are the New Testament Church."

The Hebrews whom Paul had to correct, writing, "For the time you ought to be teaching others, you have need to be taught all over again the basic things of Christianity." The Holy Spirit said, "They are New Testament Christians." I began to understand what the Spirit of the Lord was showing me.

We are the New Testament Church, who have called upon the name of the Lord and have been born into the kingdom of God. Whether we belong to community, are churchled or unchurchled, victorious or defeated, mature or babies, carnal or spiritual doesn't matter.

From what I can see, the New Testament Church is people who in all kinds of situations walk with God moment by moment.

We are the New Testament Church!

The only way I could start a New Testament Church would be by leading some person to Jesus.

Lord Jesus, give us eyes to see in our heart, so that we might understand You and know You.

FAITH

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

I find that we must have some understanding of a thing before we can say we have faith in it. I have asked people before, "Do you believe the Bible?" They would say yes, and come to find out later they had never read it. How do you believe something you know nothing about?

The Bible speaks about faith as a substance. This means it is something we can be aware of. Something we can know we have or don't have. It seems to be something that we can receive, or it can be taken away. Paul said he contended and kept the faith.

Some people say, "I have lots of faith," but yet seem to receive nothing from God. Others say, "I have very little faith," and they receive mightily from God.

I find in my own life there are some areas I seem to have great faith and other areas very little faith. I know for certain that God is going to save my whole family. It is not my mind which tells me this or just because I read it in the Scripture. The Holy Spirit spoke it into my heart. I also believe God loves me, not just because the Scriptures say so, but deep in my heart I know it.

We, as the children of God, need to be aware of what faith is, and recognize where we have it and where we are lacking.

Faith can move mountains. It can bring us into rest with God. It can give us the victory, the healing, the miracle. Without it you cannot please God. The just man walks by faith. Faith allows us to see spiritual things, and it allows us to see into the future.

I have found for myself that faith is one of the surest guidance systems we have, and the Holy Spirit will use it often to direct us.

We need to use our faith to the fullest. Some seem to have a lot of faith for healing and use it. Others have a lot of faith for deliverance and use it at every opportunity. Brothers and sisters recognize your faith and use it. Put it to work! What good is it to say, "I have a lot of faith," and you do not use it for some good purpose. If you have faith for prayer, then pray mightily.

There is a very clear difference between hope and faith. I did not understand this at first until I saw the two in action. There are people who are hopeless, and those who have hope, and those who have faith. I have learned to watch a person's attitude and what comes out of their mouth. This reveals whether they are hopeless, have hope, or have faith. The hopeless person is a negative person. When hope enters in, you can actually see that it does something for a person. The totally negative thing goes and they have the attitude that things can be better. I have seen this happen to many people. They came hopeless. After they had heard the gospel and people testify that God had healed and delivered them they would speak in this manner, "I hope He will do it for me, or maybe God will heal my marriage." What had happened was that hope had sprung up within them. This always encourages me, for I know the next thing that will appear is faith.

It is important to recognize the difference between hope and faith. We sometimes try to force a victory on a person and they don't yet have the faith to claim it. You notice Jesus recognized those who had faith. Just because a person says they have faith doesn't mean

they do. Often the opposite is true. The person who says I have a lot of faith has very little, and the person who says, I have little faith, has more than they think. Oh, how we do like to boast about spiritual things.

The things I speak of, hopelessness, hope and faith all speak very clearly. Hopelessness says, "God doesn't care, He doesn't love me." Hope says, "Maybe God does care, maybe He can do the things He says, I hope He can." Faith says, "God loves me, God has forgiven me, He has heard my prayers. I know He will do what He has promised. By His stripes I am healed. I am victorious. I can do all things through Christ." Faith has a strong voice, a firm voice, a positive voice.

Hope says, "I hope so".

Faith says, "I know so."

How do we move from hope to faith? The Word of God tells us faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of Christ.

The Living Bible puts it in this way, "Yet faith comes from listening to this good news - the good news about Christ."

I have learned a few things about faith from faith ministries. Some of these are healing, teaching, deliverance and others. I noticed that the ministries who were effective would spend time building up people's faith, by the Word of God and personal testimonies. For example, healing or miracle ministries would spend a lot of time sharing the healing and miracles of Christ, and then have people who had received a healing or miracle in the past share it. I could actually feel the faith building up in people. These ministers would not begin to pray for healing or miracles until the faith was there.

We know that every man has a measure of faith. How blessed is the man who knows how to stir up the faith which God has given him, or how to stir up the faith of others.

We seem to be better at stirring up the flesh of men than the spiritual things from God. By this, I mean we stir up anger, resentment, confusion in ourselves and others, instead of stirring up love, faith, joy and the fruit of the Holy Spirit. God help us!

You see, not only can we cause faith to rise up in others, we can cause faith to rise up within ourselves. We need to learn how to minister faith to every person around us every moment of every day. We can do it if we try. I believe this is a ministry God has given to all of us.

Recognize the areas that you are weak in faith; the areas that those around you are weak in faith. Then minister to yourself or to others the things you need to hear from God's Word and from books, tapes, and testimonies. We have so many ways to minister to our faith and the faith of others. You can do it. You can receive the miracle, you can receive the healing, you can be free from the smoking, or some other habit. You can be victorious, but you must receive or stir up the faith for it. The Bible tells us we receive nothing from God without faith. We cannot please God apart from faith. In fact everything not of faith is sin.

As many as are sons are led by the Spirit.

DRAW NEAR TO HIM

We find in the Old Testament that the nation of Israel had a high priest. They were a nation called by God. They had a purpose and they had a priesthood.

The Bible tells us that they were a shadow of that which was to come, the Church.

The Church is called. It is a nation. It has a purpose. It is called a nation of priests and ministers, and it also has a high priest.

(Hebrews 4:14)" Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."

In verse 16 it says, "Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need."

Did you ever consider where the throne of grace is? It is in the Holy of Holies.

The Holy of Holies has not passed away. It is the veil that has changed.

In the Old Testament the high priest would go in to the Holy of Holies to the mercy seat, to the throne of grace, and there he would find mercy for him and the whole nation of Israel.

We seem to find many people in the body of Christ who have no confidence before God. Either they feel like terrible sinners or they feel unworthy.

Who is the throne of grace for? I believe it is for sinners and unworthy people. If you are not one of them you don't need it.

Who did Jesus come for? Sinners and unworthy people. If you are not one of them, you don't need Him. The devil is a liar. He will tell you that you are a sinner and unworthy, and that God will not hear you or answer you.

Yes! We are sinners and unworthy, but God does hear us and does answer our prayers, and He gives us undeserved favor.

We can have confidence before God, because God our Father sent Jesus to open the veil and to become the new veil, so that you and I, sinners that we are, can go boldly in and out of the Holy of Holies and expect to receive wonderful things from our Father.

Over and over the Bible tells us to draw near with confidence; be bold!

Do you think the high priest in the Old Testament was without sin? Of course not. Then why could he go boldly into the Holy of Holies?

I will use four reasons: (1) he was called (2) he was consecrated (3) he had on priestly robes (4) he had an offering of blood.

Remember, we the Church are the called. The Bible says we are a nation of priests, we are sanctified and sealed. We have an offering of blood, the perfect blood of Jesus.

Many people seem to have a problem understanding the book of Hebrews. It reveals Jesus as the high priest and the beginning of a

new priesthood where many others follow him into the Holy of Holies.

Do you suppose the Bible says we are a nation of priest just for the fun of it? It means just that; a nation of priests, who are called, consecrated, and robed. What is the white robe the Bible keeps speaking of and also the blood offering; that you and I can go boldly and confidently right into the Holy of Holies and find grace and mercy in time of need?

Read the book of Hebrews, and pray for God to give you understanding. Read Chapter Ten and see the nation of priests being sanctified and consecrated and the blood offering presented. You will see this was all done by the Father's will and accomplished by Jesus Christ, so we can enter and be bold.

Read verse nineteen, "Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the Holy place by the blood of Jesus."

Verse twenty says, "by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh."

Brothers and sisters rejoice! We can be bold before God. We are called! We are priests! We are robed! We are washed! The blood offering has been made once and for all!

YES, WE ARE SINNERS.

YES, WE ARE UNWORTHY.

BUT WE CAN GO BOLDLY BEFORE THE THRONE IN SPITE OF THAT.

WE ARE PRIESTS.

THE THRONE OF GRACE IS FOR US.

Do you know something wonderful happens when we come to the throne of grace? We receive mercy, we are healed. We are freed from bondage. We receive forgiveness. We are filled with peace.

I need the throne of grace, and so do you. Draw near to it and stay close to it. Don't worry about trying to make yourself perfect before you come. He will make you perfect there.

THANK GOD FOR THE THRONE OF GRACE.

SEEING JESUS

"Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer." (2 Cor. 5:16)

Why did Paul come out with such a statement? Is there more than one way of knowing Jesus? Yes, there is! Paul made one of these ways quite clear in this passage of Scripture. We can know Jesus according to the flesh.

It is very possible that many of the people who Paul came into contact with had seen or heard Jesus when He walked on this earth. There were yet others who had heard of Him and knew of Him and the great things He did.

These people all knew Him according to the flesh: Both groups, the ones that saw and heard and the ones that heard second-hand. It even says that many believed on Him. Were they born of the Spirit yet? No! Had they entered into the kingdom of God yet? No! They were still all seeing, hearing, knowing and believing in the flesh, with the natural senses and mind.

Paul had this to say of the flesh. "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Can we have a belief in Jesus and still not be born of the Spirit? Yes! We can have a belief in Jesus and still not be born of the Spirit, still not be born of God, and still not able to see the kingdom of God or enter

the kingdom of God. You see, any of us can know Jesus according to the flesh and not know Jesus according to the Spirit.

"And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." (John 17:3)

What is the other way that we can know Jesus and the Father? Is Jesus still in the flesh now?

In regard to the first question. Jesus tells us that we must come to the Father in Spirit and truth. Let me word this statement a little differently. You must come to the Father as a spiritual man and sincere in your heart. Remember this Scripture, "You will find me when you seek me with your whole heart." In another place it says, "As many as are led by the Spirit are sons of God."

One of the works of the Holy Spirit is to lead us to the Father, to reveal the Father of spirits to us. This cannot happen until we are born of the Spirit and can begin to see spiritually, hear spiritually and understand spiritual things. Paul spoke of this in 1 Cor. 2:12-14, "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God; which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 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."

Now think about this. There are many who profess Jesus and totally reject the supernatural. They will not believe in healing, miracles, people being led by the Spirit, tongues, or God speaking to people in spiritual experiences; any type of spiritual manifestation they will not accept. These people can even say, yes, these things used to happen, but they don't happen anymore.

I think back before I experienced the Holy Spirit. I had no awareness of any spiritual kingdom around me. I was not aware that miracles were happening every day right around me. And then, my eyes were opened. I saw miracles and healing all around me. Did they just start? No! They were happening all the time, but I did not have the capability to be aware of them.

If we want to know the Jesus of now, who is seated in heaven, glorified, then there is only one way that we can know Him and that is spiritually. He is Spirit. You might say, yes, but didn't His body go with Him? Yes! But remember His body is changed. It is a spiritual body. Paul claims to have seen Jesus. Did he see Jesus in the flesh or indeed did he see Him high and lifted up, even as John saw Him in the book of Revelation. Jesus is not in the flesh anymore.

Think about this: Elijah was taken to heaven. Do you suppose he still has the same flesh and blood body he had on this earth. I believe when he was taken up in that flaming chariot, something happened to him. He was changed into a spiritual body. The Bible makes it very clear that we are going to be changed also. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Brothers and sisters, we are not to know any longer what Jesus used to be like in the flesh. We must know Him in the Spirit. Eternal life is to know Him. How? In the flesh or in the Spirit? As He was, or as He is? I believe that we must know Him in the Spirit to have eternal life. Knowing Him in the flesh is not enough.

DENY YOURSELF AND FOLLOW ME

"Deny yourself and follow me." These words have bothered me many times, and I am sure that they have bothered many of you at times.

Don't just be a hearer, but be a doer.

"Unless a seed fall into the ground and die, it bears no fruit."

These and many other sayings from the Bible are telling us the same message. What I hear is this: If the Word of God does not become active in our everyday life, then our whole religious practice is for nothing. Just practicing our Christianity in our church is not enough. It must extend to our home, our school, our job, and our fun; our whole life.

I know Christians who tithe, fast and pray, and who are involved in their local church. This still is not the fruit of the Spirit. Isn't it strange that we can be doing all these things and still not bear fruit? Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking because I am doing these things I am bearing fruit.

