

# Shepherd's Guide

## Bible Institute for Leaders

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## **The Canon of Scripture**

*The following notes have been borrowed from the English Standard Version Study Bible by Crossway publishers..  
These notes and many more are helpful to any Bible student.*

### **The Canon of the Old Testament**

The word “canon” (Greek. for “a rule”) is applied to the Bible in two ways: first, in regard to the Bible as the church’s *standard* of faith and practice, and second, in regard to its contents as the *correct collection and list* of inspired books. The word was first applied to the identity of the biblical books in the latter part of the fourth century AD; reflecting the fact that there had recently been a need to settle some Christians doubts on the matter. Before this, Christians had referred to the “Old Testament” and “New Testament” as the “Holy Scriptures” and had assumed, rather than made explicit, that they were the *correct* collections and lists.

### **The Causes of Uncertainty about the OT Canon**

The Christian OT corresponded to the Hebrew Bible, which Jesus and the first Christians inherited from the Jews. In the Gentile mission of the church, however, it was necessary to use the Septuagint (a translation of the OT that had been made in pre-Christian times for Greek-speaking Alexandrian Jews. Because knowledge of Hebrew was uncommon in the church (esp. outside Syria and Palestine), the first Latin translation of the OT came from the Septuagint and not from the original Hebrew. Where there was no knowledge of Hebrew and little acquaintance with Jewish tradition, it became harder to distinguish between the biblical books and other popular religious reading matter circulating in the Greek or Latin language. These factors led to the uncertainty about the composition of Scripture, which the coiners of the term “canon” sought to settle.

### **Did the Hebrew Bible Contain the Same Books as Today’s Bible?**

The above analysis assumes that the Hebrew Bible, which the church inherited in the first century, comprised the same books as it does today. The five books of the Law are obviously not an arbitrary grouping. They follow a chronological sequence, concentrate on the Law of Moses, and trace history from the creation of the world to Moses’ death. Moreover, the Prophets and the Writings, if arranged in the traditional order recorded in the Talmud, are not arbitrary groupings either. The Prophets begin with four narrative books—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings—tracing history through a second period, from the entry into the Promised Land to the Babylonian exile. They end with four oracular books—Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, and the Book of the Twelve (Minor Prophets)—arranged in descending order of size. The Hagiographa (Writings) begin with six lyrical or wisdom books—Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations—arranged in descending order of size, and end with four narrative books—Daniel, Esther, Ezra–Nehemiah, and Chronicles—covering a third period of history, the period of the exile and the return. (The remaining book of the Writings, Ruth, is prefixed to Psalms, since it ends with the genealogy of the psalmist David.) The four narrative books in the Hagiographa are this time put second, so that Chronicles can sum up the whole biblical story, from Adam to the return from exile, and for this reason also Ezra–Nehemiah is put before Chronicles, not

after it. A small anomaly is that the Song of Solomon is in fact slightly shorter than Lamentations, not longer, but it is put first to keep the three books related to Solomon together.

Jesus and the NT authors quote the words of the OT approximately 300 times; uncertainty about the exact number arises because of a few instances where it is not clear whether it is an OT quotation or only an echoing expression using similar words. They regularly quote it as having divine authority, with phrases such as “it is written,” “Scripture says,” and “God says,” but no other writings are quoted in this way. Occasionally the NT writers will quote some other authors, even pagan Greek authors, but they never quote these other sources as being the words of God (see [Acts 17:28](#); [Titus 1:12–13](#); [Jude 8–10, 14–16](#)), as they do the canonical OT books. Sound historical study shows, therefore, that the Hebrew OT contains the true canon of the OT, shared by Jesus and the apostles with first-century Judaism. No books are left out that should be included, and none are included that should be left out.

## **The Canon of the New Testament**

The foundations for a NT canon lie in the gracious purpose of a self-revealing God whose word carries his own divine authority. Just as new outpourings of divine word-revelation accompanied and followed each major act of redemption in the ancient history of God’s people (the covenant with Adam and Eve, the covenant with Abraham, the redemption from Egypt, the establishment of the monarchy, the exile, and the restoration), so when the promised Messiah came, a new and generous outpouring of divine revelation necessarily ensued (see [2 Tim. 1:8–11](#); [Titus 1:1–3](#)).

### **The OT Authorization**

The prospect of a NT Scripture to stand alongside the OT was anticipated, even authorized, in the OT itself, embedded in the promise of God’s ultimate act of redemption through the Messiah, in faithfulness to his covenant ([Jer. 31:31–33](#); and [Heb. 8:7–13](#); [10:16–18](#)). Jesus taught his disciples after his resurrection that “the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms” predicted not only the Messiah’s suffering and resurrection but also that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem” ([Luke 24:44–48](#)). Prophetic passages such as [Isaiah 2:2–3](#); [49:6](#); and [Psalm 2:8](#) spoke of a time when the light of God’s grace in redemption would be proclaimed to all nations. It naturally follows that this proclamation would eventuate in a new collection of written Scriptures complementing the books of the old covenant—both from the pattern of God’s redemptive work in the past (mentioned above) and from the actual writing ministry of some of Jesus’ apostles (and their associates) in the accomplishment of their commission.

### **The Commission of Jesus**

God, who spoke in many and various ways in times past, chose to speak in these last days to mankind through his Son (see [Heb. 1:1–2, 4](#)). Bringing this saving message to Israel and the nations was a crucial part of the mission of Jesus Christ ([Isa. 49:6](#); [Acts 26:23](#)), the Word made flesh ([John 1:14](#)). He put this mission into effect through chosen apostles, whom he commissioned to be his authoritative representatives ([Matt. 10:40](#), “whoever receives you receives me”). Their assignment was to “bring to ... remembrance,” through the work of the

Spirit, his words and works ([John 14:26; 16:13–14](#)) and to bear witness to Jesus “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” ([Acts 1:8](#); cf. [Matt. 28:19–20](#); [Luke 24:48](#); [John 17:14, 20](#)).

In time, the apostolic preaching came to written form in the books of the NT, which now function as “the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles” ([2 Pet. 3:2](#)).

Paul and the other apostles wrote just as they preached: conscious of Jesus’ mandate. From the beginning, the full authority of the apostles (and prophets) to deliver God’s word was recognized, at least by many ([Acts 10:22](#); [Eph. 2:20](#); [1 Thess. 2:13](#); [Jude 17–18](#)). This recognition is accordingly reflected in the earliest non-apostolic writers. For example, Clement of Rome attested that “The apostles received the gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent forth from God. So then Christ is from God, and the apostles are from Christ. Both, therefore, came of the will of God in good order” (*1 Clement* 42.1–2 written c. a.d. 95). In its deliberations about the particular books that make up the canon of Scripture, the church did not sovereignly “determine” or “choose” the books it most preferred—whether for catechetical, polemical, liturgical, or edificatory purposes. Rather, the church saw itself as empowered only to receive and recognize what God had provided in books handed down from the apostles and their immediate companions (e.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.preface; 3.1.1–2). This is why discussions of the so-called “criteria” of canonicity can be misleading. Qualities such as “apostolicity,” “antiquity,” “orthodoxy,” “liturgical use,” and “church consensus” are not criteria by which the church autonomously judged which documents it would receive. The first three are qualities the church recognizes in the voice of its Savior, to which voice the church willingly submits itself (“My sheep hear my voice ... and they follow me,” [John 10:27](#)).

The Gospels according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (the earliest Gospels known) gained universal acceptance while arousing very little controversy within the church. If the latest of these, the Gospel of John, was published near the end of the first century (as most scholars think), it is remarkable that its words are echoed around AD 110 in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, who also knew Matthew, and perhaps Luke. At about the same time, Papias of Hierapolis in Asia Minor received traditions about the origins of Matthew’s and Mark’s Gospels, and quite probably Luke’s and John’s. In the middle of the second century, Justin Martyr in Rome reported that the Gospels (apparently the four)—which he calls “memoirs of the apostles”—were being read and expounded in Christian services of worship.

In [2 Peter 3:16](#), a collection of at least some of Paul’s letters was already known and regarded as Scripture and therefore enjoyed canonical endorsement. Furthermore, a collection (of unknown extent) of Paul’s letters was known to Clement of Rome and to the recipients of his letter in Corinth before the end of the first century, then also to Ignatius of Antioch and Polycarp of Smyrna and their readers in the early second century. The Pastoral Letters (1–2 Timothy and Titus), rejected as being Paul’s by many modern critics, are attested at least from the time of Polycarp.

By the end of the second century a “core” collection of NT books—21 of the 27—was generally recognized: four Gospels, Acts, 13 epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation. By this time Hebrews (accepted in the East and by Irenaeus and Tertullian in the West, but questioned in

Rome due to doubts about authorship), James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude were only minimally attested in the writings of church leaders. This infrequent citation led to the expression of doubts by later fathers (e.g., Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.25).

Yet, by some time in the third century, codices (precursors of the modern book form, as opposed to scrolls) containing all seven of the “general epistles” were being produced, and Eusebius reports that all seven were “known to most.”

By the 240s a.d. Origen (residing in Caesarea in Palestine) acknowledged all 27 of the NT books but reported that James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude were disputed. The situation is virtually the same for Eusebius, writing about 60 years later, who also reports the doubts some had about Hebrews and Revelation. Still, his two categories of “undisputed” and “disputed but known to most” contain only the 27 and no more. He named five other books (*The Acts of Paul*, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, *The Apocalypse of Peter*, *The Letter of Barnabas*, and *The Didache*) which were known to many churches but which, he believed, had to be judged as spurious.

In the year a.d. 367 the Alexandrian bishop Athanasius, in his annual Easter letter, gave a list of the NT books which comprised, with no reservations, all 27, while naming several others as useful for catechizing but not as scriptural. Several other fourth-century lists essentially concurred, though with various individual deviations outside of the most basic core (four Gospels, Acts, 13 epistles of Paul, 1 Peter, 1 John). Three African synods—at Hippo Regius in a.d. 393 and at Carthage in 397 and 419—and the influential African bishop Augustine affirmed the 27-book Canon. It was enshrined in Jerome’s Latin translation, the Vulgate, which became the normative Bible for the Western church. In Eastern churches, recognition of Revelation lagged for quite some time. The churches of Syria did not accept Revelation, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, or Jude until the fifth (Western Syria) or sixth (Eastern Syria) centuries.

The apostolic word gave birth to the church ([Rom. 1:15–17](#); [10:14–15](#); [James 1:18](#); [1 Pet. 1:23–25](#)), and the written form of this word remains as the permanent, documentary expression of God’s new covenant. It may be said that only the 27 books of the NT manifest themselves as belonging to that original, foundational, apostolic witness. They have demonstrated themselves to be the Word of God to the universal church throughout the generations. Here are the pastures to which Christ’s sheep from many folds continually come to hear their Shepherd’s voice and to follow him.

## **The Apocrypha**

Larger editions of the English Bible—from the Great Bible of Tyndale and Coverdale (1539) onward—have often included a separate section between the OT and the NT titled “The Apocrypha,” consisting of additional books and substantial parts of books. The Latin Vulgate Bible translated by Jerome (begun a.d. 382, completed 405) had placed them in the OT itself—some as separate items and some as attached to or included in the biblical books of Esther, Jeremiah, and Daniel. In Roman Catholic translations of the Bible, such as the Douay Version and the Jerusalem Bible, these items are still placed in their pre-Reformation positions. In Protestant translations, however, the Apocrypha is either omitted altogether or grouped in a separate section.

Jerome called them by the name “apocrypha” (Gk. *apokrypha*, “those having been hidden away”). In accordance with his teaching—

and with the understanding of the OT canon held by Jesus, the NT authors, and the first-century Jews; thus the sixteenth-century Protestant translators did not consider those writings part of the OT but gathered them together in a separate section, to which they gave Jerome’s name, “The Apocrypha.”

The way in which Christian writers used the Apocrypha confirms the above analysis. The NT seems to reflect knowledge of one or two of the apocryphal texts, but it never ascribes authority to them as it does to many of the canonical OT books. While the NT quotes various parts of the OT about 300 times, it never actually quotes anything from the Apocrypha ([Jude 14–16](#) does not contain a quote from the Apocrypha but from another Jewish writing, *1 Enoch*) In the second century, Justin Martyr and Theophilus of Antioch, who frequently referred to the OT, never referred to any of the Apocrypha. By the end of the second century *Wisdom*, *Tobit*, and *Sirach* were sometimes being treated as Scripture, but none of the other apocryphal books were. Their eventual acceptance was a slow development. Much the same is true with Christian lists of the OT books: the oldest of them include the fewest of the Apocrypha; and the oldest of all, that of Melito (c. a.d. 170), includes none.

By the late fourth century, Jerome found it necessary to assert the distinction between the Apocrypha and the inspired OT books with great emphasis, and a minority of writers continued to make the same distinction throughout the Middle Ages, until the Protestant Reformers arose and made the distinction an important part of their doctrine of Scripture. At the Council of Trent (1545–1563), however, the Church of Rome attempted to obliterate the distinction and to put the Apocrypha (with the exception of *1* and *2 Esdras* and *The Prayer of Manasseh*) on the same level as the inspired OT books. This was a consequence of (1) Rome’s exalted doctrine of oral tradition, (2) its view that the church creates Scripture, and (3) its acceptance of certain controversial ideas (esp. the doctrines of purgatory, indulgences, and works-righteousness as contributing to justification) that were derived from passages in the Apocrypha. These teachings gave support to the Roman Catholic responses to Martin Luther and other leaders of the Protestant Reformation, which had begun in 1517.

## The One Big Story of the Bible

(The plan of Salvation from the ESV Study Bible)

How does the Bible as a whole fit together? The events recorded in the Bible took place over a span of thousands of years and in several different cultural settings. What is their unifying thread?

One unifying thread in the Bible is its divine authorship. *Every book of the Bible is God's word.* The events recorded in the Bible are there because God wanted them recorded, and he had them recorded with his people and their instruction in mind: "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" ([Rom. 15:4](#)).

### God's Plan for History

The Bible also makes it clear that *God has a unified plan for all of history.* His ultimate purpose, "a plan for the fullness of time," is "to unite all things in him [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" ([Eph. 1:10](#)), "to the praise of his glory" ([Eph. 1:12](#)). God had this plan even from the beginning: "remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose'" ([Isa. 46:9-10](#)). "When the fullness of time had come," when the moment was appropriate in God's plan, "God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law" ([Gal. 4:4-5](#)).

The work of Christ on earth, and especially his crucifixion and resurrection, is the climax of history; it is the great turning point at which God actually accomplished the salvation toward which history had been moving throughout the OT. The present era looks back on Christ's completed work but also looks forward to the consummation of his work when Christ will come again and when there will appear "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" ([2 Pet. 3:13](#); see [Rev. 21:1-22:5](#)).

The unity of God's plan makes it appropriate for him to include *promises and predictions* at earlier points in time, and then for the *fulfillments* of these to come at later points. Sometimes the promises take *explicit* form, as when God promises the coming of the Messiah, the great Savior whom Israel expected ([Isa. 9:6-7](#)). Sometimes the promises take *symbolic* form, as when God commanded animal sacrifices to be offered as a symbol for the forgiveness of sins ([Leviticus 4](#)). In themselves, the animal sacrifices were not able to remove sins permanently and to atone for them permanently ([Heb. 10:1-18](#)). They pointed forward to Christ, who is the final and complete sacrifice for sins.

### Christ in the Old Testament

Since God's plan focuses on Christ and his glory ([Eph. 1:10](#)), it is natural that the promises of God and the symbols in the OT all point forward to him. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]" ([2 Cor. 1:20](#)). When Christ appeared to the disciples after his resurrection, his teaching focused on showing them how the OT pointed to him: "And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" ([Luke 24:25-27](#)). One could also look at [Luke 24:44-48](#): "Then he said to them, 'These are my words I spoke to you while I was still with you, that



everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.’”