We can sometimes deny ourselves food and that is great, but can we deny ourselves when it involves people; whether I get my way or they get their way?

I can give freely to the Church or ministry; which is great. Do you give as freely at home, or on the job, or to your boss?

We can be very involved in the Church and not much involved at home or in the community or on the job.

I hope I am getting my point across clearly. I am not trying to knock any of these things. They are good. Jesus said, "Do these things but don't leave the other undone."

It has taken me twenty years to see that this Christian walk is not a one-time decision or act, but a daily, hourly, moment by moment decision and act.

I see one thing very clearly now: it is very easy to be the Pharisee, the lawyer, the judge. Not so easy to be the Good Samaritan, the servant, the buried seed; the one sitting at the lowest seat.

Something I have shared before and it is still true: I don't have all the answers. I don't have many answers at all. It is not important that I have all the answers. What's important is that I be a servant, a Good Samaritan; that I deny myself for the benefit of others.

A little experience happened to me the other day. My wife and I had an evening free. We don't have these very often. I suggested we go for a ride to visit a brother. We started off and were about half way. My wife Pauline spoke up and said, "Let's go visit this person instead. I don't see them very often."

Well, I was kind of set on going to visit this other brother, so that caused something inside of me to stir a little, I was a little bit disturbed. I didn't say anything. In fact, I had been thinking about denying oneself, and I knew that I did not deny myself enough when it came to my personal life.

I had to make a decision soon, for I had to take a different road. I thought it is time for me to deny myself in this kind of situation. I

deliberately decided to do what would be pleasing to my wife and not have a sick attitude, and that I was going to enjoy myself.

I came to the turn; without hesitation I turned in the direction my wife wanted to go. I think in that moment I died a little bit. It may seem like a very small thing to some of you. To me it was a victory.

(Luke 14:26) "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

I believe this Scripture and the story I just shared are speaking about the same thing. May God give us ears to hear, a heart to understand, and motivate us to act.

PART TWO

"I PRAY THAT THE EYES OF YOUR HEART MAY BE ENLIGHTENED,"
(EPHESIANS 1:18)

THE NEW LIFE

"This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world." (James 1:27)

I have to accept the fact that there is religion in the world which is defiled; it is not acceptable to God nor pleasing to our Father in heaven.

I am also aware there is a difference between the practice of religion and being religious.

To point out an example from the Bible: Jesus was religious, and the Pharisees were practitioners of religion. There was a big difference between the two. One pleased God; the other, God took no pleasure in at all.

It is very easy for Christian people to fall into the trap of practicing religion instead of being religious.

What is the big difference between the two? I am sure there are many differences. I want to point out a big one. Pure and undefiled religion comes from the heart. The practice of religion can very easily just be put on. Jesus pointed this out when He said, "White-washed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness."

We cannot have pure and undefiled religion apart from Jesus. It can only come from Jesus, from the life of Jesus within us; that river of life which Jesus spoke of.

The Good Samaritan is another example of pure religion. The Bible says he felt compassion, and he went to him and helped him. He did not do it because he had to, or to obey some law, or because of duty. He did it because something came up from his heart, and there was a need.

Maybe Jesus was speaking about the same thing when He told about the people who said, "Lord, Lord didn't we do all these things in your name," and He said, "Be gone you workers of iniquity, I never knew you." Maybe their religion was defiled.

In another place, Jesus spoke of a separating of the sheep from the goats. The goats left undone that which should have been done. Jesus spoke of giving a glass of water to someone in need; clothing the naked; visiting the prisoner. What was He speaking of? Pure and undefiled religion.

How do we defile religion? By doing things out of duty or obligation, instead of from a heart of compassion. We defile it, if we expect something back or feel they owe us something for what we did. We defile it, if we stand and count the cost of whatever it is that needs to be done.

Pure religion comes from the heart; sees the need, meets the need to the best of one's ability. It does not consider whether the person deserves it or not, and it does not expect anything in return. It comes forth from the heart and keeps coming and coming and coming.

Pure and undefiled religion does not boast or brag; does not even care if people know what it has done or not. With such, the Father is greatly pleased.

"Lord deliver us from the practice of religion, and cause us to be religious."

Why was it that David was pleasing to God? He sinned, lied, deceived, betrayed, murdered, and committed adultery.

The Bible says it was his heart. David had a heart for God. Let's look into this a little more and see what it was about David's heart that pleased God.

Now there are many of us who get upset with God. When things go well, we feel pretty good about God. When things go bad, we grumble and sometime get downright angry with Him.

Consider David; he killed the giant and the whole nation praised him. It was short-lived. Saul became jealous and tried to kill him. God anointed David king over the nation. He was chased all over and only had a few outlaws for his friends. Saul was finally taken care of by God. The nation accepted David as king. His own son turned the hearts of the people away from him, and back he went into hiding, again. His own son tried to kill him.

Now you put yourself into David's shoes. I think about now, you would be getting upset with God. Maybe even angry. There was something special about David's heart. He never turned against Saul or his son Absalom. He had every reason to, but he didn't. David's heart never turned sour against God either.

David fell into sin. God sent the prophet to him and pointed out his sin. He fell on his face before God, begging forgiveness. He did not try to justify himself in any way. God told him he was going to take his son. David put on sackcloth and ashes and prayed before God to spare his son. God didn't. As soon as he realized his son was dead, to the amazement of his servants, he got up, washed up, put

on clean robes and went into the temple to worship; praising and glorifying God.

Through all of this, David's heart was steadfast toward God. David's attitude toward God was right, and God was pleased. I believe David was an example of pure and undefiled religion: A heart toward God, set to serve God, even as Jesus' heart was single toward the Father.

As David cried out, "Teach me thy ways, Lord." "Teach us your ways Lord, Jesus and cause us to walk in them." Amen.

THE PERFECT LAW

God has given man the perfect law. If we read it and obey it, we will find peace, blessing, liberty and victory. James 1:25 speaks of it:

"But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man shall be blessed in what he does."

So there is a perfect law. What is the perfect law? Where do we find this perfect law?

I am sure most of you have tried to keep the ten commandments. Were you able to do it? No! Did you get the victory? No!

The Scriptures tell us this about the letters written in stone; they kill and bring people into bondage. These are not the perfect laws then, because we do not get the victory, the peace, or the liberty through them.

Did you ever notice this? The people who seem to be keeping the ten commandments and are trying to live up to them have a common problem. They all seem to be self-righteous, and they are not very responsive to the Holy Spirit.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit was not very active, except in a very few people. In the New Testament we find the Holy Spirit very active in the Church as well as in the individual believers who

really center in on Jesus Christ, grace, love and the new covenant. If a person or group turns back to the old religious practice of the ten commandments, the Holy Spirit is not active in that person or group any longer.

You will find this to be true: The Holy Spirit is very active in people and groups who are strong in faith.

The Holy Spirit is not active in people and groups who are putting their trust in good works.

God has written His law in two places: 1) on tablets of stone, the old covenant. 2) On the human heart and mind, the new covenant.

Then, of course, we like to play God and make up our own laws. Remember how the people in the Old Testament added to God's laws many of their own, and Jesus said they laid burdens upon the people that were hard to bear.

In the Church, today, there are still the lawmakers who are laying heavy burdens on the people of God which are hard to bear. Paul wrote to the Galatians and said, "You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? You began by the Spirit, and now you are trying to perfect yourself." Someone became their lawmaker, and they foolishly submitted to them. Yet God had already given them the perfect law that would give them liberty.

Where is this perfect law? "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord; I will put My laws upon their heart, and upon their mind I will write them." (Hebrews 10:16)

Each one of us, as new covenant people, have to look intently at our heart and mind, and see what the Holy Spirit is putting there this moment, and be obedient to that which we see written there in the tablets of our heart. If we begin to test every thought

carefully, we will find that some of them are coming directly from God by the Holy Spirit. This fulfills the Scripture which says, "And as for you, the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need for anyone to teach you; but as His anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you abide in Him." (1 John 2:27)

There will be some who will stand in your way from entering into this kind of walk with the Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke of them in this way, "You don't enter in yourself, and you stand in the way and don't let others enter in." He also said this of them, "Blind leaders of the blind and they will all fall into the ditch."

The perfect law, the new covenant, is not written in stone or on paper; it is written in tablets of the human heart. I am not putting down Scripture; I am agreeing with it. The Scriptures point us to Jesus. The Scriptures point us to the new covenant. The Scriptures are not Jesus, and they are not the new covenant. They bear witness of both and point the way to both.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord, look intently at your heart and mind, see what the perfect law is for you. Obey it. You will have liberty and you will be very, very blessed in what you do.

"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the council of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.

And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither, and in whatever he does, he prospers. "(Psalm 1:1-3)

THE HEART WORD

The Bible tells us this, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God."

Another place says that the Word of God is like a seed, and if it once finds fertile ground, it springs up and bears fruit.

What is the fruit of the Word of God?

I believe that it is faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Why is there so much contention in the body of Christ? Why so much envy, pride, jealousy, covetousness, and separations?

I believe the basic reason for this is lack of faith. Did you ever notice a person who is lacking in a particular way always tries to make up for it somehow in a different way? For example, a person who can't seem to do big things may do a lot of bragging and boasting about the big things he has done. We struggle to hide our weakness with some other thing. We want people to think we are strong. Not many seem to escape this trying to cover up our weaknesses.

The Church has not escaped it either. We would like to think we are mountain movers. Most of us are not. In the Church we go feverishly about trying to hide our weakness, our lack of faith. How do we do this? Maybe by trying to have perfect doctrine. Nobody is going to question my faith if my doctrine is up to par.

Maybe, by being super-involved in the Church, nobody is going to question my faith.

If I study the Bible hard and remember many Scriptures to use at the right time, my faith has got to be big.

I am speaking about something which is very subtle. We would not even be aware of it ourselves, even though we might be the one involved.

There are many people looking for answers today. This is also true in the Church. They want to know why. Prove to me, give me some facts so I can believe; show me, give me a sign. People asked for a sign in Jesus' time on earth. He said you will receive no sign but the Son of Man being lifted up.

I know a woman who just recently told me that the Father in heaven loved her. She has gone to and belonged to a church many years. It took about fifty-five years for that word from God to enter her heart and spring up as faith. She must have heard it hundreds of times. She has also questioned it hundreds of time. Now there is no question, she knows. You can hear the faith as she says it, "My Father in heaven loves me."

There are some who have all kinds of questions about all kinds of things in the Church. The day that faith enters that area the questions stop. Faith does not have to have all the answers or ask all the questions. It is our unbelief that needs so many answers. It is our doubt that ask so many questions.

Why so much doubt and unbelief in people who study, go to church, and work so hard with intentions so good?

The Bible says, "hearing, we hear not, seeing we see not." This is our problem. We hear the Word, but not with the heart. We see things with our intellect, but not with the eye of the heart. As a

result, the fruit of the Word does not spring up in us, and the fruit of God's Word is faith.

Wherever or whenever the Word of God finds a fertile place in men's hearts, faith springs up as a result.

Jesus came to bring a word from God. That word was for men's hearts: Some heard, some didn't. Some received it in the mind, some received it in the heart. To some it brought bondage, to some it brought life.

One man, when he was being questioned by the priest said, " I don't know if He is a sinner or not. All I know is that before I was blind, now I see." He didn't need any more answers, but it seems that the priest did.

God's Word is intended for man's heart; it must find good soil in that heart. And if it does, great things happen.

I think most people would agree that there is a lot of stone throwing in the Church. Could it be that our hearts have not heard what Jesus said? "You without sin cast the first stone?"

Was that word intended only for those men that day? I don't think so. I think that word, "You without sin cast the first stone," was intended for every man on earth. Then, if Jesus was speaking to me and I heard Him, can I throw any more stones?

I am sure most of you have heard this; read it and spoken about it many times. Have you stopped throwing stones? If you haven't, then the word has not entered your heart, yet. The day that it does, you will drop all your stones.

May God open our hearts and cause them to be fertile and to hear as He says,

"I love you"

"I forgive you"

"By my stripes you are healed"

"We are more than conquerors"

"I can do all things through Him"

"You without sin cast the first stone"

"Whitened sepulcher"

"Go and sin no more"

May the Lord give you an open and fertile heart to receive His Word.

2 CORINTHIANS 11:3

"But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ." (2 Cor. 11:3)

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death." (Phil. 3:10)

In several places in the New Testament Paul warned the Church about straying away from the gospel he preached. We find he had good reason for doing this.

What was this simple gospel Paul taught? And are we straying away from it?

The basic gospel is this: Jesus Christ died on the cross for sinners, and anyone who would believe and receive and come to Him would have life. He went to heaven and sent back the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, that we might be filled with the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, pray and worship in the Spirit.

Now go back to that Scripture, 2 Cor. 11:3. It says, "Lest...your minds should be led astray." Many of us fall into the trap without realizing it. We seem to think if we get enough knowledge, we will be closer to God. This is not true! The Holy Spirit is the only one who can bring us closer to God. Apart from the Holy Spirit we get no revelation of God.

We should learn a lesson from the Old Testament. Where did the called and chosen people land up? Read Acts 13:16-27. They started in Egypt. By the mighty power of God they were brought out into the desert; saw the mighty works of God and entered the promised land. Sometimes they were faithful, sometimes not. Later on they heard from God very seldom. They became very legalistic until, by the time Jesus came, they did not recognize Him as the Son of God; nor did they recognize the Holy Spirit or the apostles. The Bible called them Pharisees: A form of Godliness and no power.

I met a sister in the Lord several years ago after a service. We had been speaking about being led by the Holy Spirit, and hearing His voice direct us, and being aware of the presence of the Lord with us. This sister came up to me and said, "The service was very good, but I am envious of you." I was surprised and I asked her why she was envious. She said, "I met the Lord Jesus forty years ago and I knew His voice and was very aware of His presence. But now I have not heard for a long, long time, and I no longer have any awareness of His presence with me."

This sister has a greater knowledge of the Bible in her mind than she did back then. She goes to a Bible Study every week, church every Sunday, and works for the church. Forty years after she met Jesus and was filled with the Spirit, she was not aware of His presence; nor recognized His voice anymore; nor knew the leading of the Spirit.

This sister was in the same condition as the Pharisees. She had been deceived and led astray from the simple gospel of knowing and walking with Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

Another Scripture which Paul used so well to describe our Christian walk, (Phil. 3: 10) "That I may know Him." To know Him is eternal life. I think of Jesus when He spoke to the disciples, "I have been with you so long and you still don't know me." Such is the sad

condition of many in the Church. Not just lay people, but priest, ministers and sisters. Paul went on to say, "And the power of His resurrection". What did he mean by this? He meant there was even more than knowing Jesus, that we could experience the same mighty power resurrecting us into a newness of life. That's part of the good news. Is that resurrection just for after we are dead? NO! The Scriptures make it very clear we are to live a new life here and now. This is the testimony that Jesus lives and arose from the dead; because we walk in newness of life.

Paul continued on to say, "And the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death." Any person who follows Jesus is going to experience the pain of rejection and ridicule: their name defamed, loss of close friends; hated by those that don't understand why you have changed; even rejected by the people in their own church who think they have gone religious crazy. All these things and more bring us into that fellowship of suffering with Christ. We experience the very things He experienced. It gives us the opportunity to say Father forgive them, they don't understand.

Paul finished that Scripture, "Being conformed to His death". Simply meaning dying like He did. Not so much the death on the cross. It means the dying every day to self and living every day for God. Denying our own pleasures for the sake of others and the kingdom of God. This certainly has its reward.

"For if you are living according to the flesh you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body you will live." (Romans 8:13)

Why is there so much confusion in the Church? We have made the gospel too complicated. Instead of teaching people to be led by the Spirit and knowing a personal Jesus, we give them knowledge that makes them into Pharisees.

May God help us to get back to the simple gospel. You need help? Go to Jesus, receive the promise of the Father. Be filled with the Spirit. Be led by the Spirit. Walk in the Spirit. Don't settle for anything other than the real thing. The Kingdom of power and of Spirit which the Father promised.

DO I HAVE TO?

This may sound like a strange title for a Christian message so let me finish my question. Do I have to conform to what you think I should be before you can love and accept me?

This is what one husband said to his wife, "How do you expect me to love you when you make so many mistakes?" There is a marriage on the way down. If a person cannot love another when they make mistakes, is there any chance they could love them if they were perfect? You might say, "It would be easy to live with a perfect person." I don't think so because all of your own imperfections would become very obvious to you. For most of us it is easier to live with imperfection than perfection.

When we get around perfection, true perfection, not self-righteousness, we experience the same as Peter, "But when Simon Peter saw that, he fell down at Jesus' feet saying, 'Depart from me for I am a sinful man O Lord!'"(Luke 5:8)

That poor man who cannot love his wife because of her mistakes; if she were perfect, he would not be able to love her because of her perfection. He would be saying, "How can I love you when you are so perfect?"

There is no chance for that relationship to begin to work until he gets out of the judgment seat and gets in the mercy seat.

I don't believe I will ever see the day when the whole Church agrees on doctrine. I don't believe that day will ever come till the coming of Christ.

Do I have to wait till we all agree on doctrine before I can love you and accept you as a brother? NO!

Do I have to wait till you join the same church I go to before I start loving you? NO!

Do I have to wait till you start doing things the same way I do before I can love you? NO!

What a tragedy that brothers and sisters born of the same Spirit, the same Father, cannot love one another. The very things I listed above are the stumbling stones they fall over.

I cry out to you! Can you accept me as I am? Can you love me as I am without me having to conform to your standards and be what you think I should be? Can you allow me freedom in the body of Christ to be Me?

I was listening to a tape the other day and this brother was telling how one day he was saying, "Boy do I love this syrup." He was promptly corrected by this very spiritual man. "You don't love that syrup, you like it. It's God you love." After he pondered on this awhile, he concluded he did love the syrup and he still does.

Well, we get hung up on words sometimes and it makes us small. I have come to the same conclusion this man did. I can love God and still love syrup too.

I was never much of a person to wear a cross or other Christian ornaments. In fact, sometimes when others did, it bothered me. I thought they were being kind of "over spiritual", or were showing off or superstitious.

A while ago a friend gave me a neat little cross to wear around my neck. It was a love gift, and I liked it. The first time I wore it, it seemed a little strange. I wore it three or four times and I liked it.

I am not wearing it as a charm or superstition or to offend anyone, or to flaunt my Christianity.

Can you love me as I am and allow me the freedom in Christ to wear a cross around my neck?

Can you love me as I am and allow me to go to the church of my choice? Can you allow me to make the sign of the cross or kneel in church, or lift up my hands and praise God loudly? Can I sing in the Spirit and prophesy? Can I lay hands on the sick and pray for them? Can I cast out a demon in the name of Jesus? Can I do these things, some of which you may not agree with or desire to do?

Do I have to be what you want me to be before you can love me?

GOD'S GRACE SUFFICIENT

Is God's grace sufficient? This is an important question to all of us, because our salvation and our eternal life depends on it.

If it is sufficient, then we can rely totally on God's grace. If it is not sufficient, then we would be foolish to rely totally on it.

The man who believes God's grace is sufficient can rest. The man who does not believe God's grace is sufficient must work.

I know a man who came to know the Lord Jesus, he got filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to read the Bible a lot. He saw that God's grace was so great toward sinners that he was filled with peace and joy. He was confident in the Lord Jesus.

One day he was speaking to another man who also knew the Bible. The first man was telling the second man how all sufficient God's grace was. The second man said, "Oh yes! God's grace is sufficient, but you have to do some of it too, you know."

At this point the first man lost his peace and his joy, and he entered into confusion. He continued to read his Bible, but instead of seeing God's grace any longer, he began to see all the things he had to do. He saw all the laws, all the judgments, all the do's and all the don'ts. He no longer was very happy. Being a Christian was fast becoming a heavy burden.

What had happened to this man? What he experienced happens to many. You can read about them in the Bible.

"You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you; did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Galatians 3:1-3)

In Galatians 5:4 it uses even stronger language. "You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Some time ago I talked with this man. He was telling me what had happened to him and how he was now confused, and he asked me the question, "Is God's grace sufficient, or do I have to do some of it myself?"

I didn't really know how to answer his question in a way which would bring him out of the confusion, but I asked the Lord how I was to answer. The lord gave me two simple questions for him.

I asked him the first question, "Where does grace come from?" He answered, "It comes from God."

I asked him the second question, "Where does good works come from?" He looked at me, and instantly the joy came back into his face and the confusion was gone from him. He was very excited and said, "I was right! I was right all the time. God's grace is sufficient." Then he answered the second question, "Good works come from us! Grace comes from God."

I said, "That's right; which one brings forth the fruit?"

Does good works bring forth grace, or does grace coming from God bring forth good works in a man's life?

Do you know God as the law giver or as the Lord of grace? Do you approach God as the judge or as a Father that loves you? Do you go to the throne of judgment or to the throne of grace? Do you know that God our Father is now seated on the throne of grace? We should all be very happy about this.

Do you know grace cannot be bought; it can only be accepted or received.

I for one am convinced that God's grace through Jesus Christ is sufficient; and if we will allow His grace to work fully in us, we will bring forth good works which will bring pleasure to our Father in heaven.

Some people read the Bible and see all the law and all the do's and don'ts. Others read the Bible and see the grace and love.

Which one do you see? The natural mind sees all the rules, the spiritual man sees the grace.

May God help us to see and experience his love and grace. Amen

CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS

There are certain people in the body of Christ whom the Bible tells us to stay away from and have nothing to do with. Even as I write I am aware of this: not everyone you associate with is good for you. In fact, some of the people you know, you would be better off to have nothing to do with them, for this reason: They pull you down every time they are near you. They rob you of your joy, your faith and are helping to keep you in a position of defeat. Some of you might very well say, "I know this person is not good for me, but he is my best friend. I have known this person for years, we have been neighbors."

Let me present this in a different way. Say, that I had a good friend, and I was trying to stop drinking or smoking. We did everything together; we worked for the same company, we liked sports, we went fishing and hunting together. I finally decided that for my health and my family I needed to stop drinking and smoking, but every day on the job, my friend kept trying to make me smoke, and every night after we finished work, he insisted we stop and have a few drinks. Because I was already weak in these areas, my friend kept me in a defeated position. Was he really my friend? Was he really concerned about my health or my family? No! He was my enemy, he was a wolf dressed in lamb's clothing. I remember in one incident

Jesus turned to Peter and said, "Satan, get behind me."

If a person is not good for us and keeps us in defeat, should we continue being involved with that person? (Note, I am not speaking about husband and wife). So often I have heard people say, "But that person needs me." This may be true, but if the person is detrimental to you, you don't need them.

It is one thing, if a person is strong in the Lord and is able to help another person who has a problem with gossiping or being negative all the time, but it is something else when you get sucked into it and gossip and become negative yourself.

I suppose that at some time we are taken in by these things, and even our best friend or even our pastor might get caught up in some of it, but we should quickly recognize it and move on. I am speaking about the people who do this just about every time you meet them. I am not speaking only about gossiping but about those who are always arguing Scripture, always putting down the church or the pastor; they never have anything good to say of anyone. The Bible calls them "malicious gossips," and says do not "wrangle about words," which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearer.

"Holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these." (2 Timothy 3:5)

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us." (2 Thess. 3:6)

The Scriptures tell us that we will know them by their fruit.

An unruly life does not mean just the person who is getting drunk or committing adultery. It can very well be the person who argues about the Scriptures every day, or the person who gossips every day, or the person who lies and manipulates other people. It can

also mean the one who is always robbing the joy and peace from others, or who is always keeping the church all stirred up and causing pain and heartache for others. We do have a lot of unruly people in the Church. Watch out for them, stay away from them; correct them in love if you can.

I think it is rather strange that it is not those out in the world the Bible tells us to be separated from, but those who are in the Church who are not bearing good fruit. Yet we do the opposite, we separate ourselves from the world and hang out with some people in the Church who are very bad for us. "Lord, give us courage to stand up and be counted."

THE HOPE OF GLORY

I could have used the title, "Hope of Peace" or "Hope of Victory" or "Hope of Rest". The meaning would be quite similar.

I am sure most of you who read this message could use a little more peace, victory and rest. Indeed, you have a hope that you will experience some of these things in the near future.

Have you ever felt like a wretched man even though you are a Christian? Well I have, many times. The reason for it is because I fall so short of the glory of God, so often. It is wretchedness to have all the power and authority which God has given us as His sons; to be blessed with every spiritual blessing from above, and still to suffer defeat over and over in our everyday life.

Colossians 1:27 reads, "Christ in you, the hope of glory". Many people tell me they have Christ in them. They really believe He is in them. I also believe that He is in them. Yet they suffer defeat in their daily lives many times.

The point I want to bring out is this; we can have Christ within and still suffer many defeats. Yet, He is our peace. Jesus is our rest.