When the Bible says that “he opened their minds to understand *the Scriptures*” ([Luke 24:45](#)), it cannot mean just a few scattered predictions about the Messiah. It means the OT as a whole, encompassing all three of the major divisions of the OT that the Jews traditionally recognized. “The Law of Moses” includes Genesis to Deuteronomy. “The Prophets” include both the “former prophets” (the historical books Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings) and the “latter prophets” (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the 12 Minor Prophets, Hosea–Malachi). “The Psalms” is representative of the third grouping by the Jews, called the “Writings.” (The book of Daniel was placed in this group.) At the heart of understanding all these OT books is the truth that they point forward to the suffering of Christ, his resurrection, and the subsequent spread of the gospel to “all nations” ([Luke 24:47](#)). The OT as a whole, through its promises, its symbols, and its pictures of salvation, looks forward to the actual accomplishment of salvation that took place once for all in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **The Promises of God**

In what ways does the OT look forward to Christ? First, it directly points forward through *promises of salvation and promises concerning God’s commitment to his people*. God gave some specific promises in the OT relating to the coming of Christ as the Messiah, the Savior in the line of David. Through the prophet Micah, God promises that the Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David ([Mic. 5:2](#)), a prophecy strikingly fulfilled in the NT ([Matt. 2:1–12](#)). But God often gives more general promises concerning a future great day of salvation, without spelling out all the details of how he will accomplish it (e.g., [Isa. 25:6–9](#); [60:1–7](#)). Sometimes he promises simply to be their God (see [Gen. 17:7](#)).

One common refrain is that, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (cf. [Jer. 31:33](#); [Hos. 2:23](#); [Zech. 8:8](#); [13:9](#); [Heb. 8:10](#)). Variations on this broad theme may sometimes focus more on the people and what they will be, while at other times they focus on God and what he will do. God’s promise to “be their God” is really his comprehensive commitment to be with his people, to care for them, to discipline them, to protect them, to supply their needs, and to have a personal relationship with them. If that commitment continues, it promises to result ultimately in the final salvation that God works out in Christ.

The principle extends to all the promises in the OT. “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him [Christ]” ([2 Cor. 1:20](#)). Sometimes God gives immediate, temporal blessings. These blessings are only a foretaste of the rich, eternal blessings that come through Christ: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” ([Eph. 1:3](#)).

### **Curses and Warnings**

God’s relation to people includes not only blessings but also warnings, threatenings, and cursings. These are appropriate because of God’s righteous reaction to sin. They anticipate and point forward to Christ in two distinct ways. First, *Christ is the Lamb of God, the sin-bearer* ([John 1:29](#); [1 Pet. 2:24](#)). He was innocent of sin, but became sin for us and bore the curse

of God on the cross ([2 Cor. 5:21](#); [Gal. 3:13](#)). Every instance of the wrath of God against sin, and his punishments of sin, looks forward to the wrath that was poured out on Christ on the cross.

Second, *Christ at his second coming wars against sin and exterminates it*. The second coming and the consummation are the time when the final judgment against sin is executed. All earlier judgments against sin anticipate the final judgment. Christ during his earthly life anticipated this final judgment when he cast out demons and when he denounced the sins of the religious leaders.

## Covenants

The promises of God in the OT come in the context not only of God's commitment to his people but also of instruction about the people's commitment and obligations to God. Noah, Abraham, and others whom God meets and addresses are called on to respond not only with trust in God's promises but with lives that begin to bear fruit from their fellowship with God. The relation of God to his people is summed up in various *covenants* that God makes with people. A covenant between two human beings is a binding commitment obliging them to deal faithfully with one another (as with Jacob and Laban in [Gen. 31:44](#)). When God makes a covenant with man, God is the sovereign, so he specifies the obligations on both sides. "I will be their God" is the fundamental obligation on God's side, while "they shall be my people" is the fundamental obligation on the human side. But then there are variations in the details.

For example, when God first calls Abram he says, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you" ([Gen. 12:1](#)). This commandment specifies an obligation on the part of Abram, an obligation on the human side. God also indicates what he will do on his part: "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing" ([Gen. 12:2](#)). God's commitment takes the form of promises, blessings, and curses. The *promises and blessings* point forward to Christ, who is the fulfillment of the promises and the source of final blessings. The *curses* point forward to Christ both in his bearing the curse and in his execution of judgment and curse against sin, especially at the second coming.

The obligations on the human side of the covenants are also related to Christ. Christ is fully man as well as fully God. As a man, he stands with his people on the human side. He fulfilled the obligations of God's covenants through his perfect obedience ([Heb. 5:8](#)). He received the reward of obedience in his resurrection and ascension (see [Phil. 2:9–10](#)). The OT covenants on their human side thus point forward to his achievement.

By dealing with the wrath of God against sin, Christ changed a situation of alienation from God to a situation of peace. He reconciled believers to God ([2 Cor. 5:18–21](#); [Rom. 5:6–11](#)). He brought personal intimacy with God, and the privilege of being children of God ([Rom. 8:14–17](#)). This intimacy is what all the OT covenants anticipated. In Isaiah, God even declares that his servant, the Messiah, will *be* the covenant for the people (see [Isa. 42:6](#); [49:8](#)).

## Offspring

It is worthwhile to focus on one specific element in OT covenants, namely, the promise concerning offspring. In making a covenant with Abram, God calls on him to "walk before me, and be blameless" ([Gen. 17:1](#)). That is a human obligation in the covenant. On the divine side, God promises that he will make Abram "the father of a multitude of nations" ([Gen. 17:4](#)), and he renames him Abraham ([Gen. 17:5](#)). The covenant with Abraham in fact extends beyond Abraham to his posterity: "And I will

establish my covenant between me and you and *your offspring after you* throughout their generations for an *everlasting* covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” ([Gen. 17:7–8](#)).

The promises made to Abraham are exceedingly important within the OT because they are the foundation for the nation of Israel. The history after Abraham shows that Abraham had a son, Isaac, in fulfillment of God’s promise to Sarah. Isaac was the immediate result of God’s promise of offspring who will inherit the land. Isaac in turn had a son, Jacob, and Jacob was the father of 12 sons who in turn multiplied into the 12 tribes of Israel. The nation of Israel became the next stage in the offspring that God promised.

But how does this relate to Christ? Christ is the descendant of David and of Abraham, as the genealogy in Matthew indicates ([Matt. 1:1](#)). Christ is the offspring of Abraham. In fact, he is the offspring in a uniquely emphatic sense: “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to off springs,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ *who is Christ*” ([Gal. 3:16](#); see notes on [Gen. 22:15–18](#)).

Abraham was told to “walk before me, and be blameless” ([Gen. 17:1](#)). Abraham was basically a man of faith who trusted God ([Gal. 3:9](#); [Heb. 11:8–12, 17–19](#)). But Abraham also had his failures and sins. Who will walk before God and be blameless in an ultimate way? Not Abraham. Not anyone else on earth either, except Christ himself ([Heb. 4:15](#)). All the other candidates for being “offspring” of Abraham ultimately fail to be blameless. Thus the covenant with Abraham has an unbreakable tie to Christ. Christ is the ultimate offspring to whom the other offspring all point. One may go down the list of offspring: Isaac, Jacob, then the sons of Jacob. Among these sons, Judah is their leader who will have kingship ([Gen. 49:10](#)). David is the descendant of Abraham and Judah; Solomon is the descendant of David; and then comes Rehoboam and the others who descend from David and Solomon ([Matt. 1:1–16](#)).

Christ is not only the descendant of all of them by legal right; he is also superior to all of them as the uniquely blameless offspring. Through Christ believers are united to him and thereby themselves become “Abraham’s offspring” ([Gal. 3:29](#)). Believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, become heirs to the promises of God made to Abraham and his offspring: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” ([Gal. 3:28–29](#)).

### **Christ as the Last Adam**

Christ is not only the offspring of Abraham, but—reaching back farther in time to an earlier promise of God—the offspring of the woman: “I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her *offspring*; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” ([Gen. 3:15](#)). The conquest over the serpent, and therefore the conquest of evil and the reversal of its effects, is to take place through the offspring of the woman. One can trace this offspring down from Eve through Seth and his godly descendants, through Noah, and down to Abraham, where God’s promise takes the specific form of offspring for Abraham (see [Luke 3:23–38](#), which traces Jesus’ genealogy all the way back to Adam). Thus Christ is not only the offspring of Abraham but the last Adam ([1 Cor. 15:45–49](#)). Like Adam, he represents all who belong to him. And he reverses the effects of Adam’s fall.

Shadows, Prefigures, and “Types.” The NT constantly talks about Christ and the salvation that he has brought. That is obvious. What is not so obvious is that the same is true of the OT, though it does this by way of *anticipation*. It gives us “shadows” and “types” of the things that were to come (see [1 Cor. 10:6, 11](#); [Heb. 8:5](#)).

For example, [1 Corinthians 10:6](#) indicates that the events the Israelites experienced in the wilderness were “examples for us.” And [1 Corinthians 10:11](#) says, “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” In [1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11](#), the Greek word for “example” is *typos*, from which derives the English word “type” (cf. [Rom. 5:14](#)).

A “type,” in the language of theology, is *a special example, symbol, or picture that God designed beforehand, and that he placed in history at an earlier point in time in order to point forward to a later, larger fulfillment*. Animal sacrifices in the OT prefigure the final sacrifice of Christ. So these animal sacrifices were “types” of Christ. The temple, as a dwelling place for God, prefigured Christ, who is the final “dwelling place” of God, and through whom God comes to be with his people ([Matt. 1:23](#); [John 2:21](#)). The OT priests were types of Christ, who is the final high priest ([Heb. 7:11–8:7](#)).

Fulfillment takes place preeminently in Christ ([Eph. 1:10](#); [2 Cor. 1:20](#)). But in the NT those people who are “in Christ,” who place their trust in him and experience fellowship with his person and his blessings, receive the benefits of what he has accomplished, and therefore one can also find anticipations or “types” in the OT that point forward to the NT church, the people in the NT who belong to Christ. For example, the OT temple not only prefigured Christ, whose body is the temple ([John 2:21](#)), but prefigured the church, which is also called a temple ([1 Cor. 3:16–17](#)), because it is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Some OT symbols also may point forward especially to the consummation of salvation that takes place in the new heaven and the new earth yet to come ([2 Pet. 3:13](#); [Rev. 21:1–22:5](#)). Old Testament Jerusalem prefigured the new Jerusalem that will come “down out of heaven from God” ([Rev. 21:2](#)).

### **Christ the Mediator**

The Bible makes it clear that ever since the fall of Adam into sin, sin and its consequences have been the pervasive problem of the human race. It is a constant theme running through the Bible. Sin is rebellion against God, and it deserves death: “the wages of sin is death” ([Rom. 6:23](#)). God is holy, and no sinful human being, not even a great man like Moses, can stand in the presence of God without dying: “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” ([Ex. 33:20](#)). Sinful man needs a *mediator* who will approach God on his behalf. Christ, who is both God and man, and who is innocent of sin, is the only one who can serve: “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all” ([1 Tim. 2:5–6](#)).

Though there is only one mediator in an ultimate sense, in a subordinate way various people in the OT serve in some kind of mediatorial capacity. Moses is one of them. He went up to Mount Sinai to meet God while all the people waited at the bottom of the mountain ([Exodus 19](#)). When the people of Israel were terrified at hearing God’s audible voice from the mountain, they asked for Moses to bring them God’s words from then on ([Ex. 20:18–21](#)). God approved of the arrangement involving Moses bringing his words to the people ([Deut. 5:28–33](#)).

But if there is only one mediator, as [1 Timothy 2:5](#) says, how could Moses possibly serve in that way? Moses was not the ultimate mediator, but he *prefigured* Christ's mediation. Because Moses was sinful, he could not possibly have survived the presence of God without forgiveness, that is, without having a sinless mediator on his own behalf. God welcomed Moses into his presence only because, according to the plan of God, Christ was to come and make atonement for Moses. The benefits of Christ's work were reckoned beforehand for Moses' benefit. And so it must have been for all the OT saints. How could they have been saved otherwise? God is perfectly holy, and they all needed perfection. Perfection was graciously reckoned to them because of Christ, who was to come.

That means that *there is only one way of salvation*, throughout the OT as well as in the NT. Only Christ can save us. "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" ([Acts 4:12](#)). The instances of salvation in the OT all depend on Christ. And in the OT, salvation frequently comes through a *mediator*, a person or institution that stands between God and man. All the small instances of mediation in the OT prefigure Christ. How else could it be, since there is only one mediator and one way of salvation?

So understanding of the unity of the Bible increases when one pays attention to *instances where God brings salvation*, and *instances where a mediator stands between God and man*. These instances include not only cases where God brings *spiritual* salvation in the form of personal fellowship, spiritual intimacy, and the promise of eternal life with God. They also include instances of *temporal*, external deliverance—"salvation" in a physical sense, which prefigures salvation in a spiritual sense. And indeed, salvation is not *merely* spiritual. Christians look forward to the resurrection of the body and to "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" ([2 Pet. 3:13](#)). Personal salvation starts with renewal of the heart, but in the end it will be comprehensive and cosmic in scope. The OT, when it pays attention to physical land and physical prosperity and physical health, anticipates the physicality of the believer's prosperity in the new heavens and the new earth.

Instances of mediators in the OT include prophets, kings, and priests. *Prophets* bring the word of God from God to the people. *Kings*, when they submit to God, bring God's rule to bear on the people. *Priests* represent the people in coming before God's presence. Christ is the final prophet, king, and priest who fulfills all three functions in a final way ([Heb. 1:1-3](#)). One can also look at *wise men*, who bring God's wisdom to others; *warriors*, who bring God's deliverance from enemies; and *singers*, who bring praise to God on behalf of the people and speak of the character of God to the people.

Mediation occurs not only through human figures, but through institutions. *Covenants* play a mediatorial role in bringing God's word to the people. The *temple* brings God's presence to the people. The *animal sacrifices* bring God's forgiveness to the people. In reading the Bible one should look for ways in which God brings his word and his presence to people through *means* that he establishes. All these means perform a kind of mediatorial role, and because there is only one mediator, it is clear that they all point to Christ.

## What is the Gospel?

The Gospel is a story. It is God's story. **Mark 1:14** tells us that Jesus came forth from His temptation in the Wilderness, "preaching the Gospel of God"

**Matthew 4:23**-tells us Jesus came proclaiming the "Gospel of the Kingdom." See also **Matt. 9:35; & Matt. 24:14**. Thus we see the story (gospel) is about God and his kingdom.

### I. What is the True Gospel?

**Explain:** In **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:1-4** Paul defines the "Gospel." He says the Gospel is the story of Jesus- Who He is, why He came to earth, what He did for us, and how we must respond to it. The gospel story centers on God's Son-His Person and Work. It then is followed by a call to repent and believe the story. The Gospel is the work of the Father- it is a Grace work the Father has accomplished for mankind. It is all of God, all of Grace. It has nothing to do with religion, human merit or works.

When the Gospel is preached, adding nothing to it, subtracting nothing from it; the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all you believe it. (**Romans 1:16**)

### When did the Gospel story begin?

**Explain:** the gospel began not with the birth of Christ the Messiah, but rather it began in Genesis with God's purpose in Creation. He created mankind in his image with the purpose that mankind might fulfill its destiny by spreading the Father's image throughout the whole earth. The story of the "fall" of man into sin, man's rebellion, and God's efforts to rescue, redeem, and restore what was lost in the Garden are all little dramas in the bigger story of the Gospel. The entire Old Testament is an unfolding of the narrative of the gospel. The Old Testament is a testimony to Jesus telling us a savior is coming, will come, and He will save, renew and restore his new people. The gospel story in the New Testament is about fulfillment even as the Old Testament stories are shadows and promises pointing to the fulfillment in Christ and His Church.

**Observation:** There are today many religions distortions of the true Gospel. Much of the New Testament is comprised of apostolic letters to correct these distortions. One of the best ways to

learn what a thing really is would be to define what it is NOT. I can think of no better example of what the Gospel is not, than the Galatian heresy.

### The Galatian letter

The background of Galatians is found in the book of Acts. Paul comes to Galatia which today is modern day Turkey. Paul preached a pure Gospel of God's grace to them, accomplished through the free gift of his holy Son Jesus. For Paul, Christ's life, death, and resurrection accepted by faith & repentance; are all that God requires for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus life, death, resurrection are the finished work of God- this is the story- the gospel.