Let me ask you a question. Are you still trying to perfect yourself? If you are, you are being carnal and fleshly. Paul would tell you that you are foolish. I tried several years to change myself and all it did was frustrate me. I quit trying, and right away I saw some changes. I don't try to change myself anymore. I let God do it. I only try to

be faithful to do that which He tells me to do. To serve Him and the Church. Jesus only did what the Father showed Him to do, and only spoke the things the Father told Him to speak. This is all we need to do, and life will pour out of us as it did Jesus.

Remember, Jesus said, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me." I believe that Jesus was dead to the flesh, and it was the life of the Father in Him which was coming forth. The disciples said, "We don't know the Father," and Jesus said, "I have been with you all this time and you still don't know me."

What I want to bring out is this: It is not just a matter of me having asked Jesus into my heart and believing He is there, but I must enter into the Jesus who is in me. I must become rooted into His life which is in me. Then I can say as Paul did, "Not I that live, but Christ in me." I am dead to self and alive to Christ.

Victory is in Christ. Peace is in Christ. Rest is in Christ.

We can ask Jesus Christ into our heart and believe He is there, yet not be rooted and grounded in Him.

There are two levels of Christianity. A fleshly, carnal level and a spiritual level. One level, we act and speak from the flesh; the other level, we act and speak in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit.

When we speak and act from the flesh, we suffer defeat over and over. When we speak and act in Jesus, there is victory and life.

So many times I hear people pray, "Lord, give me more faith". The problem here is not so much that you need more faith, but you need to stir up and use the faith you have which you are not using. Whenever we function outside of faith, we are being carnal and of the flesh. We leave the doors wide open for every evil thing to enter into our lives: Fear, worry, doubt, confusion. These things

have no opening when we are using that measure of faith which God has given us.

We can have Christ in us and not be in Him. Christ's victory becomes ours when we enter into Him. We pass from glory to glory when we are in Him. We have peace and rest when we are in Him. We are more than conquerors in Him. His life is manifested through us when we are in Him. Our hope of glory is in Jesus Christ. Amen.

PART THREE

"SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW WHAT IS THE HOPE OF HIS CALLING,"
(EPHESIANS 1:18)

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS AT HAND

John the Baptist came from the wilderness crying, "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand".

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way of the Lord, make His paths straight".

And when Jesus came, He began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand".

What is the kingdom of God? In Mark 4:30 we find it starts very small and grows very large.

In Luke 17:32 we find that the kingdom of God is in our midst. Yet many are totally unaware of it. Jesus says, "You can't see the kingdom of God nor enter into it unless you are born of the Spirit".

Another interesting Scripture, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God". I believe this Scripture is talking about the same thing. (Matt. 7:13-14) "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those that enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those that find it." (Acts 14:30)

I don't think the kingdom of God is anything less than the kingdom of life.

Paul said, "The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." In 1 Corinthians 4:20 he says, "For the kingdom of God does not consist of words, but in power."

These Scriptures say many things to me about the kingdom of God. I have an idea that it may not be as easy to enter as I think. It seems to me as I travel about that many people seem to think it is very easy also.

John seemed to think that men had to change, turn away from sin in order to prepare the way for the kingdom. It seems like many don't receive that message; only all they have to do is to ask Jesus into their heart and they can go right on with their sinning.

I remember a little story I heard a while ago. I don't know if it is true or not. A man asked Jesus into his heart, received the Holy Spirit and went his way. A while later, he came back to the minister and asked, "How can I get rid of the Holy Spirit now that I have Him?" The minister asked him, "Why do you want to be rid of the Holy Spirit?" The man said, "I feel more miserable and unhappy than I have all my life. What can I do about it?" The minister said, "Turn away from your sin."

Now if this story is true or not, I don't know. I do know there are many miserable people today who have received Jesus and the Holy Spirit and have never reckoned the cost of turning away from sin. As a result they are still in their sin and are very unhappy.

Paul said the kingdom of God is peace, joy and righteousness.

One of the works of the Holy Spirit in us is to make sin utterly sinful and convict us of our sin. And then it is up to us to turn away from it.

I think of Mark 11:25, "And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions."

Now this sounds to me like there must be an active move on my part before God forgives my sin. I must forgive first. I must turn away from my sin of unforgiveness. In other words, I must repent, leave my sin and then God forgives me.

One Scripture says, "If my people who are called by My name, will humble themselves, pray and seek My face and turn from their evil way, I will hear them from heaven, I will forgive their sins and heal their land".

Now a question: Does God forgive us our sin as long as we continue right on in it? Or does He forgive us when we repent of it? I mean by this, leaving the sin behind us.

Will the Lord give us that peace and joy as long as we continue in sin which the Holy Spirit has made us very aware of? The Scriptures also say the kingdom of God is righteousness. Are we righteous while we continue in our sin? I am aware that sometimes we stumble. But we need to learn to walk. I am speaking mostly about sin, the sin that we know is sin, and yet day by day continue doing it. You are not going to be filled with joy and happiness as long as you want to continue in it.

REPENT for the kingdom of God is at hand. Forgiveness and mercy are right at hand. Come to your senses and set your heart and mind on Jesus. Accept the great salvation He has to offer: not only forgiveness of sin, but freedom from sin.

May God bless you with freedom from sin.

NOT FAR AWAY

Sometimes we forget how close the kingdom of God is to us who believe. I have come to realize that most Christian people are praying and seeking to hear from a God who is far, far away. Forgetting that we have a God who is with us and is very aware of our every situation. He is closer to us than our breath.

What are some of the things which are close to us because God is with us? Not only close to us, but in us.

I guess I would have to start with life. I have eternal life in me. The grave will not be able to hold me because of the life abundant which Jesus Christ has given me.

It is so easy for us to grumble because we think God is not doing enough for us. If God had never done another thing for us than to die on the cross for our sins and keep us from hell; that would be enough. So we should praise Him for every breath taken.

The next thing I will remind you of is that within us is God's power. It is not a long way off. It is within us to accomplish God's work. Remember, Jesus said out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water.

The Lord Jesus has also blessed us with His name. He has given us the use of His name and that means He has given us authority. Not just the leaders of the church, but every one of us who believe on Him. Can you believe that Jesus has given you authority? That it is

also within you. It has to be used or you benefit nothing from it. How does authority come forth? It comes forth through speaking or action. Not every word we speak is authoritative, nor is every action authoritative. As children of God we should learn to speak and act so God's authority can come forth from us.

1 Cor. 1:24 tells us that Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. So if Christ Jesus is in us, then we have the power of God and wisdom of God right within us. Some of you might say I don't feel very powerful or very wise. You are not, but Jesus in you is. The treasure in the earthen vessel is nothing less than life eternal; the power and authority of God, the wisdom of God and the righteousness of God.

These things are all in us. It is just a matter of learning to live out of these things within us, instead of living out of our weakness and our foolish intellect; in other words, the wisdom of the world which is foolishness to God.

Isn't it amazing that the power and wisdom and righteousness of God was a man named Jesus, who was nailed and hung and died on a cross. The Bible tells us that the weakness of God is stronger than men and the foolishness of God is wiser than men. Jesus Christ died on the cross and defeated sin, the devil and death. Any man foolish enough to believe this, defeats the devil, sin and death also.

God says the kingdom of God is within. Jesus said out of your innermost being shall flow rivers of living water.

God and His power and authority and wisdom and righteousness are not far away. Seek for it within yourself, and you will find it.

The new covenant is written in your heart. Seek it out and see what is written there. Become obedient to the Spirit of God and the new covenant in your heart. You will bear much fruit and find that God

has not lied to us. His power and authority, His wisdom and righteousness are indeed within us. We can live and function in this power, life and righteousness.

I AM THE WAY

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me. If you had known Me you would have known my Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.' Philip said to Him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, "Show us the Father?"' (John 14:6)

Jesus walked on this earth and many did not recognize who He was. Even His own disciples had a problem there. The problem still exist today not only in the world, but in the Church.

I want to point out one of the sad conditions in the Church. There are many people who have received Jesus in their hearts. Some, many years ago, and they still don't know Jesus. Yes, they believe He is their Savior, Healer, Comforter and so on. And that their sins are washed away and they are forgiven. I have talked with many people like this. Prayer is a part of their life, and so is the Bible reading and going to church. But even with all this, many still do not have that deep, personal, intimate, knowing relationship: a meaningful awareness of the Lord Jesus who has come to dwell with and in His people.

I earnestly believe one of the things Paul was trying to do in the early Church was to create a hunger and thirst for a more intimate relationship with Jesus. When this is lacking in the Church, the

Church suffers. Paul was trying to stir these people when he said, "To know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His suffering, being conformed to His death."

I am not saying that we don't have Jesus in our hearts. I believe when we ask with a sincere heart He comes and never leaves us. The tragic part is that He is there and we are not even aware of it.

"CHURCH, IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST I AM CALLING YOU TO A DEPTH OF RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD JESUS. A NEW DEPTH OF AWARENESS OF GOD IN THE TEMPLE."

Like Paul, I am trying to stir you up. YOU can know Jesus better than you do, but there has to be a hunger and thirst for this close relationship which I am speaking about. Are you aware brethren, if you had a deeper relationship with Jesus, some of those problems you are having would just disappear?

Jesus stood up in the midst of the multitude and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come to me."

I am aware that some have a thirst for the Bible, for prayer, for fellowship, for praise, for gifts, for ministry, for many things. I am not speaking about these things. They are fine. But above all thirst to know Him, to hear Him, to be filled with His presence.

It is sad, because so many have all the things listed above, except the knowing; and they lack something else also, peace in their heart and their home, and joy in their heart, mind, and soul.

In Proverbs 29:18 there is a very interesting Scripture, "Where there is no vision the people are unrestrained."

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH WHO HAVE NO VISION. NO OBJECTIVE.

Paul would say they are beating at the air. Are you one of these people? THEN STOP RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE and pray, "Jesus give me a vision, a firm objective to begin moving toward." I believe Paul had a very solid objective: to save souls and share the Jesus he knew. How can we share a Jesus we don't know? I found myself without an objective even with the ministry. I prayed for one and the Lord Jesus gave one to me. My objectives is to know Jesus, to be filled with His word, and to fill others with His word, and to make people thirsty for more of Jesus!

You see, once we have a vision and objective we can begin to direct all our efforts toward achieving that. The race is on. I now have purpose and direction.

I wonder if Jesus were right here in the flesh today that He might say to us, "I have been with you so long and you still don't know me." You see Jesus was right there with them, and they really didn't know Him. He is with us and we really don't know Him, either.

A fact! We cannot bring anybody else any closer to Jesus than we are. How close can you bring someone else to Jesus? If you don't have the peace of God, can you give it to anyone else? Or can you only tell them about it? If you don't have the joy of the Lord, it is mighty hard to give it away.

For all the things of God there has to be a hunger and thirst, a seeking and asking. If you don't have a thirst for these things, ask for the hunger and thirst, and the Lord will give it to you.

Do you have peace? Do you have joy? Has the kingdom of God come into your home and heart? We see many Christian homes and hearts which have no peace, no joy. They are filled with confusion, doubt, fear, worry, anger and frustration.

Dear brothers, if you are not experiencing the reality of the kingdom of God in your home and heart, then tell the Lord so. Don't deny it or cover it up and try to deceive even yourself. Cry out, LORD, I WANT TO KNOW YOU, I WANT PEACE AND JOY AND TO KNOW YOUR BLESSED PRESENCE. Don't settle for less than what God has for you.

You shall find Him when you seek Him with your whole heart, your whole mind.

"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." (Jer. 19:13)

"Father, I pray for every person who reads this to begin to thirst. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen."

FAITH VERSUS UNBELIEF

Unbelief has a voice which has spoken from the time of Adam. It says, "Did God really say that?" This voice has spoken to the children of God ever since. It speaks loud and clear, and brings into question everything which God says.

Does this voice ever speak in the Church? Yes! Does this voice ever speak through Christians? Yes! Does this voice ever speak through you or me? Yes!

It is amazing how many in the Church believe this voice of unbelief.

It is amazing how many read and study the Bible and question all of it, instead of believing it.

If you are not going to believe it, why read it?

What does this voice of unbelief say? Many things, such as: These things didn't really happen: God does not do miracles anymore; Those things were only for the past, the Church doesn't need them anymore; Healing stopped a long time ago; It is just the ignorant and misguided who believe that stuff, not the intelligent; The Bible is just foolishness, a bunch of stories which were made up.

This sounds like something you would hear pagans, unbelievers, say.

But you hear it in the Church. These are all things I have heard from people who profess to be believers and profess to have the Holy Spirit.

Who are many of these things being said to? Babies in Christ, who have just come to know the Lord Jesus as their personal Savior.

At the very beginning of the Christian walk their faith and trust in a God of power and might is being undermined. Their faith in the written word of God is being destroyed. One other thing, also, which is being robbed from them; they are taught that God only speaks through the leaders and elders.

This and much more is coming from the voice of unbelief.

Another of the things this voice says: "You are not ready yet"; "You can't go out and tell people about Jesus until your life is changed"; or "You don't know the Bible well enough yet". This voice of unbelief is always trying to keep Christians from going out into the world.

I tell you brothers and sisters there is a lot of this in the Church. Don't be deceived by it. Guard your heart and mind and your speech. It is very easy to minister unbelief.

We are called to minister; life, not death, faith, not unbelief, God's Word, not the lie of the enemy.

I would like to attack the lie, "You are not ready yet! " When are we ready? We are ready when the Lord says so. Do we have to know the Bible from end to end? No! We need to be aware of what the Holy Spirit wants us to say.

Do we need to be strong? No! We need to rely on the strength of God. I can go in weakness and trembling.

Do I need to have persuasive words of wisdom? No!

Do I need superior speech? No!

All I need to know is the Lord Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

All I need to do is offer myself as the loaf of bread, and let God do the multiplying.

All I need is for the Lord to say, Go! Knowing that He is going to give me everything I need to accomplish whatever He wants done.

Paul said, "The kingdom of God is not just in word but in power".

Paul said, "Watch out for those who hold to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these." Why would Paul say such a thing?

I believe that unbelief is like a root of bitterness. Bitterness, it says, defiles many; unbelief can also defile many.

Is it scriptural that God only speaks to the leaders and elders?

If it says this in your Bible, then it is different than mine. I don't believe it. What I see is that every person is in a new personal relationship. A walking, talking relationship, wherein the Lord is going to speak to each one of us in a special way. Each one of us is a son and a priest who can go boldly right to the Father, who will know Him as our God. If this is not what is in the New Testament, then I have read it totally wrong.

I don't have to question everything God says. I don't have to understand it all. I don't think I will, as long as I am on this earth. One thing I do, I believe God, I believe His Word. I don't believe He lies or tells stories. He speaks truth because all that is in Him is Truth.

I pray that our Lord would show to every one of us any and all unbelief which may lurk in our heart to spring up and destroy others.

PREPARED TO GO

Right at this point in our lives, my wife and I are going through some changes. My daughter just got married. So we will have to get used to someone new in the family. My son, who has been living in our home with his wife and two children, have a new home of their own. So now we have this whole house to ourselves; just Pauline and me. Today I have been preparing to go to Wisconsin for three weeks of ministry. There are quite a number of things which have to be taken care of before we are free to go. We have a radio ministry. So all the programs have to be ready for the time we are gone. This message and the other things for the newsletter have to be done. Our financial arrangements have to be taken care of, both personal and for the New Life, Inc. Our home has to be taken care of. These are all things which we are personally responsible for. They can be done or left undone, but God has made us directly responsible for these things.

Our responsibilities change day by day in regard to our children, our community, our church, our ministry or our work. How important it is to know what is most important.

In the ministry, for example, there are many things that can be done. But some of them can wait, some of them cannot wait. In my home there are many things which need to be done or looked after, but only certain ones need to be done now. How blessed is the person who has the wisdom and the discernment to know what needs to be done "now" and does it, and leaves other things to be done in their proper time. What a burden it is to leave undone

what should be done. It seems to weigh heavier and heavier each passing day.

I feel even now that some of you are heavy laden for this reason. You are not doing what needs doing. You might say, "Well I am so busy I can't do any more." Yes, you are busy all right, but you are not doing the right thing.

Some of you are not doing the right thing in the Church. Others are not doing the right thing in the home. Yet, there are others who are sandbagging. The word sandbagging, I learned in the service, means to look very busy, and, yet, be accomplishing nothing. There are sandbaggers in the Church, in the home and on the job and even in ministries. The problem with sandbaggers is that they never get satisfaction from what they do, and they never get done the thing that needs to be done.

I remember reading a book a while ago that spoke about the person who eats the frosting first but they never eat the cake, and how much better it is to eat the cake first and the frosting last. Or it is like the person who wants to get a pat on the back or an award but doesn't want to do the hard work.

It took me a while to understand the Scriptures that spoke about the servant who worked all day in the field, and then, when he came home, he cleaned up and prepared the meal for his master; and then, when that was done, he was able to care for his own need.

Jesus Christ put us first all the way and He gave Himself totally for us. Now it is our responsible service to give ourselves completely to Him and expect nothing in return. Now I know this has something to do with the needs that God has made us responsible for. We need to see to them and get them done and not even expect a big pat on the back or someone to give us an award and tell us how great we are. It is our reasonable service.

You may say what does this have to do with the title of this message? "Prepare To Go." Plenty! If you do what needs to be done now, you are always ready: Prepared to do what God has for you next. I can say, "I have done the things that need to be done, and I am ready to go to Wisconsin or to do whatever God has for me next."

IT IS FINISHED

"When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit."(John 19:30)

What was finished? He had accomplished everything that the Father had sent Him to do: He had come to save sinners; He had come to fulfill the Law; He had come to destroy the works of the devil; He had come to usher in the new covenant signed with His blood; He had come that we might have life. There were so many things that Jesus has finished, and they are all for you and me. There are things we could not do for ourselves.

One of the wonderful things He did was to reconcile us to the Father. Because Jesus Christ finished His work, now you and I, once again can have a relationship with the Father in heaven, even though we are sinners and fall short.

When Jesus Christ died, the veil in the temple was rent from top to bottom. Now any man who so desires can go boldly before the throne of grace and receive mercy and undeserved favor from God.

Jesus Christ overcame death, not for Himself, but for us. Because Jesus Christ finished His work; any man who puts his faith and trust in Him and calls on the name of the Lord, the grave will not be able to hold him, no more than it was able to hold Jesus.

The payment for sin is complete because Jesus Christ finished His work. It is not the issue of sin between God and man any longer. The issue between God and man is, do we draw near, now that we can? Do I now accept God's grace and forgiveness, now, that it is available?

Again, I want to say that Jesus Christ paid for sin in full. Whose sin did He pay for in full? Your sin and my sin. If Jesus Christ did not pay for all your sin in full, you will never come out of the grave. You will not enter the holy place to the throne of grace.

The Book of Hebrews makes it very clear that Jesus Christ, our high priest, was the perfect Lamb of God without blemish. He was the offering for sin, for the sins of the world; and this offering was sufficient to cover all our sins, once and for all.

"By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once and for all. But He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God. For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."(Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14)

Jesus Christ has done His part. He has removed all the things that separated us from the Father. He has provided us a way, a door into heavenly places. Now it is up to us to take advantage of that door. He has made the way; now it is for you and me to walk in that way. He will not force any man to enter. He will not force any man to leave the darkness or his sin, if a man does not want to.

Yes, it is finished. The way has been made. The door is open. It is such a tragedy that so few want to enter.

I want to encourage you to tell others that it is finished, share your faith with those people around you who do not know it is finished. I know some will reject you. They rejected Jesus too. I also know some will receive it. Some will hear you and enter in, and they will

say of you, "How blessed are the feet of those that bring good news", and they will be glad.

I pray that you will receive boldness to share with someone today.
Amen and Amen.

GRACE

The unmerited love and favor of God toward man. Divine influence acting in man to make him pure and morally strong.

As I read the Bible one thing stands out very clear in the Old and New Testament: Not many people understand God's grace.

I believe one of the major problems in the Church today is the same.

We talk about grace, we sing about grace. We pray for God's grace but we understand it very little.

We have a great problem accepting one another as brothers and sisters in the Lord if we are not from the same church, and we are not living under the same rules. I somehow have the feeling that a lack of grace is involved here. Jesus didn't have this problem. He was able to associate with the lowly fishermen, tax collectors, Samaritans, prostitutes and Pharisees, scribes and lawyers.

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, glory as of the begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

Another Scripture comes to my mind. "To what then shall I compare the men of this generation and what are they like?"

They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another; and they say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.'

For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, 'he had a demon!'

The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, 'behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gathers and, sinners!'" (Luke 7:31-34)

Is this a message to the Church? If it is, what is it saying to the Church?

I can only relate what it is saying to me. And I know that I am guilty.

To me it says, you can't accept this person, for they are too spiritual. And you can't accept that person because they are not spiritual enough. "God, give the grace to dance when it is time and to weep when it is time. Lord, deliver me from seating myself in the judge's seat, for I have no grace or mercy."

It is amazing that more grace is not manifested in the Church because God gives it so freely to the Church.

What was the problem with the man who Jesus spoke of in Matt. 18:24-35? A man had a large debt and he could not pay it. The Lord of that slave had compassion and forgave him. He met a man who owed him very little and he would not forgive his debt. This teaching has to do with forgiveness, but even more important, it has to do with grace.

We find many times in Scripture it tells us how all sufficient God's grace is toward us; for our short-comings and our sin.

How about our grace toward one another, is it enough? Are we allowing God's grace to fill us so that we become people of grace? Are we like the unforgiving servant? We are quick to receive God's grace for us, but very slow to extend it to others.

Maybe we need to read the New Testament again, looking especially for God's grace to be revealed to us in a wonderful new way; to see how it was manifested through Jesus in the gospels. To listen anew as Paul speaks of it over and over again in the Epistles, giving us a new revelation of the greatness and the glory of that grace which saved us.

All too often we are guilty of quenching the Spirit as God wants to manifest His grace through us to someone else. May God forgive us for this sin against one another.

I urge you, brethren, to be merciful and gracious to one another; especially to those who are weak and to the outsider who doesn't know or understand God's grace.

I urge you to pray and to seek the Lord that He might increase you in this way. Much of the critical, judgmental, haughty and prideful spirit which works in you and I is because we have not allowed enough of God's grace to work in our hearts yet.

The grace of the Lord be with you.

A CHRISTMAS GIFT

Once again we are in the Christmas season, and we all begin to think about giving gifts to one another. Some may not only be thinking about what they are going to give, but what they are going to receive. There are those that give because they want to, others give because of duty or obligation. Some give expecting nothing back, not even a thank you. But there are those who give because they are expecting something back. For some the size or value of the gift is very important. To others just the thought, the remembering is what is important.

God gave His only begotten Son! Because He loved us.

Who is on your Christmas List?

I am sure you have your children, your spouse, maybe some of the people you work for or with; your brothers and sisters, your relatives, some close friend, maybe your pastor. I am sure that some are even buying a gift for themselves.

Have you ever thought about giving a gift to God, our Father in heaven. You might say what in the world could I give to God that He doesn't already have?

I think first off, we can give God ourselves, saying, "Here I am Father, I am my gift to you. Do with this gift as you please."

We could give a gift to God in another way. The Scriptures say, "Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, that you have done for me." Give with time and effort and money to those who are in need: A gift, pleasing and acceptable to God our Father.

God gave His Son that men might be saved. You want to give a gift to God our Father? Give freely to the Church and to those who are involved in spreading the Gospel.

Give that men might be saved; this would be a gift that our Father in heaven could receive with joy.

Maybe our Christmas list is not complete without God our Father on it. Maybe He should be on the top of the list. My prayer is that you will have the most wonderful Christmas you have ever had; filled with joy and peace and the awareness that God has not left us orphans, but that He is with us. That His gift to us is life and life to the fullest. Amen and Amen.

PART FOUR

"WHAT ARE THE RICHES OF THE GLORY OF HIS INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS," (EPHESIANS 1:18)

A FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

"For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." (2 Cor. 2:15)

When I think of a fragrance, I think of flowers, or home baked bread fresh out of the oven or the air right after a good rain has washed it. I wonder how many people like this kind of fragrance. I think most do if they have any sense of smell at all.

For those of you who have received Jesus and accepted the grace of God, there is or should be a fragrance coming forth from you which is from God. In verse 16 of 2 Corinthians 2 it says, "To one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life."

The only thing I can understand this is telling me is that, in some way or manner, all the people around me are being affected by me. There is something coming forth from me which is not of me, but of God. Paul called it a fragrance or an aroma. This aroma is received in two ways depending on the condition of that soul.

One soul is lost; this person is reminded every time a Christian person is around them of the death that awaits them.

Another soul is saved; this person is also reminded of something, that they are saved and have eternal life with Jesus and the Father. You might ask: "Why are you telling me this?" So you will have a better understanding of how people act when you are around.