Soon after Paul left Galatia, Christian Jews from Jerusalem followed Paul to these new churches, telling them they must obey all the man-made "rules" of their religion. They insisted that the new male converts must be circumcised. In so doing, they added to the gospel story. They added Jewish Kosher rules, Jewish holy days and seasons. The Apostle was amazed they had done this. Paul calls their teaching, "a different Gospel" (1:6). The entire Galatian letter is a refutation of this teaching and a defense of the true Gospel of Grace

**Apply:** This same distortion of the Gospel is still going on today. Most churches & denominations have in some way distorted the true Gospel. Grace versus works is the repeated theme of the Galatian letter. Paul wrote this letter to refute the 'false brethren' of Gal. 2:4, and the different Gospel they preached, (see 1:6)

It was a different Gospel because it distorted Grace= 1:7

It was a different Gospel because it killed Grace= 2:21

It was a different Gospel because it abandoned the Christ=1:6

It was a different Gospel because it abused Grace= 6:13; Romans 6:1, 2

**Explain:** Paul, who had been a devout Jew understood how easy it is to mix religion and the Gospel. It seems we humans desperately need to justify ourselves before the face of God. All religion is the result of that need to impress God with good behaviors, performance, and religious deeds.

Paul's past life as a devout Jew- see Gal. 1:10-14

**Note:** Rabbi Saul was extremely zealous for his ancestral traditions. (See Gal.1:14)

This means he had a long list of do's and don'ts trying to please God! His former life was lived as a rule keeper and rule breaker. His ancestors had added 613 rules (traditions) to the Ten Commandments given to Moses. These 613 traditions formed the core of Jewish pharisaical religion known as the Mishnah or Talmud.

**Apply:** Modern day Christians also have their lists of do's and don'ts. Christianity began as a relationship in the Garden of Eden; became a rule book in Israel, an idea in Greece, an institution in Rome; and finally an enterprise in America! The institutional Church is characterized by this accursed "different Gospel."

## II. What the Gospel is not

### 1. The Gospel is not a philosophy that makes you a better person.

**Explain:** The Gospel is not a self-improvement program. The Gospel is NOT about you! It does not improve you, but it will transform you! See **2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:17**, this transformation makes you like Him.

**Apply:** Beware a distorted gospel that "adds" to your life anything other than Jesus Himself! Our old self cannot be reformed, improved, or even killed. Only the power of the Gospel can transform us into Christ's likeness.

**Illustration:** Beware of those who preach a "Joel Osteen" feel good about yourself message, telling you it is the Gospel. It is not. You haven't preached the "good" news until you tell the bad news, which is that we are lost sinners in need of saving Grace. The Gospel convicts us that we are lost without Christ, so that we can repent and be found by Christ. The Gospel will not improve what God condemns-that is our sin nature. Being a Christian is not about improved morals but rather it is about the Spirit of Jesus being lived out in us and through us. (See **2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. 5:17**)

### 2. The Gospel is not just an entry point (a ticket to Heaven)

**Explain:** Many have "accepted Jesus" in a prayer of belief, like at a Billy Graham crusade, thinking that is the sum of the Gospel. "I prayed it, now forget it." Some prayed a sinner's prayer



thinking it is a ticket to heaven. Let's be clear about this-salvation does begin with a decision to call upon the name of the Lord Jesus, however, there is much more to it than that entry point. The Gospel call to sinners is not just to believe, but to believe and "follow me" as Jesus repeatedly said to his men.

**Apply:** The Gospel is much more than just a ticket to heaven; it is an invasion of the King and His Kingdom into your life. You are a new person, with new citizenship, and a new power for living out the Gospel mandate. When Jesus is your Lord, he then becomes your Savior. Your new birth is a new beginning, but it is not the journey of discipleship. God has purposes he wants to fulfill through your obedient walk with Him. There is work to be done here on earth. The Father wants to continue the life of his Son by his Son living in and through us His people.

### 3. The Gospel is not Prosperity- (it does not make you materially rich)

**Explain;** many misguided Bible interpreters make a mistake in taking old covenant teachings about blessings and curses and applying them to the new covenant church. As Christ followers we do not live under blessings and curses any longer. Christ has become "cursed" for us on the Cross (see **Gal.3:13, 14**) the result is that you are blessed abundantly in Christ (see **Eph. 1:18** and **Eph. 2:20, 21**). You may become prosperous but it is not a promise made to all believers who profess Christ. He has promised to be with us no matter our circumstances. He has promised that if we suffer with Him, we shall be glorified with him. (Romans 8:17).

**Apply:** Do you think if you are good, or better, you merit blessing, and if you are bad, you merit curses? This is NOT the Gospel message. In Christ you are blessed beyond measure. In Him you have every blessing God can give. This blessing is not dependent upon YOU, but upon His sovereign will for you. When you are in Christ and Christ is in you-there are no curses upon us ever again.

**Illustration:** there is in the modern Church a "give to get" theology which is a false distortion of the gospel. Giving to God in order to get more from God is not the Gospel. We are to give to God and his work out of a generous spirit, not to bribe God to prosper us. Never! That teaching is a "different gospel."

### 4. The Gospel is not Later- (for the next life only)

**Explain:** Many professed believers have no expectations of present power or privilege from being saved. For them the Gospel is future only. It is only Heaven by and by-oh my! Some

foolishly believe salvation is only for the next life. Not so! The Gospel brings with it the power of God. It is power for the present as well as prospect for the future. You don't have to die to go to heaven, you can live out heaven in the here and now, by the power and presence of Christ in your daily life. In Christ the Father provides privilege, provision, protection, power, and purpose for us. The Gospel is for NOW, not just THEN!

**Apply:** The Gospel is about God and His Kingdom. We are in Christ and His rule, reign, and restoration are at work in us NOW. We can through faith in this Gospel pray, "Thy kingdom come" and see the kingdom lived out in us and through us. We as Christ-followers are to live lives of dominion here on earth to establish the rule of King Jesus.

### 5. The Gospel is not Love (thy Neighbor)

**Explain:** The institutional church is alive with this false Gospel of Love only. Some teach that if you just love God and love your neighbor that is what following Jesus is all about. This false gospel tells us that by loving our neighbor we are fulfilling the Gospel message. Well, the Gospel IS about God's love in us, but it is not about us loving our neighbor. This is a different Gospel because it is impossible to do! Only Jesus can love His enemies! All the loving we might do for others must proceed from the Gospel –Christ Himself manifesting the fruit of His Spirit in us. We in our flesh cannot love our enemies. However, Christ's love in us, released thru us can love a world back to God.

**Apply:** Multitudes of Christian denominations have made their central ministry the doing of good deeds. They call it the social application of the gospel-a social gospel! Never! It may be social, but it is not the Gospel. These good deeds may be beneficial to the poor and downtrodden, but if not accompanied by the "*in Jesus name*" it is only temporary and not of Kingdom permanence. We are to do loving deeds because He first loved us. This means we are forever telling the story as we pour out the soup in the soup line! The greatest love I can give another man is to tell him of the love of Christ.

### **What exactly is the Gospel?**

Simply put- the good news story is Jesus himself. The Gospel is the story of how God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself (**1 Cor. 5:18-21**) A story is just a story unless it is true. The Gospel story is the truth about How God sent His Son to be our sacrifice, to die in our place, to be raised from the dead in our behalf- this is the Gospel. Jesus is risen and seated at the right hand of almighty God. He is the story and He is the Gospel. That explains why Paul says, "*I sought to know nothing among you save Christ and Him crucified.*"

## **The Gospel Story And the Kingdom of God**

**Introduction:** The word “*gospel*” means “story” or “God’s story.” The four Gospels are in reality the story of a King and his kingdom. Each tells the story from a different perspective.

**Apply:** Western thought- we tend to analysis them and turn the Gospels into an instruction manual for successful living. The danger is it can put you under condemnation very quickly. Better to let each Gospel tell you its story and make its point.

**The Synoptics-** The three Gospels-Matthew Mark and Luke are called the “synoptics” because they tell the Story of Jesus differently, but uniquely the same (synoptic means to “see the same”)

**Matthew=** the theme is “fulfilled.” Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Covenant promises of a coming Messiah. For example, Matthew’s story begins with a genealogy that starts with Abraham, thus Jesus is the son of Israel, its Messiah

**Mark=** the theme is that Jesus the wonder/worker has come, He is the Servant/king coming to redeem all men. Mark has no genealogy, but rather begins with John the Baptizer

**Luke=**his genealogy begins with Adam, showing Jesus is the Savior of the world. He is for all men, not just Jews.

**John=** the fourth gospel, presents Jesus as the Eternal Word, God’s final word to mankind. He is the Word made flesh. His story begins in eternity past, from “the beginning.”

### **The four Gospels together tells us the story of Jesus:**

#### **I.** They tell us *one* story.

The story is that all of Creation is coming to a climax in the advent of the Kingdom of God.

They are announcing that a new era has come, a radical event has happened in the coming of King Jesus. Things will never be the same again!

#### **II.** They tell *us the rest* of the story-

The Old covenant is being fulfilled in the New. Israel the old has failed, but is being fulfilled in the new people of God- the Church. All the Gospels see the Kingdom of God as coming out of the Old Covenant. The whole bible is not many stories but is a unit, one big story, the old covenant being fulfilled in the new.

#### **III.** They tell us a *salvation* story- a Redeemer King has come to rescue mankind and establish His kingdom.

**Explain:** The story begins in Eden’s Garden where God creates man in His image. Adam was a king ruling the Garden. See **Genesis 1:28**

**Illustration:** God’s one word to Adam= “You are a King, rule and have dominion.”  
Satan’s one word to Adam= “you are not a King, you are a God”

**Apply:** the Gospel story is that God's King, Jesus is the 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam, (see **Romans 5: 12-19**) who climbed up on a Cross and made it His throne and defeated Satan's rule. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Adam is ruling and his throne is a Cross! Jesus has come and salvation for all mankind is possible to all who will receive His offer of grace and forgiveness.

#### IV. The Old Covenant *Exodus* story.

**Explain:** Israel's story is that God has delivered Israel out Egyptian bondage. That story is a continual theme in the Gospels-the King will deliver his people. Our Exodus is the Cross event- the death, burial, resurrection & ascension of King Jesus has provided our "exodus" from sin's bondage. In this sense, salvation is a deliverance from the bondage of sin.

#### **The Gospels & the Kingdom of God**

Salvation to the Jews was that a good and powerful King (like David) will win over a bad King. The lesson of the exile is God's judgment on a bad King (pharaoh) ruling over them. The fulfillment story is that our good King Jesus has sacrificed his life for our deliverance.

**Illustration:** In the book of **Daniel**, he has a vision where he sees the day when God will place His king (the Son of Man) on His throne to establish an everlasting Kingdom, ruling over the kingdom's of man. God's great King and His kingdom is coming.

**Note:** The Jews always saw this king and His Kingdom as physical, their concept of a Messiah as a Warrior King. See **Isiah 9:6, 7**

**Illustration:** John the Baptist offered Israel a *Lamb/King*, the Jews were expecting a *Lion/king*! Jesus was their Savior/king to deliver Israel, but the Jews only saw Rome and wanted to be delivered from Rome

#### V. The Gospel story is that "*messiah*" is here.

Jesus is Israel (prince of God) fulfilled. Just as the tribe of Israel was God's chosen Son, even so in a greater sense Jesus is Israel, God's promised Son. Jesus is not only the Son of David, He is the greater David.

#### VI. The Gospels tell us that the new people of God (indwelt by the Israel/Jesus) can do what Israel was meant to do. The Church's calling is to establish the rule of the King in every Nation.

#### **Summary and Action steps:**

1. The King has come and brings his Kingdom with Him.

This means “Kingdom Come” is already here. Where Jesus “is” his rule, power, and presence can be realized. The “already” and “not yet” has begun in the death, burial and resurrection of King Jesus.

2. The Kingdom is here NOW, and is in you-child of God.  
The Kingdom is within every born again child of God. Christ in you is the hope of Glory.
3. Kingdom rule is available to all who are indwelt with the Spirit of the King. Kingdom subjects have “dominion.” We are not ruled by circumstances, but by Kingdom power and presence. Jesus has given us his authority (see **Matthew 28:18**)
4. God’s Story (Gospel) says that like Adam of old, you have a role to play in the drama. You are to go out and “name the animals.” You have “Kingdom come” authority to do the will of God, to subdue the Earth and spread God’s image throughout the nations.
5. You must believe it, apply it, and bring “Kingdom come” to your life.

## The Authority of Scripture

### The Bible and Revelation

Knowing God is the most important thing in life. God created people fundamentally for relationship with himself. This relationship depends on knowing who he is as he has revealed himself. God is personal, which means he has a mind, will, emotions, relational ability, and self-consciousness. Because he is personal, and not merely an impersonal object, God must personally reveal himself to us. He has done this in general revelation (the world) and special revelation (the Word of God).

### General Revelation

General revelation is revelation of God given to all people at all times. This revelation is found both in the external creation ([Ps. 19:1](#), “*the heavens declare the glory of God*” and in internal human experience ([Rom. 1:19–20](#), “*what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse*”). General Revelation shows us the attributes of God—such as his existence, power, creativity, and wisdom; in addition, the testimony of human conscience also provides some evidence of God’s moral standards to all human beings ([Rom. 2:14–15](#)). This means that from general revelation all people have *some* knowledge that God exists, *some* knowledge of his character, and *some* knowledge of his moral standards. This results in an awareness of guilt before God as people instinctively know that they have not lived up to his moral requirements. Thus in the many false religions that have been invented people attempt to assuage their sense of guilt.

But General Revelation does not provide knowledge of the only true solution to man’s guilt before God: the forgiveness of sins that comes through Jesus Christ. This means that general revelation does not provide personal knowledge of God as a loving Father who redeems his people and establishes covenants with them. For this, one needs *Special Revelation*, which God has provided in his historical supernatural activities, in the Bible, and definitively in Jesus Christ.

### Special Revelation

The Bible is God’s written revelation of who he is and what he has done in redemptive history. Humans need this divine, transcendent perspective in order to break out of their subjective, culturally bound, fallen limitations. Through God’s written Word, his people may overcome error, grow in sanctification, minister effectively to others, and live abundant lives as God intended.

### The Inspiration of Scripture

The Bible is “God-breathed” (cf. [2 Tim. 3:16](#)) and gets its true, authoritative, powerful, holy character from God himself, who inspired human authors to write exactly what he wanted them to write. Instead of merely dictating words to them, God worked through their unique personalities and circumstances. Scripture is therefore both fully human and fully divine. It is

both the testimony of men to God's revelation, and divine revelation itself. "No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" ([2 Pet. 1:20–21](#)). Because the Bible is God's Word in human words, it can be trusted as the definitive revelation from the mouth of God himself.

### **The Inerrancy of Scripture**

The doctrine of inerrancy means that the Bible is entirely truthful and reliable in all that it affirms in its original manuscripts. Another way of saying this is that the Bible does not affirm anything that is contrary to fact. Because God is the ultimate author of the Bible, and because God is always perfectly truthful, it follows that his Word is completely truthful as well: He is the "God who never lies" ([Titus 1:2](#)). It would be contrary to his character to affirm anything false. God is all-knowing, always truthful and good, and all-powerful, so he always knows and tells the truth and is able to communicate and preserve his Word. "*O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant*" ([2 Sam. 7:28](#)). "*Every word of God proves true*" ([Prov. 30:5](#); cf. [Ps. 12:6](#); [119:42](#); [John 17:17](#)).

Inerrancy does not require twenty-first-century precision or scientifically technical language. The following quotation from the [Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy](#) summarizes what inerrancy does *not* mean:

"We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture. We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as a lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations" (*Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, Art. XIII).

The inerrancy of Scripture gives the believer great confidence in the Bible as his sure foundation for understanding all God wants him to know and all that he needs for godliness and eternal life.

### **The Clarity of Scripture**

The Bible itself acknowledges that some passages of Scripture are "hard to understand" ([2 Pet. 3:16](#), referring to some aspects of Paul's letters). In general, however, with the illumination of the Spirit ([2 Tim. 2:7](#)), the teaching of the Bible is clear to all who seek understanding with the goal of knowing and obeying God. His Word is said to "*make wise the simple*" ([Ps. 19:7](#); [119:30](#)). Jesus based his teaching squarely on the OT Scriptures: he assumed its teaching was clear and would often ask, "*Have you not read ...?*" (cf. [Matt. 12:3, 5](#); [19:14](#); [21:42](#); [22:31](#)).