Did you ever realize how afraid people are of death, how they dislike being around dead people? Why are they afraid of death and being around dead people? It keeps reminding them that they are going to die. Now remember the Scripture said we are an aroma from death to death. When we that are of Christ are around unsaved people, they are very uncomfortable. It is like they are at a funeral or someone has died. Is it strange that they act toward us as they do, when every time they are near us they smell death, their own death?

Now because of this reaction we get, we are apt to shy away from them and not have much to do with them. You might say, "I don't want to have the odor of death about me all the time." Doesn't the Bible say that we are dead, buried with Christ, and that we are to die daily? Does this death odor have a purpose? Yes. Did you ever notice when people face death they start thinking about God and their soul? Most people push this from their minds and refuse to think about it any other time. Only in extreme times of pressure and death and sickness does a person turn their mind to think of prayer and God and the condition of their soul.

Now why would God have us going around with an odor of death? So they will start thinking and maybe be saved.

I suppose many of us wonder, who is saved and who isn't. Maybe if we began to pay attention to what they are smelling from us, we would know more clearly. If people smell death from us, they need Jesus. If they smell life from us, they are a brother.

I would like to carry this smell thing a little farther. I believe that the world has its odor and the kingdom of God has its odor. We get a smell of the heavenly and it smells pretty good. Does it smell better than the world? Enough so that you will be attracted to it instead of the world. Remember now the Scripture said to the

saved, an odor of life to life. It seems like the Lord has given us another spiritual sense, smell. With it we can smell life.

I wonder what the smell of the world is? DEATH! Why do I say this? The Bible says the world is passing away. It is in corruption. The world and everything to do with it has the odor of death. The Church has the odor of life. The things above have the fragrance of life. We, as Christian people, need to recognize the smell of life and death. Everything with the smell of death, leave it alone. Everything with the smell of life, partake of it.

With this thought we can better understand why Paul said don't be unequally yoked. How can death and life be compatible? How can darkness and light exist together?

Should we then stay away from all the unsaved? Of course not. We should be around them so they will become aware of their sad condition, and we be quick to tell them about life: That it is in Jesus, and He is the door between life and death.

We so often rob ourselves of the joy that is to be had in sharing our faith with others. We often hear, "My faith is a very personal thing between me and God." Well, that is not the faith that comes from God. Because we are to shout it from the rooftops. I don't know where this other comes from. It is not the one I read about in Scripture.

I urge you to share Jesus Christ with your friends and loved ones and the people on the job. Be bold in your faith. If you really believe in Jesus tell others about Him.

I SHOW YOU A MORE EXCELLENT WAY

Have any of you ever had a problem with 1 Corinthians 13? I have! I have always found myself falling short when I would try to go that way. I could speak in tongues, I could prophesy. I could give, I had some faith and some knowledge. In fact, these seemed easier to fulfill than love. All too often I felt like the clanging bell. One day I realized I could no more fulfill this chapter than I could live up to the ten commandments.

Another verse I had a hard time to understand is Romans 8:4, "In order that the requirements of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit."

It is telling us we can fulfill the law, but only one way: not by trying to do it on our own power, but by letting the Spirit of God do it through us. It took me a while to realize that, when it referred to the flesh, it did not mean you were living deep in sin. It also meant the person who was very religious and was doing a lot of good things, all at the level of the flesh instead of the level of the Spirit. A large part of the Church functions as fleshly Christians and not as spiritual Christians. It is of vital importance for us as Christian people to function at the spiritual level and not at the fleshly level, because we cannot come to maturity unless we do.

Very recently I was speaking to a man from a Baptist background. This man was not too much in favor of the Pentecostal experience. He said, "Too many of them do crazy things; they let some voice guide them instead of the Bible." He said, "They do not test things

well, and they don't know the Bible well." Do you know that this man had a good case; all these problems are present in the charismatic movement.

The point I tried to make was this, "Yes, I know that the things you say are true; but I also know this: God is involved in this movement." The Holy Spirit is involved in this movement. Are we to reject it because of the misuse of some of the gifts? Are we to reject it because some people don't test things properly and do crazy things; are we to reject it because some people don't know the Bible well?

My firm conviction is this: We need to know the Bible well. We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to know what God is saying to us in our heart, and we need to know what the Word of God says. I think we will find anything that comes from God in our hearts will never be contrary to the written Word of God. They will always bear witness to one another, the written Word and the Word in the heart.

Is the written Word enough without the Spirit? I say no! For this reason: The written Word can so easily be misinterpreted. For those of you who rely totally on a voice to hear from God, you are going to be misled; for those of you who rely totally on the written word, you are going to be misled too. You or someone else is going to misinterpret some of that written Word, and you are going to make just as big a mistake as the other. What is the outcome then?

We need both. We need the written Word of God, and we need to know it well. We need the Word which only comes into men's hearts, the still quiet voice of God, and we need to know that well. A man with both of these is going to be hard to be deceived.

Back to 1 Corinthians 13. We know this vital living relationship with God is of the utmost importance to the Christian person. Let me

change one word in these Scriptures, and I don't think it will offend God's Spirit if I do.

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have (Jesus), I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have the gift of prophesy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have (Jesus), I am nothing.

And if I give my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have (Jesus), it profits me nothing.

I am aware of this: We can know the Bible from end to end and not know Jesus. We can hear voices and not know Jesus. We can be a Catholic, a charismatic, a Baptist, an Assembly of God, a Protestant, and not know Jesus. We can do a lot of good works and try to obey the commandments and not know Jesus. If we do all these things and not know Jesus, it is all for nothing and we profit nothing.

There is only one way, and that is Jesus.

FIXING MY EYES ON JESUS

What have you fixed your eyes on? Let me change this a little. What have you fixed your heart on? Maybe I could word it this way. What is your heart's desire?"

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid; and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field." (Matthew 13:44)

Through this and other parables, Jesus is trying to make us see and understand things about heaven and those who are going to inherit it. What does this parable say? Well, for one thing, the kingdom of heaven is very valuable and it is hidden; it has to be looked for. Not only that, but, even when it is found, we still have to give up everything else to purchase it.

I think of two men in the Bible who demonstrate this truth. First, the rich young man who came to Jesus and wanted to be His disciple, and Jesus told him, "Go and sell all that you have, and give it all away; then come and follow me." The young man went away sad; he was unable to do that. The other person I think of who also had much is Paul. He had everything going for him. When Jesus came to him, he left everything and followed Him. Paul said, "I consider it all as dung compared to Jesus." Here was a man who found the treasure and gave up everything of the past to obtain it. One was a wise man, the other a fool.

"Again the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13:45)

What do we see in this parable? A man seeking for that which is most valuable. Remember, there are a lot of things of value, but some are more valuable than others. It is not just a matter of having things of value, it is having that which is most valuable of all and letting go of all the other things of value.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus, fixing our mind on Jesus, fixing our heart on Jesus. He is the most valuable of all. Nothing else can compare in value to Jesus. If you have to let go of every friendship for the sake of Jesus, it is worth it. If you have to give up all other loves in your life for Him, He is worth it. If you have to give up all your riches, whatever they consist of, to follow Him. It is worth it.

There are some who want both; they want Jesus and the kingdom of heaven, and they want all their other things too. The Scriptures seem to say you can't have it that way. We have to make a choice. We cannot have two masters.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind; and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away."

"So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (Matthew 13:47-50)

Do people use Jesus? Do people use the Church? Are there wicked people in the Church? Are there some in the Church who want both and don't really make a choice between the old and the new? I remember talking to a prisoner one day and the Holy Spirit spoke

to my heart and said, "Tell this man that he is not fooling God; he is only fooling himself." I would urge every one of you to make a choice. Let go of the old, and invest totally into Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. You are not fooling God by trying to keep both; you are only fooling yourself and refusing to make a choice. Set your whole heart and mind on Jesus. Serve Him with all your strength. Keep a singleness of mind and heart; don't be double minded. Jesus is the pearl of great value. He is worth letting go of everything else for. May the Lord help you.

GRACE AND PEACE TO YOU

"Grace and peace to you." These words are used several times in the Scriptures. Are they from God? Does God mean this? Who is God speaking to?

I would answer the first question; Yes! These words are from God.

The second question I would say; Yes! God does mean them.

In the third question, who is God speaking to? I believe God is speaking to me.

These five words, "Grace and peace to you," are a message all by themselves, and what a message! To me they say "undeserved favor", "unmerited favor"; "free favor", to those who do not deserve any favor at all.

Peace to those who don't deserve any peace. A peace that man cannot give; a peace beyond our understanding, peace from God, or peace with God. Still better, I like to say it this way, "Peace between God and me."

It is so easy to hear these words without giving them much thought or just kind of thinking in general terms: Yes, God is at peace with the world, or God is bestowing favor on the world or on the Church.

I would urge you to think about them a little more, and make them more personal; God wants to bestow favor on you, God is at peace

with you. You may not be at peace with God, but this does not change the fact that through Jesus Christ we have been reconciled to God. God is at peace with us.

Several places in Scripture tell us that God has kind intentions toward us. His desire is to bless us in all kinds of ways. He calls us the beloved. He calls the least, and showers the most on them. The Bible says He has not withheld any spiritual blessing from us. The same power and Spirit who moved so mightily through Jesus is given so freely to us. Can we believe that we are born of the same Spirit who came upon Mary and caused her to conceive the child, Jesus, in her womb?

Can we believe it is the same Holy Spirit who fills us, who came down on Jesus when He was being baptized in the Jordan River?

Can we believe that the same power which brought Jesus up from the tomb is working mightily in us? It is no different, not a watered down version of that Spirit, but the same Holy Spirit? Then we can understand what Jesus meant when He said, "You can do all the things I have done and even more."

It is awesome when you begin to think about it. The same power, the same authority, the same Spirit, the same Father with us who was working so mightily in Jesus. Is this the truth I am speaking? I think so from what I see in the Scriptures.

It is easy to say, "Yes, this is what I see in the Scriptures too." Do we believe it is for us as an individual?

I want to go in another direction now and talk about God's authority. Sometimes it is used and sometimes not; sometimes it is misused and sometimes overused.

Are there different classes of citizens in the kingdom of God? I don't think so. I think all of God's children are first class, and it is

about time we begin to treat one another as first class citizens. One of the areas I see this abused most is between man and wife. Some husbands treat their wives as third class; some wives treat their husbands as third class. As long as we do this, the marriage is not going to be healthy.

I think we misunderstand this Scripture about men being the head of the house. I don't believe it means so much that we are boss, but that we are more responsible. The greater responsibility rests upon the man to see to his family, care for his family, love his family; set the example for the rest of the family; take care of the family's spiritual life, and see that it stays healthy. It is a responsibility placed on him by God. So many men try to be the head of the house by giving orders, keeping their wives as third class citizens. This is not from God. This is not being spiritual. Being spiritual is laying down your life for your family.

The woman who looks down on her husband is not spiritual either. Some wives are the stumbling stones for the husband in their spiritual walk. Trying to twist and change and somehow force your husband is not spiritual; trying to manipulate him is not spiritual either.

I urge all husbands and wives to treat one another as first class citizens. Treat your children as first class citizens too. Don't try to lord it over one another; love one another.

MY PEOPLE

We find throughout Scripture God is speaking about His people, His nation. Starting with Abraham, God said, "I will make you a great nation." From Abraham's son, Isaac, came the tribes of Israel. Later, when they had greatly increased in Egypt and were in bondage, God called to Moses out of the burning bush and told him that He had heard the cries of His people, and that Moses was to go down to Egypt and lead His people out of bondage. Over and over throughout the Old Testament God refers to His people.

The Scriptures also tell us that the old is a shadow of the new. If the nation of Israel is a shadow, what is it a shadow of? It was the shadow of that which was to follow, the Church. Not only does He call the Church His people, but He calls it His body.

As I take a look at the people of Israel in the Scriptures, I think; God, you didn't make a very good choice. Look how rebellious they are, stiff-necked, prideful, and sinful. Why didn't you pick a nation more perfect, especially if you are going to call them your people? In Romans 22:28 it tells us they are enemies of the gospel. Yet from God's standpoint they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

God calls the Church His body, a royal nation, a people set apart, and beloved. I look around at the Church and think; God, you didn't make a very good choice again. Look at them: prideful, stiff-necked, arrogant, sinful, no two agree on anything. They criticize and judge each other. They seem to be all going in different directions. Yet! God calls them My body, My people.

"For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren." (Hebrews 2:11)

Isn't it amazing! God, the great I AM, calls us His people, His beloved, His nation, and we call each other names, criticize each other and judge each other. What business do we have doing such a thing when Jesus doesn't do it? Am I perfect to judge you; are you without error to judge me?

Recently we were at a meeting of a well-known Christian person. The message was very good, but before the meeting was over this person made disparaging remarks about other Christian ministries. The reason I bring this out is because it happens all over the place at many meetings and with many individual conversations. This is not from God! I think that all of our houses have a little glass in them, so none of us should be throwing stones.

God calls us His people, His beloved, His nation. He tells us to love one another, not throw stones at one another.

"Each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work." (1 Corinthians 3:13)

"Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God." (1 Corinthians 4:5)

I, of all people, should not be writing this, because I am guilty of it myself. God have mercy on me. I know there are those who put me down; maybe you have. I want you to know that I am trying to

the best of my ability to serve Jesus. I think you are too. I am sorry I misjudge you and criticize you. Forgive me.

Do you think for a moment that all of God's people have the same theology, doctrines, and traditions; that they are all perfect? (Not referring to the perfection Jesus gives us). Of course not; they have different doctrines and traditions. None of us are perfect and have all the truth. But God still loves us and calls us His own beloved, His people, His nation, His priesthood, His sons.

He says: "My people, love one another even as I have loved you."

THERE IS ONE BODY

"Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling." (Eph. 4:3)

Paul brought out a very simple truth, very profound, which we need to consider as the body of Christ. Are we, as Paul says, "one body"? Are we born of one Spirit? The Spirit of God?

What did Paul mean when he spoke to the Corinthians and said, "When one says I am of Paul, and another says, I am of Apollos, are you not mere men?"

Did he mean we were not to be involved in different groups or denominations, or have these different labels? I don't believe this was what he was talking about. Paul was talking about an attitude of the heart. He referred to it in another place when he said, "Don't you know that you are all of Christ?"

The saddest thing in the body of Christ today is that we despise and look down on each other. We are like the two men that Jesus talked about in Luke 18:9, "And He also told this parable to certain ones who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt."

Are we guilty of viewing other believers with contempt? We most certainly are. I dare say there is not one church around that does not have its share of the problem.

Not long ago I was at a service where several churches came together to worship. During the service you could see different individuals look at one another with a funny little smile and a knowing look. Sometimes a look says a thousand words. The look was saying, "They really don't know any better, so we will just put up with them for this time." I have seen the same look before in a family gathering, where one part of the family thought they were a little better and knew a little more than the others.

"Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, and the other a tax-gatherer." (Luke 18:10) Now again we see two different attitudes, both in the same temple: one was pride and one humility. "The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, 'God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people; swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer.'" "I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all I get."

This type of attitude works through many of us: lay people, priests, ministers, nuns. The enemy, like a roaring lion waits right at the door of our heart to pounce on us with this dreadful sin of pride, which says, "I am glad I am not like those sinners."

The awful thing about this sin is that it attacks the person who goes to church every Sunday, the one who does many good things for the church and community. It is so subtle. The person or church group who are under its influence are not even aware of it.

We sometimes highlight the spirit of condemnation which distresses people in the Church so much; telling them in their hearts, "You are guilty! You are guilty!", when they are really forgiven. We know this is demonic.

We fail to recognize that it is the same enemy telling us, "You really have it together; your church is better than the other. They may

be believers, but they are all wrong; we do everything right. They are a bunch of sinners over there; they do everything wrong."

Brothers and sisters, we do have these attitudes in our hearts, but they are not from God. And it's time we recognize them for what they are, demonic and sin, and get them out of our lives and our churches.

THERE IS ONE BODY, some are under one label or another. That is no excuse for not recognizing others of like faith. I don't mean like doctrine; I mean like faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

All too long we have allowed doctrinal difference to separate people of like faith. We look through our doctrine and down our long noses and reject people that God has received.

This amazes me; the lack of discernment we have when it comes to recognizing other people who have like faith. People of like faith are born of the same Father. This makes us brothers and sisters, whether we like it or not. It is a good thing the Spirit of God is not as picky as we are. We would have a problem.

"But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, God be merciful to me the sinner."(Luke 18:13) Maybe as a corporate body this needs to be the way we approach God's throne. Not thinking, we are the perfect Church, but recognizing our need of Jesus as a group of sinners; knowing there is some error in all of us and in our doctrine.

There was a time when I didn't really want to break bread with others who were sinners. The Lord opened my eyes to something. I was as great a sinner as they. The body and blood of Jesus, the bread and wine, are for sinners such as they and such as I. The people who are not sinners don't need Jesus or the bread or the wine.

Brothers and sisters, the Word of God tells us we are to sit at the lower place and esteem others. I believe this relates to people with other labels, but with the same Father, the same Spirit, the same Jesus. Lord heal us.

HE WILL RAISE US UP

"And raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus." (Ephesians 2:6)

If we have been raised up with Him, then we should be seeing things from a different point of view.

"And have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created Him." (Colossians 3:10)

It seems this Scripture is telling us that the Lord wants us to see things the same way as He does.

Another Scripture tells us that His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. From this I would say that God wants our thoughts to be lifted up into new and higher ways of thinking than we have ever had before.

He says, through Paul, "not to be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you might prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."

I see two groups of people in the Church. One group is allowing God to lift them to new heights. The other is trying to bring God down to their size. Which group do you belong to? I hope to the first.

I believe that God is bigger than you and I think.

I believe that the kingdom of God is bigger than you and I think.

Just for an example. A person could be standing at the foot of the Empire State Building looking around and say, "Boy this place is big." A few minutes later he could be at the top of the Empire State Building and say, "I didn't realize just how big this place really is."

If indeed, God is bigger than we think He is, then let's allow Him to enlarge our thinking. Let's allow Him to enlarge our thinking about Him, about the Church, about the kingdom of God and about one another.

A strange thing happens when we bring God down, instead of letting Him lift us up. God becomes smaller and smaller. The kingdom becomes smaller and smaller. The Church becomes smaller and smaller. And we become smaller and smaller. As we allow God to lift us up, we become larger and larger in our heart, in our mind, and in our spirit.

There seems to be so many people who enjoy making people small. I am talking about in the Church not outsiders.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to lift up one another. Enlarge one another. Don't make one another small.

A change has taken place in me that I would like to share with you. For several years I have been reaching out to be a great ministry: The second Billy Graham or Oral Roberts. This was important to me. I didn't get very far, but it doesn't matter now. For the Lord has shown me something better.

He began to speak to me about being a blessing, and He told me that He had called us to be a blessing to one another. I didn't

understand at first what He was trying to tell me. Now I know this is what He wanted me to see.

Every day which goes by I am to become a blessing to every person I meet, no matter who they are; it might be a word, a little love or affection, some undeserved favor or maybe a gift of money or clothing. It could be a large thing or a very small thing, but I allow this to become a habit in my life.

Do you think if I did this all day that by evening my cup would be overflowing? And not only that, but my Father in heaven would be rejoicing over me also.

I believe it. This is the change that has come about for me. I now realize it is not important that I be another Billy Graham or one of the top ten ministries. What is important is that I be a blessing to all men.

This must start right at home. Are you a blessing to your husband, your wife, your children, your church, your pastor, and your boss?

Allow our Father in heaven to enlarge your heart, your mind, your spirit.

I know some people who experienced Jesus and then decided to start their own church, because none other was perfect enough for them. They did start their own church and now they believe they are the only true church. How small the Church has become for them. I feel sorry for them. In the past God was able to speak to them in a number of ways. Now God can only speak to them by their elders. How small God has become to them.

Again, dear brothers and sisters don't bring God down. But allow Him to lift you right up into the heavenlies: Thinking as heavenly men and women, acting as heavenly men and women. Be large in the Lord Jesus Christ. Be a blessing to all men.

PART FIVE

"AND WHAT IS THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF HIS POWER TOWARD US WHO BELIEVE." (EPHESIANS 1:19)

LORD, CHALLENGE US

Do you remember when as a child someone always seemed to be challenging you, daring you to do this or that? I remember it quite well, because so many times it got me into trouble. If you hesitated a little, then someone would say, "You are afraid", and then to really get you going, "I double dare you." I realize now that school was really a challenge; a good teacher will always be challenging the students. Of course, not every challenge is a good one; it must be tested to see if it is good for me or bad for me. Even in our Christian faith we are challenged often. The same thing holds true; some of the challenges are good for us, and some are not so good. They must be tested.

I realize now that many of the 'dares' were not good for me. Indeed, most of them were 'traps and snares', and I fell into them. The good challenges from my teachers and parents which I should have taken, I refused and turned my back on.

In our Christian walk we run into the same problems. Someone comes along and challenges us in our theology and doctrine and we will fight and argue. We will rise up to the challenge. Yet, when the Spirit of the Lord challenges us, we back off and turn our backs.

One of my close brothers in the Lord would often lead off in prayer at the meetings. He would often say this, "Lord, challenge us today." I think that is a good bold way to pray. Have you prayed that way lately?

Did you notice that the devil challenged Jesus, and Jesus did not fall into the trap? "Throw yourself down" the devil said, but Jesus did not. "Turn the stones into bread if you can," Jesus would not. "Bow down to me and I will give you the world," the devil said, and Jesus did not.

When the great challenge came, the cross, Jesus rose to the challenge. Whenever the challenge was there from the Father, Jesus faced it.

Jesus confronts us with the challenge also. "Follow Me" is a challenge. "Love one another" is a challenge. The Bible is a challenge. The Christian walk is a challenge. Are you rising up to the challenge?

The Scripture says, "Many are called but few are chosen." A short time ago I heard it interpreted this way, "Many are called but few choose." I would like to say it this way: Many are called but few accept the challenge.

The Scripture says, "You will do all the things I have done and even more." Wow! What a challenge.

"What I tell you in secret, shout from the rooftops"

"Lay hands on the sick and they will recover"

"Cast out demons in My name"

"Go out into the whole world and preach the good news"

"Open the eyes of the blind"

"Set the captives free"

"Bring them from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of light"

"I challenge you." "I challenge you." "I challenge you."

Brothers and sisters, stop rising up to the wrong challenges and rise up to the right ones. Stop making excuses, "I am not ready." Stop saying, "I belong to the best church in the area." So what! "I go to church every Sunday." So what, so do thousands of others. Are you rising up to the challenge? Many people say, "I feel that I am not doing enough." You are right, you are not. Rise up to the challenge.

I hear many people say, "I have a lot of faith," but do you know if you were to follow these people around you might not be aware that they are people of faith. (James 2:20) "But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow that faith without works is useless?"

Brothers and sisters, rise up to the challenge of the Bible, of the Spirit, of Jesus, of the Father. Don't let others who are afraid to accept the challenge turn you back. Don't let others who always accept the wrong challenge cause you to fall into the trap also. There are many traps and snares set for the Christian. Be wise and not foolish. See the challenge which the Lord has set before you and rise up to it. Don't let fear and timidity hold you back. Be strong and courageous and do not tremble nor be afraid, but be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. And last, don't be afraid to pray, "Lord, challenge Me."

LET US GO ON TO MATURITY

"Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world." (1 John 2:15-16).

I was reading a book the other day and this statement jumped right out of the page at me, "He was constantly mistaking impulse for will." I knew what the Lord was saying to me, "You mistake your desires for your will, and even a bigger mistake; you think your desire is my will."

Not only do we do this as individuals, we do it as a body as well.

I think of Abraham and how he desired so much for God's will to be done that he did it himself. He brought Ishmael into the world and the Israelites have to live with the problem.

It is dangerous how one person can have a strong desire, and it can overshadow and overpower many others.

Can this happen in your church or group? Yes! Can it happen in your home? Yes!

Desire has a loud, persistent voice. Even as a child will get their way over the will of the parent, so will the desire get its way over the will of man.

I wonder how many people there are right in the Body of Christ who think they are free, but are still enslaved by desire. It is so subtle that we are not even aware of it.

The word, desire, is interesting. It means craving, longing, passion, lust. There can be a good desire, but it is not used this way often. Another meaning of the word desire is, covetous or covet. Paul brought out this point in Romans. "You shall not covet."

Going back to the Scripture which I started with, "The strong lust of the flesh, the strong desire of the flesh is not from the Father, but is from the world." Now if this is true, and we are being led by our desires instead of using our will, the Church is being made worldly by our desires being fulfilled.

Another thing about desire is that it gets upset very easily, gets angry when it doesn't get its way. Again I want to make this point: Desire can move on a whole group as well as one person.

I wonder how many times, right in the Church, desire has moved a whole body of people to do something it had to live with for years, and it was not of God. It could be programs it started, building commitments, things that sapped the energy and the money from the church; but they really did not accomplish the work of God, or the will of God.