Because of the basic clarity of the Bible, when Christians disagree over the meaning of a passage they can assume that the problem is not with the Bible but rather with themselves as interpreters. God has given us gifted leaders to further help his people's understanding ([1 Cor. 12:28](#); [Eph.](#)

[4:11](#)). Believers have the responsibility to read, interpret, and understand the Bible because it is basically clear. This was an assumption of the Protestant Reformers who sought to translate the Bible into the language of the common people. They believed that all true Christians are priests who are able to know God for themselves through his Word and to help others do the same.

### **The Sufficiency of Scripture**

Scripture provides all the words from God that we need in order to know God truly and personally, and everything we need him to tell us in order for us to live an abundant, godly life ([Ps. 19:7–9](#); [2 Tim. 3:15](#)). God has given his people a sufficient revelation of himself so that they are able to know, trust, and obey him. “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work*” ([2 Tim. 3:16–17](#)). God commands that nothing be added or taken away from the Bible, which indicates that it has always been exactly what he has wanted at each stage in its development throughout the history of salvation. “*You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you*” ([Deut. 4:2](#); cf. [Deut. 12:32](#); [Prov. 30:5–6](#)). The powerful admonition against tampering that stands at the conclusion of the entire Bible ([Rev. 22:18–19](#)) applies primarily, of course, to the book of Revelation, but in a secondary sense what it says may be applied to the Bible as a whole: “*I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book*” ([Rev. 22:18–19](#)).

Believers should find freedom and encouragement in the knowledge that God has provided all of the absolutely authoritative instruction that they need in order to know him and live as he intends. Therefore believers should be satisfied with what Scripture teaches and what it leaves unsaid. “*The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law*” ([Deut. 29:29](#)).

### **Jesus’ View of Scripture**

The most convincing reason to believe that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, clear, and sufficient is because this is what Jesus believed. His teaching assumed that the OT was the authoritative Word of his Father: “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished*” ([Matt. 5:17–18](#)). Jesus referred to dozens of OT persons and events and always treated OT history as historically accurate. He quoted from Genesis as his Father’s Word when he said, “*Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become*

*one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate*” ([Matt. 19:4–6](#)). Jesus not only assumed that the creation story was true, he also freely quoted words from the OT narrator as words that God himself “said.” It is not uncommon for Jesus’ theological arguments to depend on the truthfulness of the OT account



([Matt. 5:12; 11:23–24; 12:41–42; 24:37–39](#); [Luke 4:25–27; 11:50–51](#); [John 8:56–58](#)). Jesus' view of the OT as the Word of God aligns with the way the OT regularly speaks of itself.

Jesus saw his entire life as a fulfillment of Scripture ([Matt. 26:54](#); [Mark 8:31](#)). Throughout his life, Jesus used Scripture to resist temptation ([Matt. 4:1–11](#)) and to settle disputes ([Matt. 19:1–12; 22:39; 27:46](#); [Mark 7:1–13](#); [Luke 10:25–26](#)). At the end of his life, Jesus died quoting Scripture (cf. [Matt. 27:46](#) with [Ps. 22:1](#)). On his resurrection day he explained Scripture at length on the Emmaus road and to his disciples in Jerusalem ([Luke 24:13–17, 44–47](#)).

Conscious of his identity as God the Son, Jesus saw his teaching as no less divinely inspired than the OT. Jesus taught with an authority that distinguished him from other teachers of the law. He interpreted the law on his own authority rather than depending on rabbinic sources ([Matt. 5:21–48](#)). He described his teaching and the law as sharing the same permanence: “*heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away*” ([Matt. 24:35](#), cf. [Matt. 5:17–18](#); [John 14:10, 24](#)). Jesus viewed both the OT and his own teaching as the Word of God. The NT apostolic witness was a result of Jesus giving his disciples authority and power through the Holy Spirit to impart spiritual truths in writing no less than by word of mouth ([Mark 3:13–19](#); [John 16:12–14](#); [Acts 26:16–18](#); [1 Cor. 2:12–13](#)).

Jesus took Scripture to be the authoritative Word of God upon which he based his entire life. Those who follow Christ are called to treat Scripture (OT and NT together) in the same way. For Christians, the Bible is a source of great delight and joy. God is to be diligently sought in his Word ([1 Pet. 2:2](#)). The Word of God is a precious treasure that deserves to be studied, meditated upon, and obeyed:

*My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God ([Prov. 2:1–5](#)).*

### **The Living Word**

Finally and most importantly, The Apostle John declares Jesus to be the living embodiment of God's Word. In the prologue to the 4<sup>th</sup> Gospel John says of Jesus “*in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God*,” then he climaxes this prologue with “*and the Word became flesh, and pitched his tent among us,... and we beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of Grace and truth.*” [John 1:14](#)

Therefore we can declare that God the Father's final and greatest word (message) to mankind is embodied in His Son Jesus, the living Word.

# THE THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

**Edited from an essay in the ESV study Bible**

New Testament theology as a discipline is a branch of what scholars call “biblical theology.” Systematic theology and biblical theology overlap considerably since both explore the theology found in the Bible. Biblical theology however, concentrates on the historical story line of the Bible and explains the various steps in the progressive out-working of God’s plan in the redemptive history. In this article some of the main themes of the NT theology are presented.

## **Already but not yet**

The message of the NT cannot be separated from that of the OT. If you read only the NT without an understanding of the OT story you will fail to really know who Jesus is and what he came to do. The OT promised that God would save his people beginning with the promise that the seed of the woman would triumph over the seed of the serpent (**Gen. 3:15**). God’s saving promises were developed especially in the covenants he made with his people (1) the Abrahamic covenant promised God’s people land, seed, and universal blessing (**Gen.12:1-3**); (2) the Mosaic covenant pledged blessing if Israel obeyed the Law (**Exodus 19-24**); (3) the Davidic covenant promised a king in the Davidic line forever, and that through this king the promises originally made to Abraham would become a reality (**2 Samuel 7**; **Psalms 89; 132**) and (4) the new covenant promised that God would give his Spirit to the people and write his law on their hearts, so that they would obey his will (**Jer.3:31-34**; **Ezek. 36:26-27**).

As John the Baptist and Jesus arrived on the scene, it was obvious that God’s saving promises had not yet been realized. The Romans ruled over Israel, and a Davidic King did not reign in the land. The universal blessing promised to Abraham was scarcely a reality, for even in Israel it was sin, not righteousness that reigned. John the Baptist therefore summoned the people of Israel to repent and to receive water baptism to announce they were ready to receive the Messiah. They were to prepare for a coming One who would pour out the Spirit and judge the wicked.

## **Jesus of Nazareth**

Jesus represents the fulfillment of what John the Baptist prophesied. Jesus, like John, announced the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God (**Mark 1:15**), which is another way of saying that the saving promises found in the OT were about to be realized. The Kingdom of God, however, came in the most unexpected way. The Jews had anticipated that when the Kingdom arrived, the enemies of God would be immediately wiped out and a new creation would dawn (**Isa. 65:17**). Jesus taught, however, that the Kingdom was present in the person of Jesus and his ministry (**Luke 17:20-21**) and yet the foes of the Kingdom were not instantly annihilated. The Kingdom did not come with apocalyptic power but in as small as a mustard seed, and yet it would grow into a great tree that would tower over the entire earth. It was as undetectable as leaven mixed into flour, but the leaven would eventually transform the entire batch of dough (**Matt. 13:31-33**). In other words, the Kingdom was already present in Jesus and his ministry, but it was not yet present in its entirety. It was “*already- but not yet*.” It was inaugurated but not consummated. 1

Jesus fulfilled the role of the servant of the Lord in **Isaiah 53**, taking upon himself the sins of his people and suffering death for the forgiveness of their sins. The day of judgment was still to come in the future, even though there would be an interval between God's beginning to fulfill his promises in Jesus (the Kingdom inaugurated) and the final realization of his promises (the Kingdom consummated). Jesus, who has been reigning since he rose from the dead, will return and sit on his glorious throne and judge between the sheep and the goats (**Matt. 25:31-46**). Hence, believers pray both for the progressive growth and for the final consummation of the Kingdom in the words "*your Kingdom come*" (**Matt.6:10**).

### **The Synoptic Gospels**

Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus on the promise of the Kingdom, and John's gospel expresses a similar truth with the phrase "*eternal life*." Eternal life is the life of the age to come, which will be realized when the new creation dawns. Remarkable in the John's Gospel is the claim that those who believe in the son enjoy the life of the coming age now. Those who have put their faith in Jesus have already passed from death to life (**John 5:24-25**), for he is the resurrection and the life (**John 11:25**) still, John also looks ahead to the day of the final resurrection, when every person will be judged for what he or she has done (**John 5:28-29**). While the focus in John is on the initial fulfillment is in view as well.

The "*already-not yet*" theme dominates the entire NT and functions as a key to grasping the whole story. The resurrection of Jesus indicates that the age to come has arrived, that now is the day of salvation. In the same way the gift of the Holy Spirit represents one of God's end-time promises. The NT writers joyously proclaim that the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has been fulfilled (e.g., **Acts 2:16-21; Roman. 8: 9-16; Eph.1:13-14**). The last days have come through Jesus Christ (**Heb. 1:1-2**), through whom we have received God's final and definitive word. Since the resurrection has penetrated history and the Spirit has been given, we might think that salvation history has been completed- but there is still the "*not yet*." Jesus has been raised from the dead, but believers await the resurrection of their bodies and must battle against sin until the day of redemption (**Rom. 8:10-13 23; 1Cor. 15:12-28; 1 Pet. 2:11**). Jesus reigns on high at the right hand of God, but all things have not yet been subjected to him (**Heb. 2:5-9**).

### **Fulfillment through Jesus Christ, the Son of God**

The NT highlights the fulfillment of God's saving promises, but it particularly stresses those promises and covenants are realized through his son, Jesus the Christ.

Who is Jesus? According to the NT, he is the new and better Moses, declaring God's word as the sovereign interpreter of the Mosaic Law (**Matt. 5:17-48; Heb. 3: 1-6**). In-deed, the law and the prophets point to him and find their fulfillment in him, Jesus is the new Joshua who gives final rest to his people (**Heb. 3:7-4:13**). He is the true wisdom of God, fulfilling and transcending wisdom themes from the OT (**Col. 2:1-3**.) In the Gospels, Jesus is often recognized as a prophet. Indeed, Jesus is the final prophet predicted by Moses (**Deut.18:15; Acts, 3: 22-23; 7:37**). Jesus' miracles, healings and authority over demons indicate that the promises of the Kingdom are fulfilled in him (**Matt. 12:28**), but his miracles also indicate that he shares God's authority and is himself divine, for only the Creator –Lord can walk on water and calm the sea

**(Matt. 8: 23-27; cf. Ps. 107:29).** Jesus is the Messiah, who brings to realization the promise that one would sit on David's throne forever. Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah is fundamental to all the Gospels and the missionary preaching of Acts, and is an accepted truth in the Epistles and Revelation. To say Jesus is messiah is to declare he is king. When his disciples call him "lord" they are recognizing him as God's sovereign King.

The stature of Jesus shines out in the NT narrative, for he authoritatively calls on others to be his disciples summoning them to follow him **(Matt. 4: 18-22; Luke 9:57-62)**. Indeed, a person's response to Jesus determines his or her final destiny **(Matt.10.32-33; cf, 1 Cor.16:22)** Jesus is the Son of Man who will receive the Kingdom from the Ancient of Days **(Dan. 7:13-14)** and will reign forever. The Gospels emphasize, however, that his reign has been realized through suffering, for he is also the servant of the Lord who has atoned for the sins of his people **(Isa. 52:13-53:12; Mark 14:24; Rom. 4: 25; 1Pet.2:21-25)**.

The One who atones for sin is fully God and divine. He has the authority to forgive sins **(Mark 2:7)**. Various NT occurrences of the word "name" indicate Jesus' divine status: people prophesy in his name **(Matt. 7:22)**. And are to hope in his name **(Matt. 12:21)**. And salvation comes in his name alone **(Acts. 4:12)**. But the OT establishes that human beings are to prophesy only in God's name. hope only in the Lord, and find salvation only in him; thus, such use of Jesus' name indicates his divinity.

The Greek translation of the OT (the Septuagint) identifies Yahweh as "the Lord." In quoting or alluding to OT texts that refers to Yahweh, the NT authors often apply title "Lord" to Jesus and evidently use it in that strong OT sense (e.g., **Acts.2: 21; Phil. 2:10-11; Heb. 1: 10-12**). The title is therefore another clear piece of evidence supporting Christ's divinity Jesus is the image of God **(Col.1:15 cf. Heb. 1:3)**. He is in the very form of God, and is equal to God, though he temporarily surrendered some of that so human beings could be saved **(Phil.2:6-8)**. Jesus is the Son of God **(cf. Matt.28:18; John 20:31; Rom. 8:32)** and is worshipped just as the Father is **(cf. Revelation 4-5)** His majestic stature is memorialized by a meal celebrated in his memory **(Mark 14: 22-25)** and by people being baptized in his name **(Acts 2: 38; 10:48)**. The Son of God is the eternal divine word (GK logos) who has become flesh and has been identified as the man who is God's Son **(John 1: 1, 14)**. Finally, in a number of texts Jesus is specifically called "God" (e.g., **John. 1:1, 18; 20:28; Rom.9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1**). Such texts involve no trace or the heresy of either modalism or tritheism. Rather, such statements contain the raw materials from which the doctrine of the Trinity was rightly formulated.

New Testament theology, then, is Christ- centered and God-focused, for what Christ does on earth brings glory to God **(John 17: 1; Phil.2:11)**. The NT particularly focuses on Jesus' work on the cross, by which he redeemed and saved his people. The story line in each of the Gospels culminates in and focuses on Jesus' death and resurrection. Indeed, the narrative of Jesus' suffering and death consumes a significant amount of space in the Gospels, indicating that the cross and resurrection are the story. In Acts we see the growth of the church and the expansion of the mission, as the Apostles and others proclaim the crucified and resurrected Lord. The Epistles explain the significance of Jesus' work on the cross and his resurrection, so that believers are enabled to grab the height, depth, breadth, and width of the love of God **(Rom. 8:39)**.

The significance of the cross is explained in relation to themes such as new creation, adoption, forgiveness of sins, justification, reconciliation, redemption sanctification, and propitiation woven together, these themes teach that salvation comes from the Lord. And that Jesus as the Christ has redeemed his people from the guilt and bondage of sin.

### **The promise of the Holy Spirit**

Bound up with the work of Christ is the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised to send the Spirit to those who are truly his disciples (**John 14:16-17, 26; 15:26**). And he poured out the Spirit on his people at Pentecost (**Acts 2: 1-4; 33**) after he had been exalted to the right hand of the Father. The Spirit was given bring glory to Jesus Christ (**John 16: 14**) So that Christ would be magnified as the great Savior and Redeemer. Luke and Acts in particular emphasize that the Spirit is given for ministry, so that the church is empowered to bear witness to Jesus Christ. At the same time, having the Spirit within is the mark of person belonging to the people of God (**Acts. 10:44-48; 15:17-9; Rom. 8: 9; Gal. 3:1-5**). The Spirit also strengthens believers, so that they are enabled to live in a way that is pleasing to God. Transformation into Christlikeness is the Spirit's work (**Rom. 8:2, 4:13,14; Cor. 3:18; Gal. 5:16,18**).

### **The Human Response**

Because of sin, all humanity stands in need of the salvation that Christ brings. The power of sin is reflected in the biblical story line, for even Israel as the chosen people of the Lord lived under the dominion of sin, showing that the written law of God by its own power cannot deliver human beings from bondage to sin. Paul emphasizes that sin and death are twin powers that rule over all people, so that they stand in need of the redemption Christ brings (**see Rom, 1:18-3:20; 5:1-7:25**). Sin does not merely constitute failure to keep the law of God but represents personal rebellion against God's lordship (**1 John 3:4**). The essence of sin is idolatry, in which people refuse to give thanks and praise to the one and only God, and worship the creature rather than the Creator (**Rom. 1:18-25**).

But sin is not the last word, since Jesus Christ came to the save sinners, hereby highlighting the mercy and grace of God. The fundamental response demanded by God is faith and repentance. The call to faith and repentance is evident in the ministry of John the Baptist. In Jesus' announcement of the Kingdom (**Mark 1:15**). In the speeches in Acts, In the Pauline letters, and throughout the NT. Those who desire to be part of Jesus' new community (the church) and part of the Kingdom of God (God's rule in people's hearts and lives) must forsake false gods; renounce self-worship and evil and turn to Jesus as Lord and Master. The call to repentance is nothing less than a summons to abandonment of sin and to personal faith, whereby people are called to trust in the saving work of the Lord on their behalf instead of thinking that they can save themselves. All people everywhere have violated God's will and must look outside of themselves to the saving work of Christ for deliverance from God's wrath. Indeed, the whole of the NT can be understood as a call to repentance and faith (**cf. Hebrews 1:10**)-. Even those who are already believers are to exert themselves in faith and repentance as long as life lasts, for this is the mark of Christ's true disciples. The NT writers constantly encourage their readers to persevere in faith until the end, and warn of dangers of rejection of Jesus as Lord.

True believers testify that salvation is of the Lord, and that Jesus Christ is the One who has delivered them from the coming wrath.

### **The People of God**

The saving promise of God, then, have begun to be fulfilled in the new community, the church of Jesus Christ. The church is composed of believers in Jesus Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, for the laws in the OT that separated Jews and Gentiles (e.g., circumcision, purity laws, and special festivals and holidays) are no longer in force. The church is God's new temple indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and is called to live out the beauty of the gospel by showing the supreme mark of Christ's disciples; love for one another (**John 13:34-35**).

The Church recognizes, however, that she exists in an interim state. She eagerly awaits the return of Jesus Christ, and the consummation of all of God's purpose. In the interim, the church is to live out her life in holiness and godliness as the radiant bride of Christ and the herald the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth, so that others who live in the darkness of sin may be transferred from Satan's Kingdom to the Kingdom of the Lord. The Church longs for the day when she will behold God face to face and worship Jesus Christ forever. The new creation will be a full reality. All things will be new, and the Lord will be praised forever for his love and mercy and grace—for NT theology is ultimately about glorifying and praising God.

# How the New Testament Quotes and Interprets the Old Testament

## A Variety of Kinds of “Uses”

We begin by observing that there is a variety of ways the NT authors can refer to the OT. They can quote it directly (as [Matt. 1:23](#) cites [Isa. 7:14](#)); they can allude to it (as [John 1:1–5](#) alludes to [Genesis 1](#)); they can use OT vocabulary with a meaning conditioned by OT usage (e.g., “the righteousness of God”); they can refer to the OT’s broad concepts (such as monotheism and creation); and they can refer to the basic overarching story of the OT (e.g., [Rom. 1:1–6](#)).

The second observation is that there is no reason to expect a single, one-size-fits-all explanation that covers every instance of the NT using the OT. For example, an author may be intending to specify the one meaning of the OT text, or he may be using the OT text as providing an example or pattern that illuminates something he is writing about. He may draw a moral lesson from some event (e.g., [Mark 2:25–26](#)), and he might find an analogy between his audience and the ancient people (e.g., [1 Cor. 10:6–11](#)). He might be making a point about how the Gentile Christians inherit the privileges of Israel ([1 Pet. 2:9–10](#)), or he might be explaining why Christians need not keep some provision of the OT (e.g., [Mark 7:19](#); [Eph. 2:19](#)). Paul describes his own calling in terms that remind us of the servant of the Lord ([Gal. 1:15](#) evoking [Isa. 49:1](#)): since Isaiah’s servant is a messianic figure (as Paul knew, cf. [Acts 13:47](#); [Rom. 10:16](#); [15:21](#)), it is best to see Paul as likening his own calling in some way to that of the servant, rather than as claiming that *he* was the servant.

## Text Form

This part is the least controversial. As a general rule, NT authors cite the OT in a Greek form that is basically the Septuagint that is available in printed form today (see [The Septuagint](#)). There are places where the NT author’s citation differs slightly from that of the Septuagint: either because the author has adjusted the quotation to fit the syntax of his own sentence or otherwise adapted it to his purpose, or because he has quoted the Septuagint from memory. Therefore one cannot say that, in using a Greek version, the NT authors have in any way slighted the original intent of the OT authors.

## NT Reflection on the Use of the OT

Several NT texts discuss the general stance by which Christians do, and should, approach the OT. The first is [Romans 1:1–6](#), where Paul describes the “gospel of God” as “promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures.” The content that follows narrates Jesus’ public entry onto his Davidic throne through his resurrection, and Paul’s apostleship as the outworking of Jesus’ program “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations”: Paul is explaining that the events of Jesus’ victory, and the witness of the early Christians, are just what the OT had foretold. This is the kind of reading the OT itself invites (see [The Theology of the Old Testament](#)). Later in the same letter ([Rom. 15:4](#)), Paul says, “For whatever was written in former days [i.e., in the OT] was written for our instruction [i.e., as Christians].” He then goes on (in [vv. 9–13](#)) to cite several OT texts about the expectation of the coming era when the Gentiles would receive the light and join in worship with the faithful of Israel: the mixed congregations of Jewish and Gentile Christians are the fulfillment of that hope.

In [1 Corinthians 10:1](#), Paul alludes to OT events, saying “our fathers” experienced them. The church in Corinth, however, had a considerable proportion of converted Gentiles; so this means that Paul is treating the Gentile Christians as having been “grafted in” ([Rom. 11:17ff.](#)) to the olive tree (the people of God, cf. [Jer. 11:16](#)), and every bit as much heirs of the story as Jewish Christians are. After listing the ways that God judged the unfaithful among the ancient people ([1 Cor. 10:6–10](#)), Paul explains that “these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.” God expects those who profess to be Christians to be sure their faith is real, just as he did the people in the Pentateuch.

[Hebrews 11](#) is able to parade the OT faithful before its audience (probably mostly Jewish Christians) to show them that they must persevere in faith just as the ancients did.

In [Luke 24:25–27, 44–47](#), Jesus “interpreted to [his disciples] in all the [OT] Scriptures the things concerning himself.” Luke does not tell us what that Bible study actually said. Some Christian interpreters have understood this to mean that it is possible to find in every part of the OT a “foreshadowing” of some aspect of the work of Jesus. However, other interpreters think it is enough to recognize both that there are specific texts that predict the messianic work, and that the entire trend of the OT story was heading toward Jesus’ victory after his suffering, which would usher in the era in which the Gentiles would receive God’s light ([Luke 24:47](#), “to all nations”).

### **Basic Catalog of NT Uses of the OT**

When the apostles applied the OT to NT realities, they were following a long line of citing earlier Scripture, using a set of practices that can be found in the OT itself. For example, OT writers could allude to an earlier passage and elaborate on it (e.g., [Psalms 8 and 104](#) use [Genesis 1–2](#)); or they could allude to an earlier text and give a more precise nuance to it (as [Ps. 72:17](#) takes the more general [Gen. 22:18](#) and ties it specifically to the house of David). They could recognize a promise (e.g., [Dan. 9:2](#) finding in [Jer. 25:12](#) a promise for the length of Babylonian domination). They could see patterns of God’s behavior repeated (e.g., many Psalms allude to [Ex. 34:6–7](#) as God’s way of dealing with his people). They could also take texts from earlier generations and apply them to new situations (e.g., [Neh. 8:14–17](#) is often seen as an example of actualizing the laws of [Lev. 23:39–42](#) in concert with [Deut. 16:13–15](#); cf. also the well-known pairing of [Jer. 22:24–27](#) and [Hag. 2:23](#)).

The NT writers exhibit these uses due to their conviction that Christians are the heirs of Israel’s story; they exhibit other uses as well due to their conviction that the resurrection of Jesus had ushered in a new era, the messianic age—“the last days” foretold by the prophets. These authors saw themselves as God’s authorized interpreters for this new era that God had opened in the story of his people.

The early Christian missionaries went to synagogues to prove from the OT Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ (cf. [Acts 17:1–3; 18:26–28](#)). This implies that they relied on and used publicly accessible arguments from the text itself, rather than merely private insights—otherwise, they would have been unjust to hold anyone responsible for failing to see something that was not truly there. Luke praises the Berean Jews, who examined the OT to see whether what Paul and



Silas told them was so ([Acts 17:11](#)): this implies that the NT invites critical interaction over its appeal to the OT, and is not solely dependent on the “insider’s” point of view.

In classifying these uses, the basic questions are:

- What is it about the OT text that enables the NT writer to use it the way he does?
- What is the NT writer’s stance toward the “original meaning” of the OT text?
- What rhetorical goal is the NT writer trying to achieve by using the OT text as he does?
- In what ways does the NT author resemble and differ from interpretative principles found among other interpreters who come from the same period of time, particularly other Second Temple Jewish authors who were not Christians?

The categories in this catalog are intended to be broad and suggestive; there is no substitute for a case-by-case examination of the various passages.

*Promise and fulfillment.* In many cases the NT writers understood their OT texts as providing a promise about where the story was headed, and identify a particular event as the fulfillment (or partial fulfillment) of a promise. For example, [Matthew 12:17–21](#) understood the servant of the Lord in [Isaiah 42:1–3](#) as the Messiah, with Jesus being the promised person. Likewise, in [Romans 15:12](#) Paul sees the spread of Christian faith among the Gentiles as fulfilling the expectation of [Isaiah 11:1–10](#).

*Pattern and fulfillment.* This is often called “typology,” and it refers to the way patterns found in the OT enable Christians to understand their own situation in, through, and under Christ. For example, the way that a lamb in the sin or guilt offering serves as an innocent substitute to work atonement explains how Jesus’ sacrifice benefits believers (see note on [Isa. 53:7](#), the probable background to [John 1:29](#)).

*Analogy and application.* Sometimes the NT writers find some kind of resemblance between their situation and an earlier one, and derive principles from the OT passage for addressing the new situation. The examples of [Mark 2:25–26](#) and [1 Corinthians 10:6–10](#) have already been mentioned.

When an author is using an analogy, he is not offering an interpretation of the original intent of the OT text; nevertheless, the analogies respect the original intent. For example, in [Matthew 21:42](#), Jesus uses [Psalm 118:22–23](#) (about “the stone the builders rejected”) to describe the way the Jewish leaders rejected him. Though many understand this to be a messianic prediction, the main point Jesus makes is that Jewish leaders who rejected him are (by analogy) just as wrong and wretched ([Matt. 21:41](#)) as the great world powers that thought so little of Israel (see note on [Ps. 118:22–23](#)).

Understanding the use of analogy in this way will help when encountering some NT texts that are more difficult. In [1 Corinthians 9:9](#) and [1 Timothy 5:18](#), Paul cites an OT law ([Deut. 25:4](#)) about not muzzling an ox, and he applies it as a justification for paying those in ministry. The OT text is based on a principle of caring for working animals; Paul’s application seems to be based on a “How much more should we care for those who serve us with the word” kind of

argument in [Galatians 4:21–31](#), Paul constructs an “allegory” from Hagar and Sarah in Genesis, in order to convince his readers to reject the false teachers. There is no need to think he is disclosing any kind of additional meaning in Genesis, nor is he disregarding the original intent of the OT passages; he is simply likening those who follow his message to the “children of promise” (supernaturally produced like Isaac), and those who follow the false teachers to him “who was born according to the flesh” (i.e., to Ishmael).

*Eschatological continuity.* As indicated in [The Theology of the Old Testament](#), “eschatology” in the OT is focused on the coming era in which the Messiah will lead his people in bringing the light to the Gentiles; the NT position is that this era began with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. These are separate chapters in the unfolding story of God’s work in the world, but they exhibit continuity because it is the same God at work, who saves people in the same way (cf. [Rom. 4:1–8](#)), who grafts believing Gentiles into the olive tree of his people ([Rom. 11:17](#)), and who is restoring the image of God in them. Hence Christian believers, both Jew and Gentile, share the privilege of the mission of Israel (e.g., [1 Pet. 2:9–10](#), looking back to [Ex. 19:5–6](#) and other texts). Thus, the Ten Commandments supply moral guidance to Christians ([Rom. 13:8–10](#)). The same “righteousness of God”—God’s uprightness and faithfulness in keeping his promises—that the OT celebrates lies behind God’s sending Jesus ([Rom. 1:17](#)).

*Eschatological discontinuity.* This category is related to the previous one and reflects the change in redemptive era. For example, God’s faithful no longer need to observe the OT food laws, whose purpose was to distinguish Israel from the Gentiles ([Lev. 20:24–26](#); cf. [Acts 10:9–23](#)). Other aspects of the Sinai covenant are likewise no longer directly applicable to God’s people, such as the sacrificial system and the theocratic government centered in Jerusalem.

*Development.* [Psalm 72:17](#) does not change the promise of blessing-to-the-nations of [Genesis 22:18](#) but rather develops it by bringing the manner of fulfillment into sharper focus. In the same way, [Isaiah 52:13–53:12](#) certainly describes the career of the Messiah in terms of rejection and humiliation followed by vindication and victory. As the note on [Isaiah 53:10](#) explains, death is clearly not the messianic servant’s end; but resurrection is not explicit there (although it now seems to be the natural inference). Thus [1 Corinthians 15:3–4](#) can say, “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (probably echoing [Isa. 53:10](#)), and “he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (developing, or clarifying, [Isa. 53:10](#)). The assumption behind these examples is that the story is moving along, and God can feed new events and insights into the process (in the case of [Ps. 72:17](#), by giving an oracle establishing the Davidic covenant; in the case of [1 Cor. 15:4](#), by raising Jesus from the dead).

*“Fuller sense.”* Christians have used the Latin term *sensus plenior* (“fuller sense”) for cases where the NT seems to find a meaning in the OT that goes much farther beyond the original intent of the earlier passage than simple development. There is every reason to allow for such cases, when one considers that God is both planning events and inspiring the biblical authors as his authentic interpreters. Nevertheless it is wise to be careful: in many cases the suggestion of *sensus plenior* stems from a misapprehension of the earlier text or of the NT usage (see discussion of [Matt. 2:15/Hos. 11:1](#) below; see note on [Ps. 16:9–11](#)). There are some instances, however, where this does in fact seem to be what the NT author has done: e.g., in [John 1:1–5](#), John describes “the Word” as a divine Person active in the creation; he is echoing

[Genesis 1:1–2:3](#) but seeing something there that Moses did not say. Nevertheless, as the notes on [Psalm 33:4–9](#) explain, this is not out of step with Genesis (see also note on [Gen. 1:26](#) for the Trinity). One can imagine Moses saying, if he had been presented with John's Gospel, "Well, I never thought of it that way, but now that you come to say it like that, I can see where you got it, and I like it": that is, he would not think that his original intent had been violated. It is tenuous, however, to advocate a *sensus plenior* that dispenses with original intent.

[Matthew 2:15](#) is often taken as a case of *sensus plenior* because it says that when the holy family took shelter in Egypt (later to return to Palestine), this was to "fulfill" the words of [Hosea 11:1](#), "Out of Egypt I called my son." Is Matthew finding a "messianic meaning" in Hosea that no one could have seen before? Probably not: it is more likely that Matthew found in Hosea a convenient summary of the exodus that contained the term "son." (Many prophets summarize the exodus as a way of reminding Israel of their obligations to the Lord: cf. [Amos 3:1–2](#).) One of Matthew's themes is that Jesus showed himself the true Messiah (the Davidic representative of Israel) by embodying all that Israel was called to be, and doing so faithfully (in contrast to Israel). On the "son of God" idea, an important theme for Matthew, see note on [Psalm 2:7](#). So Jesus' experience "fulfilled" the pattern of the exodus, which means that this is a case of pattern and fulfillment.

*Deity of Christ.* NT authors often apply OT texts to Jesus that originally applied to Yahweh, the God of Israel. For example, [Hebrews 1:10–12](#) describes Jesus by using [Psalm 102:25–27](#), which is about God's eternity. This is not because the psalm is directly messianic but because NT authors accept that Jesus is Yahweh incarnate (cf. [John 1:1–14](#)). Thus the NT uses these texts consistently with their original intent—they describe the Lord—and recognize that their description applies to Jesus as being no less truly the Lord than is God the Father.