Lord, grant us the gift of spiritual discernment in the body of Christ and in each heart, so that we might recognize the difference between will and desire.

I would like to touch upon another spot in the body. It is hardness of heart. How do we keep hardness out of our hearts?

Our hearts can be open or closed. They must be guarded. If I allow unforgiveness to enter my heart, hardness begins right then. If any criticalness enters, hardness comes. Bitterness, self-righteousness; these things and many more bring hardness and narrowness into our hearts.

As Christian people, we cannot afford to allow this to enter; for deceit comes right with it.

I seem to be picking on the Church, but it does have its problems and we need to be aware of them and repent of them.

That first Scripture touched upon the boastful pride of life. Can the Church have this boastful pride in it? Sure it does. We brag and boast about our buildings, our schools, our programs, how many converts we have made. It affects priests, ministers, elders, sisters, song leaders, laymen; all of us. The point I want to bring out is that Scripture says it is of the world and not of God.

I believe the book of 1 John was written later than the gospels. It was a book of correction to the Church, because the Church had slipped back into the darkness a little bit.

Note that right after John wrote about the strong desires and lust and the pride, he went on to speak about the antichrist.

If we allow these strong desires to lead us; the pride and boasting to manifest itself in our midst. If we allow any hardness to set into our hearts, we are leaving the door wide open for the enemy to enter right into the midst of the Church and do his dirty work.

One more thing we find ourselves very slow in dealing with: It is something that provokes and grieves God, our lack of trust in Him; our unbelief. We have every reason to trust God completely. The first little affliction which comes along has us wondering if God has

left us. This is sin. We need to ask God's forgiveness and repent of it.

Leaving our childish ways behind us, let us go on to maturity. This we shall do if God permits.

I WANT MORE

I want more! Do you want more? What do you want more of? I hear some say I want more power. Others say I want more authority. Some say I want more food, I need to be fed. I want better teaching. I want a better pastor, a better church. I want more Bible studies, more of the gifts working in my life. I need more talents.

Some want more order, others want less. There are those who want more rules and regulations. On the other hand, some want more freedom from rules and regulations. Yet, others want more rituals and traditions. Some are sick and tired of them and want to be free from them.

All these, and many more, I have heard in the Christian church. I look back at my life and see many things that I have wanted. Many of them I have received, and after I had them, they were of no importance to me at all. I have had my share of wants in the Church since I have become a Christian. Some of these I have received. The same thing was true in my earlier years. Some of the things I wanted and received I had no interest in them anymore, or I just wanted something different again.

Do you know there are things that you want right now from God, from the Church, from your husband or wife, your children or maybe your pastor? But even if you received them, they would be of no value to you at all. You would get no satisfaction from it. You would only begin to want something more you don't have.

Have you ever taken a look at your wants and considered whether you would benefit from them if you received them?

I know of a number of times people have prayed for a new pastor or priest because they wanted a different one, and they got one, and were very unhappy with him. I wonder if God is trying to tell us something?

Some wanted a Bible study. It came with the wrong leader and they would not attend anyway.

Our wants are not always good for us. But we spend a lot of time wanting. I have a feeling that Satan is aware of how fickle we are, and takes advantage of us.

There is a lot of unrest and instability in the Church because of our wants. Maybe it is time for us to make a list of our wants and then go through that list carefully. Remove all the things which are not good for us. Remove all the things that would not be very important to us after we received them. Remove all the things that are causing unrest and instability in the Church and in our home. Bring it down to the few important things. Clear all the others from our mind and heart, give them to Jesus.

I remember one lady who prayed over and over for her husband to take over the authority in the house. He did, and she was very unhappy and wanted it like it was before. She lost a lot of her freedom and he ruled with an iron hand. The Bible says, the letter kills.

I am very aware that the Lord Jesus wants you to be free of many of your wants; things you don't really need. Are you willing to let go of them? You would be a much freer person.

I know of others who sought for several years for the gift of tongues. Today it is not important to them, and they don't use it.

Just because we meet Jesus and get filled with the Holy Spirit does not bring our want problem to an end. Sometimes it gets worse.

My prayer is: "God, help us to get a victory in this area of our lives. Help us to control this insatiable want of things that do not satisfy. Help us to determine what we really need, Lord, I want more of your life manifested through me." Amen and Amen

COMING OF AGE

Years ago I would look ahead to when I would be of age. My thoughts were kind of like this, "I will be free to do what I want. I will be able to make my own decisions of what is good or bad for me. I won't have to live under these laws; do this, do that. I will be able to go and come as I please."

The time came when I was of age. To my surprise, I found that with new freedom of making my own decisions, I also had more responsibility, and it was not always so simple to make some of those decisions.

The Christian walk is like this also. There is a time when we should leave the childish ways behind and become of age.

There are people around who have been to school for years. They have learned and learned, but never put to use any of it. You may know someone like this.

There are many in the Christian churches such as this. They are members, they might give financial support, and that is all. These people have learned and learned, but never acted upon what they heard. These people are really to be pitied; seeing, they see not; hearing, they hear not, never having made any move toward receiving Christ into their life. Having heard of the Holy Spirit over and over, and nothing has ever been done about it. These people are in a worse condition than the ones who have never heard the gospel at all.

We pick up the Bible or learn in Sunday School about the commandments, and then struggle to try to live up to them and fail very badly. We might try to be good, and we turn out not to be as good as we think we are. Now that we have done this, we think, "I am a good Christian." Of course we also belong to a Christian church so we are even more convinced of this fact. But are we the kind of son who God is looking for? We have the commandments and are trying to live up to them. We are pretty good people, or try to be. We belong to a church which believes in and lifts up Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

Let me ask you a few questions. Will obeying the commandments save you? Will being good save you? Will joining a Christian church save you? NO! NO! NO! Nothing wrong with doing these things, but they will not save you, nor are they able to.

Some interesting Scripture in Galatians 3:23, says, "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law." Do you know that the law binds you? And as long as you are bound by it, you are under law and not grace; and sin will continue to be at work in you, aroused by the law. So this means the only hope for me to be free from sin is to be free from the law. What are we to do then? We are to be led by the Spirit.

"But now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound, so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter." (Romans 7:6)

Then you might say, "What is the good of the law?" Very good. It causes us to see sin, and we are sinners, and then it points us to Christ.

"Therefore the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:24)

"But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor."
(Galatians. 3:25)

Oh, if we could begin to recognize how deadly the letter of the law is. We would run, run, run, as fast as we could away from it. It kills. This is what killed the Pharisees, scribes and lawyers. And this is what has killed many of the people sitting every Sunday in our churches across the land. In what way are they dead? Spiritually, the same as the Pharisees were dead. Jesus called them whitened sepulchers, meaning white or cleaned up dead men.

The new covenant is not one of obeying the old Mosaic Law. If we could have got right with God by obeying it or going to church or being good, the Pharisees would have been right there on top of the list.

The new covenant is different. You have to look at Jesus and the disciples to see this. What was the difference? Jesus was conceived of by God, by the Holy Spirit. He was led by the Holy Spirit, He was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said, "The Lord has anointed Me."

He spoke and said, "Unless you are born again you cannot enter into the kingdom of God." What was He saying? You must be conceived by the Holy Spirit also; you must be filled with the Holy Spirit also.

Look at the disciples; they were born of the Spirit, filled with the Spirit, led by the Spirit.

The Scriptures make it very clear that we are not under the tutor, led by the letter. We are children of faith, led by the Spirit.

Those who have come of age, walk by faith. They don't trust in the flesh to earn their way into heaven. The sons of God are led by the Spirit, no longer by the tutor, the law.

"For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God." (Heb. 7:18)

"Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him." (Hebrews 7:25) We cannot draw near to God through the law, or by keeping the law. It only brings us into bondage and keeps us as Pharisees. But we have a better way; faith in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit to lead us, fill us, and to reveal the things of God to us deep in our spirit, that our natural mind cannot begin to understand. "Awaken sleeper and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

"Father, give us spiritual understanding. Cause us to live." Amen!

HELP, I AM ON FIRE!

I don't think I would be too wrong in assuming that just about every one of you are struggling with something. I think all of us like to be perfect. There is something within us that is striving to be perfect and wants to be perfect; because of this desire within us we are very easily led into a trap. What trap? The trap of perfection; "I am going to be perfect and please God."

Does God want us to be perfect? Yes, I believe He does. Matthew 5:48 says, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." There is another Scripture which says, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" Let me word it this way. Are you by your own strength and will power trying to overcome sin and make yourself into the image of Jesus Christ? Are you by your own power trying to make someone else into the image of God?

In 1 Corinthians 1:17-18 Paul is speaking, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

In verse 31, "That, just as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.'"

What are these Scriptures saying to us? They are saying that we can make the power of the cross of no effect in our lives. The

foolish Galatians did this. They had received the Lord and had been filled with the Holy Spirit. But instead of letting the cross and the power of God bring them to perfection and into the image of God they tried to do it themselves; not realizing that the flesh cannot perfect itself, no matter how hard it tries.

When you and I try to perfect ourselves, we are making the cross void. We have become foolish. Isn't this what the Israelites tried to do for hundreds of years and failed?

The Scriptures tell us over and over we are the called, the chosen. What are we called for? Are we called to perfect ourselves? No! He has called us to work His mighty power in us, to change us into the image of His Son. It is His power which He wants revealed, not ours. He wants to do the work in us. He doesn't want us to do it. If you do the work, you make the cross void. If He does the work in you, it is the power of the cross. Then you might say, "He isn't doing anything." I ask you this, "Have you had any trials in your life lately, any difficulties, has any of God's fire fallen on you?" These things change us. Instead of standing and boasting how holy I am and how victorious I am, and how much I have changed, I fall on my knees and cry out to God. "Help me, I am on fire, I am being consumed, and I am dying in this situation!"

I tell you out of those fires you become a changed person. You won't be boasting what great things you did. You will be saying, "What wonder working power is in the cross?" "I have gone through the fires and I am no longer the same. It burned something right out of me."

God is the only one who can make you perfect and make you like His Son. He wants to do this for you. Let Him do it for you and your loved ones.

NOW ABIDE FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE

Do you think there are ministers and priests who feel like failures? Are there husbands and wives who feel like they have failed as father and mother? I am sure we all agree there are people in all walks of life who feel this way.

What is it that keeps us going when we are in this condition? I think it is hope. We hope there will be a break-through. What about the wife of the alcoholic? What keeps her going? She hopes he will change. Hope is different than faith; faith says, "He will change." Whereas hope says, "There is a possibility that he might change." Even hope is better than hopelessness.

It seems that as long as we have hope we can hang on and go on. When hope is gone we give up and despair. So hope seems to be a power, a force, a strength that is able to keep us going for years through very difficult times. We may be very unhappy, miserable and wretched, and yet hope keeps us going.

Faith does not have the same character or power to move us along like hope does. Faith brings us into a place of peace and rest. As a result we need both hope and faith. Hope gives us the get-up and go. Faith gives us the assurance, peace and rest we all need. I believe there is a need for both faith and hope in our lives as Christian people. In some areas we have faith and know with assurance that certain things are taken care of once and for all; yet in other areas of our lives hope is at work carrying us through difficult times.

I am speaking about this for a reason. I have seen people's hope and faith undermined by well-intentioned brothers and sisters in the Lord. This should not be. We should stir up the hope and faith in a person, not destroy it. We should encourage one another in the faith. We should bring hope to the hopeless. We are to go out into the world and bring good news.

I have no desire to injure the body of Christ or destroy it. I would like to see it strong and effective. There seems to be two camps in the body of Christ. One camp is under taught and under-protected, the other camp is over-taught and over-protected. Neither camp is as effective as it should be in the world.

"But someone may well say: 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works and I will show you my faith by my works.'" (James 2:18)

I look at the way Jesus taught. He took His disciples with Him into the highways and byways, healed the sick, drove out the demons, spread the good news, and taught His disciples by action and word. Then He sent them out by twos and told them to do the same thing. We do not teach or do the same thing today. We give long teachings about healing, but we don't do the healing. We teach about demons, but don't drive them out. Our system does not work as well as the way Jesus did it.

I wonder how much teaching is needed on a Scripture such as, "These signs will follow those who believe; they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover." I believe there is only one thing to do after receiving this Scripture. DO IT.

Brothers and sisters, we have a lot of teachers and a lot of people being taught, but we do not have many doers.

Jesus said the harvest is ready yet the laborers are few. Let's start following the example of Jesus and His disciples and start doing the things He told us to do.