In all of these cases the NT authors view themselves as the proper heirs and faithful interpreters of the OT.

## The Trinity

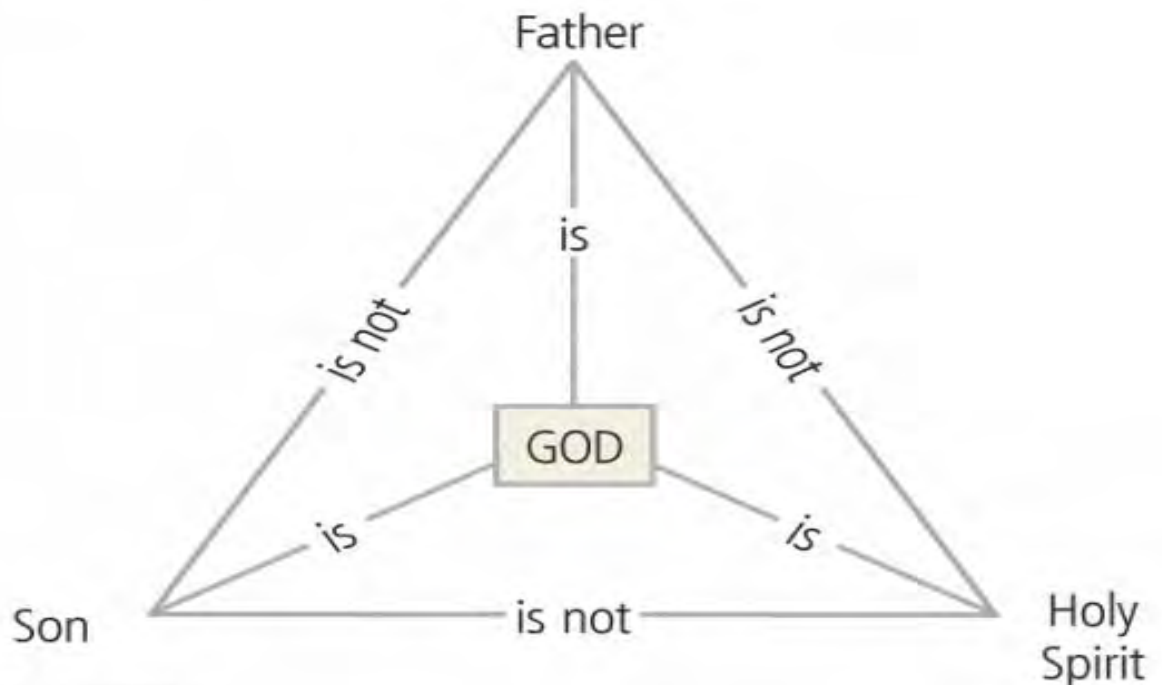
(ESV resources revised)

The biblical teaching on the Trinity embodies four essential affirmations:

1. The Scriptures teach that there is One and only One true and living God. **Deuteronomy 6:4**
2. Both old and new Covenants affirm that the One true God eternally exists in three persons—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.
3. These three persons in the God-head are completely equal in attributes, each with the same divine nature.
4. While each person in the God-head is *fully* and *completely* God, the persons are not identical.

The differences among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are found in the way they relate to one another and the role each plays in accomplishing their unified purpose.

The unity of nature and distinction of persons of the Trinity is helpfully illustrated in this diagram.



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### God Is One God: Monotheism

There is nothing more fundamental to biblical theology than monotheism (the biblical belief that there is one and only one God): “Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one” ([Deut. 6:4](#)). This verse, known as the [Shema](#) in Hebrew (from the opening verb of the verse, meaning “hear”

or “listen”), is one of the most familiar and foundational verses in the OT. God rejects polytheism (belief in many gods) and demands exclusive devotion: “I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God” ([Isa. 45:5](#); cf. [Deut. 4:35, 39](#); [1 Kings 8:60](#); [Isa. 40:18; 46:9](#)). The NT affirms the deity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as we shall see, but does not waver from OT monotheism ([John 17:3](#); [1 Cor. 8:4–6](#); [1 Tim. 2:5](#); [James 2:19](#)). Jesus quotes the *Shema* in a debate with the Jewish leaders ([Mark 12:29](#)), and Paul continues to teach that there is one God while recognizing Jesus as the divine-human Mediator between God and man ([1 Tim. 2:5](#)).

## Implications of Monotheism

Because there is only one God, idolatry of any kind is evil, foolish, wrong, and harmful. Worship of other “gods” robs the true God of the devotion and glory he alone deserves. Idolatry can take many forms. Idols are not only man-made objects but are *anything* allowed to compete with God for ultimate loyalty. According to Jesus, money can become an idol: “You cannot serve God and money” ([Matt. 6:24](#)). Greed, lust, and impurity can also become indicators of idolatry ([Eph. 5:5](#); [Col. 3:5](#)). Idolatry is foolish, deceptive, and dangerous—and may even involve demonic activity ([1 Cor. 10:19–20](#)).

Because there is only one God, he alone should be the ultimate object of the believer’s affections. He alone deserves absolute allegiance and obedience. The Great Commandment that follows the *Shema* is the obvious implication of monotheism: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” ([Deut. 6:5](#)). The one true God deserves all we are and have. He deserves wholehearted love because nothing compares with him.

## God Is Three Persons: The Tri-unity of God

As the nature of God is progressively revealed in Scripture, the one God is seen to exist eternally in three persons. These three persons share the same divine nature yet are different in role and relationship. The basic principle at the heart of God’s triune being is *unity* and *distinction*, both coexisting without either being compromised. Anything that is necessarily true of God is true of Father, Son, and Spirit. They are equal in essence yet distinct in function.

The doctrine of the Trinity is most fully realized in the NT where the divine Father, Son, and Spirit are seen accomplishing redemption. But while the NT gives the clearest picture of the Trinity, there are hints within the OT of what is yet to come. In the beginning of the Bible, the Spirit of God is “hovering over the face of the waters” at creation ([Gen. 1:2](#)) and is elsewhere described as a personal being, possessing the attributes of God and yet distinct from Yahweh ([Isa. 48:16](#); [61:1](#); [63:10](#)). Some interpreters think that the plurality within God is seen in the Hebrew word for God, *’Elohim*, which is plural in form (though others disagree that this is significant; the word is used with singular verbs and all agree that it has a singular meaning in the OT). In addition, the use of plural pronouns when God refers to himself hints at a plurality of persons: “Then God said, ‘Let *us* make man in *our* image’” ([Gen. 1:27](#); cf. [Gen. 3:22](#); [11:7](#); [Isa. 6:8](#)).

The plurality of God also seems to be indicated when the Angel of the Lord appears in the OT as one who represents Yahweh, while yet at times this angel seems to be no different in attributes or actions from God himself (cf. [Gen. 16:7, 10–11, 13; 18:1–33; Ex. 3:1–4:31; 32:20–22; Num. 22:35, 38; Judg. 2:1–2; 6:11–18](#)). There are also passages in the OT that call two persons God or Lord: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your companions” ([Ps. 45:6–7](#)). David says, “The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’” ([Ps. 110:1](#)). The God who is set above his companions ([Ps. 45:6](#)) and the Lord of [Psalm 110:1](#) are recognized as Christ in the NT ([Heb. 1:8, 13](#)). Christ himself applies [Psalm 110:1](#) to himself ([Matt. 22:41–46](#)). Other passages give divine status to a messianic figure distinct from Yahweh ([Prov. 8:22–31; 30:4; Dan. 7:13–14](#)).

The OT glimpses of God’s plurality blossom into the full picture of the Trinity in the NT, where the deity and distinct personalities of Father, Son, and Spirit function together in perfect unity and equality (on the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit, see [The Person of Christ](#)). Perhaps the clearest picture of this distinction and unity is Jesus’ baptism, where the Son is anointed for his public ministry by the Spirit, descending as a dove, with the Father declaring from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” ([Matt. 3:13–17](#)). All three persons of the Trinity are present, and each one is doing something different.

The NT authors employ a Trinitarian cadence as they write about the work of God. Prayers of blessing and descriptions of gifts within the body of Christ are Trinitarian in nature: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” ([2 Cor. 13:14](#)); “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone” ([1 Cor. 12:4–6](#)). The persons of the Trinity are also linked in the baptismal formula of [Matthew 28:19–20](#), “baptizing them in [or into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” There are many other passages that reveal the Trinitarian, or at least the plural, nature of God (e.g., [John 14:16, 26; 16:13–15; 20:21–22; Rom. 8:9; 15:16, 30; 2 Cor. 1:21–22; Gal. 4:4–6; Eph. 2:18; 4:4–6; 1 Pet. 1:1–2; 1 John 4:2, 13–14; Jude 20–21](#)).

Differences in roles also appear consistently in biblical testimonies concerning the relationships between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The uniform pattern of Scripture is that the Father plans, directs, and sends; the Son is sent by the Father and is subject to the Father’s authority and obedient to the Father’s will; and both Father and Son direct and send the Spirit, who carries out the will of both. Yet this is somehow consistent with equality in being and in attributes. The Father created through the Son ([John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2](#)), and the Father planned redemption and sent the Son into the world ([John 3:16; Rom. 8:29; Gal. 4:4; Eph. 1:3–5](#)). The Son obeyed the Father and accomplished redemption for us ([John 4:34; 5:19; 6:38; Heb. 10:5–7](#); cf. [Matt. 26:64; Acts 2:33; 1 Cor. 15:28; Heb. 1:3](#)). The Father did not come to die for our sins, nor did the Holy Spirit, but that was the role of the Son. The Father and Son both send



the Holy Spirit in a new way after Pentecost ([John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7](#)). These relationships existed eternally ([Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4; Rev. 13:8](#)), and they provide the basis for simultaneous equality and differences in various human relationships. Within God there is both unity and diversity: unity without uniformity, and diversity without division. The early church saw this Trinitarian balance clearly. For example, the **Athanasian Creed** (c. a.d. 500) says:

*“We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity; we distinguish among the persons, but we do not divide the substance. ... The entire three persons are co-eternal and co-equal with one another, so that ... we worship complete unity in Trinity and Trinity in Unity.”*

This unity and diversity is at the heart of the great mystery of the Trinity. Unity without uniformity is baffling to finite minds, but the world shows different types of reflections of this principle of oneness and distinction at every turn. What is the source of the transcendent beauty in a symphony, the human body, marriage, ecosystems, the church, the human race, a delicious meal, or a perfectly executed fast break in basketball? Is it not, in large part, due to the distinct parts coming together to form a unified whole, leading to a unified result? Unity and distinction—the principle at the heart of the Trinity—can be seen in much of what makes life so rich and beautiful. Woven into the fabric of the world are multiple reflections of the One who made it with unity and distinction as the parallel qualities of its existence.

## **Practical Implications of the Trinity**

1. The doctrine of the Trinity makes definitive revelation of God possible as he is known in Christ: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known” ([John 1:18](#)). No man can see God and live ([Ex. 33:20; 1 Tim. 6:16](#)), but God the Son provided an actual manifestation of God in the flesh.
2. The Trinity makes the atonement possible. Redemption of sinful man is accomplished through the distinct and unified activity of each person of the Godhead: “how much more will the blood of *Christ*, who through the eternal *Spirit* offered himself without blemish to *God*, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God” ([Heb. 9:14](#)).
3. Because God is triune, he has eternally been personal and relational in his own being, in full independence from his creation. God has never had any unmet needs, “nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything” ([Acts 17:25](#)). Personhood becomes real only within realized relationships, and the reality of relationship can only exist where one has something or someone that is not oneself to relate to; if, then, God had not been plural in himself he could not have been a personal, relational God till he had begun creating, and thus would have been dependent on creation for his own personhood, which is a notion as nonsensical as it is unscriptural. Between the persons of

the Trinity, there has always existed total relational harmony and expression; God is, from this standpoint, a perfect society in himself. Apart from the plurality in the Trinity, either God's eternal independence of the created order or his eternally relational personal existence would have to be denied

4. The doctrine of the Trinity is well beyond human ability to ever fully comprehend. However, it is central to understanding the nature of God and the central events in the history of salvation, in which God is seen acting as, in effect, a tripersonal team. Biblical Christianity stands or falls with the doctrine of the Trinity



# How to Approach Scripture

## A layman's hermeneutics

### The Goal

In **2 Timothy 3:15-17**, our purpose in reading scripture is to be equipped thoroughly for every good work. To do this we must approach Scripture with the purpose to hear something from God that enhances my relationship to God thru Jesus Christ.

Thus the goal is to see Jesus in His Word to me, *“to make you wise unto salvation thru Christ” v15*. As you read Scripture, Scripture reads you, questions you, reveals your thoughts (Heb. 4:12) - and it leads to a Person, not just truths or principles. All Scripture points to Christ's death and resurrection; to God's forgiveness, thus leading you to a personal relationship with God through Christ.

Approach Scripture with a strong desire to be fully equipped to be what I am called of God to be, and to do what I am called of God to do.

- Don't leave the Word until like Jacob of old *“you have laid hold of that which has laid hold of you”*
- Wrestle with the text until it yields to you, and you find it to be honey to your taste & gold to your soul.

### Six good questions the interpreter can ask:

#### 1. Where does the Text fit in the narrative of Bible history?

Each Bible text must be interpreted in light of God's bigger story of redemption & restoration. See the Bible not as many stories or stories within stories; but see it as God's BIG story. The Bible only has one story, a story of Father/God redeeming mankind and restoring what was lost in the Garden.

1) Where does the text fit into this bigger Story?

On a time line, where does the text fit into the greater story of *“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” 2 Cor. 5:19*? Is it before the patriarchs-Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? Is it before the Law of Moses or after? Is it in the Gospels and thus before the fullness of the Spirit in the Church age?

2) Ask yourself, “What covenant was in effect when it was written”?

Is this text an old covenant truth (or promise) or is it a fulfilled new covenant truth. How you decide this, will greatly affect how you interpret the text.

#### 2. What would the original hearers have heard?

Without asking this question you will fall into speculation, allegory, and spiritualizing the text. Ask, “How did the 1<sup>st</sup> recipients receive or view its meaning”? In order answer this question you must read and understand the text in its original context. There are at least two kinds of context for a passage of Scripture.

### Literary context:

The interpreter must have knowledge that the Scriptures include various kinds of literature and thus require different approaches to interpretation. First ask yourself, “What kind of literature is the book or the text”?

**Is it a narrative?** Many books in the Bible are narratives. A narrative is a story or a drama being told. This includes books such as Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Samuel, 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings, Acts, and others.

**Is it wisdom literature?** Books such as Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are what we call “wisdom” literature. This type of literature is different from narratives in that it is often filled with poetic language, or prose that uses hyperbole, allegory, or repeated phrases for emphasis.

**Is it Prophetic literature?** The prophets enforce God’s covenant with Israel by asking, “why is God doing what He is doing & what will be the results of disobedience. This literature has its own features such as the “oracle” or “vision” which are unique to the prophets.

**The four Gospels:** These are Holy Spirit inspired biographies of Christ’s life, message and sacrifice. Each was written by different authors for different purposes, but all are telling the same story of Christ’s life, teachings, death, burial, resurrection and ascension into heaven. The interpreter needs to know the gospel writers intended recipients and purpose to give correct meaning to the gospel he is reading.

**Example:** Luke was not an eye witness to Jesus ministry. He was a like a reporter collecting data from eye witnesses and writing them down. He wrote his gospel account to send to his friend Theophilus.

However, John the Apostle, an eye witness to Jesus life and teachings, tells us why he wrote his gospel. In **John 20:31** he says, “*but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name*”. This is why we call the Gospel of John-the gospel of belief. John wrote his gospel story of Jesus to non-Jews; yet, Matthew’s gospel is very much written to convince Jews that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, the promised Son of David. The theme of Matthew’s gospel is “fulfilled”.

**Is it a parable?** A parable is a unique kind of literature. It is an earthly story with a heavenly (eternal) meaning. The details of a parable are often not meant to be taken literally. It uses illustrative, pictorial, and dramatic language. If the reader concludes this parable is literally truth, he will make great mistakes and misunderstand God’s true meaning.

For example, in Luke chapter 8 is Christ’s parable of the sower and the seed. This story is highly symbolic, not meant to be taken literally. In Luke 8:19, Jesus says, “*The seed is the word of God*”. You know don’t you that a farmer’s seed put into soil is not literally the same as the Holy Spirit putting God’s Word into your heart. It is the symbolic language of a parable.

**Is it apocalyptic literature?** Such is the book of Revelation, which is highly symbolic, requiring some knowledge of this type of literature to correctly understand its intended meaning. Its images of dragons, angels, demons, wars, and monsters with seven heads can be bewildering to those not familiar with this Jewish apocalyptic prophetic style.

**Is it an epistle?** The epistles are letters written to persons or churches. Letters from apostles Paul, Peter, James, and Jude are apostolic letters written to real people and churches, but written under the Holy Spirit’s guidance and inspiration.

So, the literary context demands reading the text carefully, considering the words, sentences, and paragraphs preceding and following a passage. The literary context locates the passage within the larger purposes of a book.

**Example:** See **Luke 17:5** where the disciples said to Jesus, *“Increase our faith”*.

The context will show this is not a prayer for more faith, but the opposite- it is a statement of doubt. If you did not read *“Lord, increase our faith”* in its immediate context you would miss its true meaning.

Notice also that a literary context looks for the place of the text in the entire book. Ask yourself, “What is the nature of the purpose of the Book”? Our goal is to discover the author’s original intent.

**Example:** Any time you see a “therefore” in the writings of Paul, you must go back to the preceding Paragraph, or even chapters, to see what the “therefore” is referring to. By doing this, you discover what the “therefore” is “there- for”. It is there for a reason!

**Romans 12:1** begins, *“therefore, I urge you brethren...”* Here, Paul’s “therefore” is based upon all God’s mercies sited in **Romans 3-11**. Paul is saying that because of all that God has done for us in Christ, we therefore should present our life before him as a living sacrifice in service to His glory.

### Historical context

What is the historical background of a text that might either shed light on its meaning or culturally influence its interpretation? This must include the reader’s knowledge of the culture, place in history, customs, idioms, family life, morals and social structures of the date and time the passage or book was written. Ask yourself, “How did the 1<sup>st</sup> recipients receive or view its meaning”? What did the author intend for them to hear?

A good example is the apostle Paul writing to the Roman church saying *“Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated”* (**Romans 9:13**). What does this mean? Surely God does not hate Esau? When Paul wrote this to his recipients in Rome they understood this quote from Malachi 1:21. The Jews in Rome to whom he was writing had knowledge of the Scriptures to understand the story of Jacob and Esau. This is why a serious Bible student needs the following study aids:

- A good Study Bible
- A Bible Dictionary or Encyclopedia
- A scholarly Bible Commentary

(Many of these Bible aids are available on the internet for your use)

### 3. How does the Text relate to the Christ event?

Ask yourself, “How does this text relate to Christ- the Living Word of God”? Jesus told us to search the Scriptures looking for him on every page. He said in **John 5:39**, *“Search the Scriptures; it is these that testify of me”*. See also Christ’s teaching on this in **Luke 24:25-27**.

Thus every Scripture must be interpreted Christologically. This means that when reading a text or passage of Scripture, the interpreter is looking for how the text, especially an old covenant text, foreshadows the Messiah, Jesus, or the Church.

This is the meaning of **Hebrews 1:1-2**, *“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.”*

### 4. How does the whole of the Bible comment on the text and on the partial?

The interpreter must let the fullness of Scripture unfold the partial. This is another way of saying that the BIG story of the Bible must always influence how we read and understand the smaller stories.

**Example:** In Exodus chapter 20 Moses receives the Ten Commandments. We need the new covenant teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to rightly interpret the Law, and the teaching of Rabbi Paul in Galatians to tell us the purpose of the Law. Thus the new covenant fulfills the old.

### **5. What in this text applies to me that I need to respond to?**

Scripture must not be read just for study or your personal knowledge. Since all Scripture is pointing to Christ, we read in order to worship, to serve, and to magnify Him. We must ask, “How does this ancient text relate to me today”?

The reader can ask himself four questions to help in application of Scripture to one’s life:

- What should I do?
- What should I be? (realizing who I am in Christ)
- Where should I go?
- How can I see?
- 

Here are some other questions you can ask to aid in the personal application of truth:

- Try rewriting the text in your own language seeking application to your life.
- How does being “in Christ” relate to my understanding of the text?
- What is required of me if I apply the meaning of the text to me?
- How can I take what God has said to me and give it to someone else?
- What action do I take based on this?

### **6. How does God get His truth into us?**

1. He speaks eternally thru His inspired Word=the Holy Scriptures -**2nd Timothy 3:16, 17**

2. God speaks to us thru His Spirit- see **John 14-15**

We must always acknowledge the unity of the Spirit and the Word- we cannot understand truth apart from the Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of truth. It is the Holy Spirit who can “rightly divide” the Word He wrote. You must prayerfully ask Him to be your teacher.

3. God speaks to us thru His Spirit in His gifted Saints.

Here are some of the ways the Holy Spirit gets truth into us:

- 1) The Holy Spirit gives us illuminated understanding.
- 2) The Holy Spirit can interpret His Word (which He inspired)
- 3) The Spirit will guide us to consensus thru the community of Believers. (Acts 15)
- 4) The Spirit has given the Church grace gifts thru whom He speaks.

The Holy Spirit speaks truth to us through spiritually gifted believers- pastors, teachers, prophets, evangelists etc.

# WATER BAPTISM- its History and Meaning

## The Origins of water baptism:

A study of history reveals the presence of Water Baptism during Old Testament times. When Gentiles wanted to identify with Israel and become Jews (not racially, but religiously), they had to go through a three-fold process: circumcision, animal Sacrifice and water baptism. So the first instance of baptism was that of Proselyte Gentile immersion. This was done in a pool in the Temple court of the Gentiles.

The Water Baptism mentioned in the New Testament is our topic of study.

This was:

- Instituted by the Father (Jn. 1:6, 33)
- Commanded by the Son (Mt. 28:19)
- Attested by the Spirit (Mt. 3:16; Acts 2:38b)
- Instructed by the Apostles (Acts 10:48)
- Practiced by the Early Church (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 9:18)

## The Meaning and Mode of Water Baptism

The English word 'Baptize' comes from 'Baptizo' (Greek) which in turn comes from the root "bapto". The Greek-Bapto means "to Dip" (Lk. 16:24; Jn. 13:26; Rev. 19:13) It carries the idea of dipping a substance into a fluid and then taking it out again.

- Historical Usage- the verb "Baptizo" can be traced back into the earlier, classical form of the Greek language as far as B.C. 5. It has a continuous history in the Greek language right down into the 1st and 2nd Centuries A.D. Throughout, the word retains one unchanged basic meaning- "to dip", "to plunge", 'to submerge', or "to immerse". E.g. Between 500 and 400 B.C.- Plato; 400 B.C.- Hippocrates; Between 200 and 100 B.C.- 2 Kings 5:14 (Septuagint); Between 100 B.C. and A.D. 100- Strabo; 1st Century A.D.- Josephus; Between 1st and 2nd Century A.D.- Plutarch
- Technical Note- 'Bapto' and 'Baptizo' are never used in the passive sense. This means that water is never said to be baptized on someone; rather, someone is baptized into the water. It carries the sense of "to bury in the ground."
- Biblical Evidence-There is the immersion baptism done by John (Jn. 3:23); the baptism of Jesus (Mk. 1:9-10); and the baptism of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:38-39)
- Other Evidences for Baptism as Immersion are found in **The Didache**: An early handbook on Christian ministry, written between 100-110 A.D., which distinguishes between 'pouring' Greek ekxeo, and 'immersion' (baptizo). Church historian Philip Schaff, the reformers Martin Luther, and John Calvin all

state that immersion was the custom of the ancient church. Josephus (1st Century Jewish Historian) describes John the Baptist as 'John the Dipper'. Early baptism for those Gentiles who joined the Jewish faith was by immersion. It is worthy of noting that there is another Greek word that can be used for

"Sprinkling" it is the Greek verb, "prosraíneo. It wasn't until A.D.1311 that the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Ravenna made 'sprinkling' or 'immersion' alternatives as modes of Baptism. It was in 1644 that the Church of England adopted sprinkling by vote of Parliament.

### Significance of Water Baptism

There are two extremes in Christendom: one group believes that baptism is so powerful that it can impart life to a spiritually dead sinner (baptismal regeneration), while the other group believes that there is absolutely nothing that takes place in water baptism- it is just a purely symbolic activity. But both these extremes should be avoided.

Baptism is not a magical act; neither is it a meaningless act. When a true believer enters the waters of baptism it is a spiritually significant moment in his profession of faith in Christ. His repentance and faith has made him (her) a new creation, and water baptism is his public announcement of being "in Christ."

- Water baptism is an Identification with the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 15:1-5; Eph. 1:13; 1 Pet. 2:24) In Baptism, the Christian testifies to his faith in Christ and His work on the cross. He is publicly declaring his faith in the Gospel. He is basically 'identifying' and 'joining' with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He is declaring that Jesus died for him, was buried for him and was raised for him and considers himself as having died, buried and risen with Jesus.
- It is a Clothing with the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:27) In Baptism, the Christian is 'clothing himself' with Christ. Through this act, he is declaring that he belongs to Jesus and that henceforth it is no longer *'he that lives but Christ'*. Just as a uniform declares which school a person belongs to, baptism works in the same way to declare that the believer belongs to Jesus. It is a public testimony that the person being baptized is now a Christian.
- It is an Expression of the reception of Forgiveness of Sins (Acts 2:38) In Baptism, the Christian expresses outwardly the fact that he has received forgiveness of sins. This Scripture portion reads: Repent and be baptized 'for' the forgiveness of sins... This does not mean that we receive forgiveness of sins only if and when we are baptized. The word "for" in Greek is the preposition "eis" it means here: *'on account of', or 'because of'*. The verse thus reads: "Repent and be baptized on account of having received the forgiveness of sins". Forgiveness can never come through Baptism. It comes only through Jesus (Lk. 24:47; Acts 5:31; Acts 10:43; Eph. 1:7) and His blood (Mt. 26:26; Heb. 9:22; 1 Jn. 1:7).
- It is the Testimony of a Good Conscience (1 Pet. 3:21) In Baptism, the Christian testifies that he has received a good conscience towards God. We were enemies with God due to our sins. But through our relationship with Jesus Christ, we have been reconciled and now have peace with God (Rom. 5:1; 2 Cor. 5:18-19). Our hearts have been sprinkled by the Blood of Jesus to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and we can therefore come boldly before the very presence of God (Heb. 10:19-22). Note: This

Scripture portion describes Baptism as the answer, response, or pledge of a good conscience before God.

- It is an Entrance into a new Public Life as a Christ-follower (Acts 2:40-42; Rom.6:4) In Baptism, the Christian publicly proclaims an end to his old way of life-the old order. The old world system is henceforth buried or submerged under water and he comes out into God's government or system. He is henceforth joining and fellowshiping with the church, the people of God. In those days, baptism to a Jew in the name of Jesus Christ meant giving up Judaism and losing all fellowship of his nation with all his political rights and privileges.

The Bible commands those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be baptized in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:12, 37; 10:47-48; 16:33-34). Note: There is no baptism before personal conversion to be found in the New Testament.

This truth can easily be seen by the fact that People always took baptism after the experience of salvation, not before. (Acts 8:12; 9:17-18; 10:47-48). God always works on the 'inside' first and then on the 'outside'. He changes a man's actions by first changing his heart. E.g. Faith (Inside) and Works (Outside) We are told to believe in your heart (Inside) and confess with your mouth (Outside) (Rom. 10:10) Man looks at the appearance (Outside) but God looks at the heart (Inside) (1 Sam. 16:7) In the Bible, ritual always comes after inner spiritual reality. E.g. Abraham first believed. He was circumcised only after 25 years. (Heb. 11:8; Acts 7:2-4; Compare Gen. 12:1-3 with Gen. 17:9-19; Compare Rom. 4:1-4 & 10, 11)

- Why is it then that Infants are not eligible for Baptism? First, there is no Biblical evidence for such a practice. The whole significance of baptism proves that no infant can take part in it. Even the Didache did not allow for Infant Baptism. The Christian life is one where each individual is held accountable to God. There is no room for proxy. So an infant cannot take baptism with another person believing on its behalf. For example-Salvation: I cannot be saved for another; The Power of the Holy Spirit: I cannot receive the anointing of the Spirit for another; Holiness: I cannot be holy for another; Judgment: I cannot give an account for another. Jesus commanded that his disciples be baptized. A disciple is a follower, a learner who can be taught. A disciple has a Master. An infant can never be a disciple! Even when people came to John the Baptist, he commanded that each person should first repent. Only those who repented were given Baptism. (Mt.3:8, 11; Mk. 1:5; Lk.3:8-14; Acts 13:24).

### **Common questions raised to support Infant Baptism**

*"The Bible mentions "entire households" being baptized. Were there not infants in these homes?"*

We must clearly understand that the issue is not whether infants were present in homes. Surely, they may have been. But a study of each household clearly reveals that whether or not infants were present, only those who believed were baptized. Cornelius: Acts 10:44, 47, 48; The Philippian Jailer: Acts 16:33-34; Crispus: Acts 18:8; Stephanas: 1 Cor. 1:16 and 16:15; Lydia: Acts 16:15 (In this case, it is not specifically mentioned that only believers were baptized. But this does not prove that infants were

baptized because the Greek word for 'household' may mean Lydia's servants or her workers, employed by her for the cloth trade- 16:14).

*"Didn't Jesus rebuke the disciples for preventing babies from being brought to Him? Did He not say that we should not hinder the little children from coming to Him as the Kingdom of God belonged to them? (Mt.19:13)"*

Yes. But remember that these babies were brought to be 'blessed' by Him; not to be 'baptized' by Him. The two are radically different. To baptize is to help a person identify with the work of the Cross; to bless is to seek God's benefits for that person.

*"Has not Circumcision been replaced by Baptism in the New Covenant?"*

No. Circumcision and Baptism serve entirely different purposes. Circumcision was only for Israel/Abraham's descendants; it was a sign of one's national relationship with the Lord. It was not for all believers

This is why Naaman and the repentant Assyrians were not asked to be circumcised. (See 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5) Baptism, on the other hand, is for every believer; it is a sign of one's personal relationship with the Lord. Circumcision was only for males; baptism is for all, irrespective of sex. Circumcision was done on the eighth day; Baptism is done immediately after a person believes in the Lord. If Circumcision had indeed been replaced by Baptism, it makes no sense as to why the Jews in the early church demanded that the Gentile believers who were already baptized be circumcised as well (Acts 15:1-2). Surely, the Jewish Christians did not consider baptism as a replacement for Circumcision.

*"Does not 1 Cor. 7:14 support Infant Baptism as it states that children of believing parents are already holy?"*

The whole passage (vs 12-16) is a reply by Paul to the issue of 'mixed marriages', where only one partner was a believer. The situation was that some men and women, who were already married prior to hearing the Gospel, were confused as to whether their marriages were now still acceptable to God as one of their partners was an unbeliever. They wondered if they had to divorce their unbelieving partners. A related issue was "What must we do with regard to children?" Paul tells these people that a 'mixed marriage' is acceptable to God as the believing partner can exercise a holy or godly influence over the unbelieving spouse and so bring the partner to salvation. And naturally, if the parents are thus acceptable to God, it is also legitimate to have children. So, when Paul speaks of children being holy and unbelieving spouses being sanctified, what he means is that the presence of believers in a home places that family in a holy atmosphere, which gives unbelievers the possibility or opportunity to experience salvation. He does not mean that they are already saved.

- What the Bible does say about Children

We do not have to fear whether infants or little children who die before hearing the Gospel will perish in hell. God is just, merciful and loves all children, whether they are born in Christian homes or not (Mt.18:2-3; 19:14). He does not hold them accountable until they are able to discern good from evil



(Deut. 1:39; Is. 7:15-16). The duty of a parent is only to bring up children in the fear of the Lord (Eph. 6:4) and to train them in the right way (Prov.22:6).

- How Infant Baptism arose in the church:

This doctrine was first mentioned by Irenaeus (2nd Century A.D.), opposed by Tertullian and later became a practice in the 5th Century. Historically, infant baptism arose because of false teachings of sacramentalism in the Roman church. When the church fathers began to teach that baptism gives a person saving or mystical grace and teaching “Baptismal Regeneration” (water baptism washes away sins). Some political reasons were also there. The Roman Catholic Church wanted to secure everyone into her system. By making everyone from birth itself a “Christian”, the Church made sure that the people belonged to it and were under its control.

### Time of Water Baptism

In the Bible, we find that those who heard and accepted the Gospel were baptized ‘immediately’. There was no delay (Acts 2:41; 8:12; 8:36-38; 16:31-34). The only exception was in the case of Paul who was baptized after 3 days, and that too, for no fault of his (Acts 9:18).

### Some other Questions on Water Baptism

- The Link between Baptism and Salvation

Salvation is often thought of only in terms of being delivered from hell. Thus it causes a big problem when it is taught that baptism is an integral part of the salvation experience. But we must note that salvation takes place in three stages. And the whole process must be experienced in order for a person to be truly and fully saved! There is the salvation in the past- deliverance from the penalty of

sin, salvation in the present- deliverance from the power of sin, and salvation in the future- deliverance from the presence of sin. When a person repents and believes, he immediately becomes a believer. But the salvation experience is not yet over. The next step is to take water baptism. And even after this, he has to continue in the Christian faith. Only then will the salvation process continue to be worked out in his life. It is only at the return of Christ that we will be fully saved.

- Are we to be baptized using the Trinitarian Formula?

Which is right- being baptized in the name of Jesus; or in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Mt. 28:19, 20 says we are to be baptized ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’. The reason the Trinitarian formula is not mentioned in the Book of Acts is because over there, the emphasis was on the difference between the baptism of John or the Jewish baptisms and the baptism which Jesus had introduced. However, whether we use either formula, we are witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and have no need to be legalistic about it.

- Why was Jesus baptized?

*“To fulfil all righteousness”* (Mt. 3:15). In other words, Jesus was baptized as an outward act of obedience to his Messianic calling. He wanted to do everything that was pleasing to God. In this manner, He is an example to us demonstrating how we too need to lead lives that are wholly pleasing to God.

- Should we be ‘baptized for the dead’?

(1 Cor.15:29) No. This was not an apostolic practice. Paul doesn’t say, “Why are WE baptized for the dead...” but “Why are THEY baptized for the dead...” This passage refers to the topic of Resurrection. Paul was trying to prove the truth of Resurrection to those Jews who disbelieved. To further establish his point that there is indeed a resurrection, he pointed to the practice of the Jews themselves. By taking baptism for the dead, they had shown that they really had a fear of resurrection even though they wouldn’t admit it. So, here, Paul was simply taking an example of the existing custom to his advantage; he was not writing it as a rule for Christians.

## Water Baptism-Statement of Faith

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### Biblical Baptism

Water baptism of believer's in the New Testament Church was used as a public testimony to a believer's faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. New Testament baptism was BELIEVER'S BAPTISM. We see a good example of this in **Acts 16:30-33**; where Missionaries Paul and Silas, have openly preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the ancient town of Philippi. They were arrested for preaching, beaten severely by the Roman jailor, and thrown into the Roman prison. At midnight, these two battered and beaten men of God began to sing praises to God and God heard them and sent an earthquake to set them free. All the prison house was shaken, the jail doors sprung open, and the prisoners were free to flee the prison-but none did. They were so awe struck by this miracle they remained in the cells. When the frightened jailor looks into each cell, and sees the prisoners all there, he brings Paul and Silas out of their cell and says, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved.*" And they said, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your household.*"

Paul then told the jailor and his family how to pray a prayer of faith and repentance and they received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Now, verse 33 is very important- after this jailor and family all believed in Christ, immediately (in the middle of the night) they all were baptized. "*And he took them that very hour of the night and washed their wounds, (those of Paul and Silas) and immediately he was baptized, he and his household.*"

The jailor washing the very wounds he had inflicted, is a visible evidence of his repentance. He and his family being baptized in water is a visible, public sign of their faith in a risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

### Lessons we can learn from this conversion of the jailor in Philippi:

1. Baptism is for believers only  
The jailor and family were saved by faith when they "*believed on the Lord Jesus.*" Baptism is not a saving sacrament. It is not a means to Grace. "*For by grace you are saved, through faith, it is the gift of God, not a result of works (water baptism) lest anyone should boast.*" **Ephesians 2:8, 9**
2. Baptism is "in water" not just "with water" meaning there is only one type of New Testament water baptism-total immersion. The original Greek word used in the New Testament means to "bury, or immerse." The idea of sprinkling, or pouring water over the head was not a Biblical practice. It came about centuries later by the Roman Catholic Church. All water baptism experiences in the Book of Acts is by immersion. Paul's imagery in **Romans 6: 4** is a picture of a death, burial, and raising from the grave, which immersion baptism symbolizes.
3. Water baptism is a visible drama illustrating two things:
  - 1) The Believer's faith in the death and resurrection of Christ.
  - 2) The believer's new birth from death unto life.
4. Water baptism is a public act of obedience to Christ. **Matthew 28:19** quotes Christ as saying, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the son, and the Holy Spirit.*" You cannot call yourself an obedient Christ-

follower without being baptized. Water baptism is the new believer's first public act of obedience as a witness to your new life in Christ.

### Baptism a symbol

Because baptism is only a symbol of what has already happened to the Believer (his being born again) it is not essential to his salvation, but it is essential to his faithful obedience to Christ as Lord of his life.

### Illustration #1

Water baptism **is** like a soccer player putting on his team's uniform. The uniform tells all who see him "I am on this team, and not the other team." The uniform identifies him with his team. Even so, water baptism says to all who witness it, this person is on Christ's team, this baptized believer is a Christ-follower.

Note: The uniform does not make you a soccer player, it only tells others you are on this team. Even so baptism does not make you a Christian, but is a way to tell others that you are professing to be a Christian.

### Illustration #2

Another illustration of the symbolism of baptism is that of a wedding ceremony between a man and a woman. The ceremony is a public announcement of the love between two people and their "oneness." The ceremony does not make them married, nor make them truly love each other, however, it is the public witness to the love they feel for each other, and their desire to declare it to all their friends and family.

### What believer's "say" at the time of baptism

We can profess our faith both verbally and in the symbolic act of baptism. The early church did both. In **Acts 8:37** the Ethiopian Enoch is eager to be immersed and asks Phillip what he must do to "merit" water baptism. Phillip answers, "*if you believe with all your heart, you may be baptized. And he answered and said "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* Verse 38 says, "*And he ordered the Chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him."*

This helps us understand that only true believers are candidates for baptism. We encourage pastors and others who baptize others to ask them three questions as they are standing in the pool of water:

1. "Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord?"  
If the candidate response is "yes" the 2<sup>nd</sup> question follows:
2. "Are you trusting Christ's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins?"  
If the candidate answers "yes" this 3<sup>rd</sup> question follows:
3. "Do you promise to follow Jesus all the days of your life no matter what the cost?"  
If "yes I promise" is the answer; then you baptize the person in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

### Baptism Class

Before baptizing any candidate, there should be a baptism class meeting in which the pastor or a

trained Elder teaches this lesson to those about to receive water baptism. Each person should be taught, then questioned about their personal salvation experience so that they clearly understand what they are doing. The three questions list above are asked of each candidate, then repeated verbally at the time of immersion.

Hopefully this practical guide can assist pastors in both explaining baptism to their people and in the actual practice of baptizing them.

## **The Security of the Believer** **Can a Believer lose his “Grace Salvation?”**

Every Christian has doubted his or her salvation in Christ. Mr. Doubt comes visiting the new, immature believer, like a thief in the night, to steal his assurance of salvation. All it takes is a whisper in the ear from the enemy telling us we are lost. He says, “How can you call yourself a Christian and do what you just did?” Also, there are many voices coming from pulpits telling folks that disobedience can separate you from Christ and his love.

Can a Christian lose his salvation through doubt, sin, or willful disobedience? Can we “fall from Grace?” Is it possible to be saved eternally and then forfeit that precious gift by actions, or deeds that we have done or not done?

### **The Real Issue**

First, when we ask the question, “*can a Christian lose his salvation?*” we must ask a prior question that is even more important, that is, “*how did I secure my salvation in the first place?*” “Does forgiveness come to me because of something I did, or was forgiveness the result of what Christ did for me? Is being saved a result of my efforts or His? I must determine if being saved is by Grace or by works or even a combination of both. How I answer those questions will settle the issue of whether or not I believe I can lose my salvation.

### **I had it, but lost it**

Many major denominations teach that a believer can lose salvation because of some unconfessed or unrepentant sin. The debate is as old as the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. John Calvin and James Arminius held differing views. Calvin taught “the eternal security of the believer,” while Arminius said “no.” to eternal security. Denominations have divided along lines with these great men.

Calvin says, “I HAVE IT AND CANNOT LOSE IT!

Arminius says, I HAVE IT, BUT I CAN LOSE IT!

So, wherein lies the truth?

### **A Paradox**

Language can be confusing, for example the idea of “saved.” This word implies rescue, deliverance, and redemption. How can you or I be “partially” saved, or “sorta” saved? It is like saying you were almost saved from being shot, or you were almost saved from being run over by a truck. If you were shot you were not saved from being shot. If a truck ran over you, or even a part of you, you weren’t saved from being squished by the truck. Sorta saved or temporarily saved is not really “saved.” In fact, saved from what? In the bible we are saved from “wrath” through Christ. Either we are or we are not saved from God’s wrath.

### **Eternal or Temporary**

Think about the word *eternal* in scripture. It literally means the “life of the ages, or from age to age.” The forgiveness Jesus offers us is repeatedly called “eternal life.” See **John 3:16; John 3:36; Romans 6:23; Hebrews 7:25; 1<sup>st</sup> John 5:11-12**

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How then can salvation be both eternal and temporary? The salvation Jesus promised us is expressed as, “*and I give life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.*” **John 10:28**

Notice, if you can never perish, how can you ever perish? And if forgiveness is eternal (forever) how can it not be forever or just temporary?

### **Gifts and Wages**

Scripture often speaks of salvation being a “gift.” The very word for God’s “grace” has the root word for gift in it. Grace is always a gift, never a wage. In fact, wages and gifts are opposites. Wages you earn thru work or labor; a gift you cannot earn, it must be freely given, that’s why it is a gift.

Salvation is a gift to be received, it is never an attainment to be achieved. It is received not earned. It is not a merit we earn but a mercy God gives. Salvation does not begin in the life of man but in the love of God.

The idea of losing salvation has behind it the thought that it was earned by good behavior and can be lost by bad behavior. This is not what scripture teaches us.

### **Grace Salvation**

Let’s take a moment to examine the meaning of grace salvation and all that it implies.

First, all mankind faces a two-fold liability in the presence of Holy God:

- We are sinners by birth- sons of Adam, born in sin (**Romans 5:12, 19**). Our very nature is sinful, self-centered, and cannot please God. See Romans 8:8.
- We are sinners by choice (**Romans 3:10-23**). Therefore, we are guilty of transgressing against God’s law and his love.

### **Walls and Barriers**

Because of these barriers between us and Holy God, we need two things:

- *Deliverance* from what we are- Self-centered, not God centered
- *Forgiveness* for what we’ve done- Sin

God’s offer of Grace Salvation is that he has torn down the barriers that separate us from himself. Man erected the walls and is helpless to remove them. God must take the initiative, which he has done in sending his Son Jesus to die for us. We cannot change what we are on the inside, nor can we go back in time and undo the wrongs we have done. Mankind deserves justice, but he needs mercy! God’s grace in Christ is that mercy. Someone defined God’s grace as:

G-God’s

R-riches

A-at

C-Christ’s

E-Expense

God’s riches given freely to us is the cross of his beloved Son Jesus. Scripture says it this way, “*while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” That is God’s gift of grace salvation.

### **Four Word Pictures**

The NT gives us four beautiful “word pictures” that illustrate God’s gift of

Grace to sinners. *These* word pictures show us the love of God in forgiving us eternally and putting us in right standing with Him forever.

**Justified**= **Romans 3:24** says, “*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” The word *justified* means to declare “innocent”, “not guilty” or “righteous”. Paul says that is what God, the righteous Judge of the universe, has done for us. He has declared us not guilty. How did He accomplish such a feat? It wasn’t easy. God was faced with a delicate dilemma. As a Holy God, He must punish sin. As a God of love, He desires to forgive the sinners. He hates sin and loves the sinner. How can He vindicate His holiness and still love the sinner? *Justification* was God’s answer.

*An act of grace.* Perhaps an illustration of how God justified us would help demonstrate what the cross of Jesus did for us. Suppose I am your father. I am also a district Judge. You are my rebellious teenage daughter or son. You steal an automobile, and, while driving under the influence of alcohol, you run over and kill an innocent child. By chance you are brought into my court for sentencing. All the evidence is in, and you are found guilty on several counts of lawlessness. It is my task, as judge, to pass sentence upon you—my own child. For the sake of the illustration, let’s say the sentence is capital punishment – a life for a life. What a dilemma! As your loving father I desire to forgive and extend mercy, but as a judge I must honor the law and punish the lawbreaker. What is the solution? Suppose, as the judge, I came down off the judge’s seat, stood beside you, and passed sentence upon myself as your substitute my life for yours. The law would be satisfied, and you would be justified. You would be declared righteous, innocent. I would have taken your place and punishment—the innocent for the guilty. Someone said justified means, “Just as if I had never sinned”. What a wonderful act of love that would be. Amazingly, that is what God, the righteous Judge, did for us. Jesus (God in the flesh, **John 1:14, 18; Hebrews 1:3**) died in our place. **Romans 5:8** declares, “...*Christ died for us.*” God now sees the sinner just as if he had never sinned – or *justified*. We are pardoned by the Judge of the universe. Forever!

Notice that God has declared us righteous. It is an act of His love. He sees us as innocent when He knows we are not! Jesus’ righteousness has been deposited to our bankrupt account, and God sees us in Christ. We are pardoned without any merit in us. We had nothing to do with it. It is pure grace. We are acquitted, pronounced innocent, and all because of the death of Jesus, our Savior. That is one look at how God removed the barriers. He *justified* us in Christ. We have been eternally pardoned, not just paroled.

**Redeemed**=A second word picture often used in the NT is this word “*redeemed*.” Jesus has also redeemed us, as well as pardoned us. **Romans 3:24** also says, “*Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.*” Even as justification pictures the courtroom, redemption pictures the slave market. It portrays the sinner as a slave to sin and the devil. Christ came to pay the ransom for our freedom. Jesus Himself used this word picture when he said, “*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*” (**Mark 10:45**).

This Greek word for ransom means the price paid to a slave owner to purchase a slave. The price that purchased us out of slavery was the precious blood of Jesus. This is Simon Peter’s thought when he writes, “*knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ*” (**1 Peter 1:18, 19**). Redemption has been purchased for us. Our freedom from sin’s bondage has been paid for by the blood of Christ. We



have been declared not guilty before the Law of God and also set free from slavery. We are never to be put on sale again, because we are no longer slaves, but sons, adopted into the family of God (**Romans 8:15**). We have been forever acquitted and emancipated! The Bible tells us at least five things about our redemption:

- It cost God the life of His only Son (**1 Peter 1:18, 19**)
- It has taken place, historically, on the cross (**Ephesians 1:7**)
- It is eternal, not temporary (**Hebrews 9:12**)
- It is offered to the whole world (**1 Timothy 2:3-6**)
- It must be appropriated by faith in the work of Jesus on the cross (**Romans 3:26, 28**)
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**Propitiation**= Third, God's saving grace is pictured as a *propitiation* for sins. **Romans 3:25** contains Paul's third graphic illustration of what happened on the cross. "*Whom God displayed publically as a propitiation in his blood through faith...*"

This idea of making propitiation is a high priestly word illustrating what happens when a priest offers up an animal sacrifice to God to remove the guilt of sin. It pictures Yom Kippur-the Day of Atonement, when the high priest of the Jews would one day a year offer up an unblemished lamb as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. This word propitiation also pictures the Passover in Egypt when the blood was put on the doorposts of Israel's houses and the Angel of Death "passed over" them. The Passover is a shadow fulfilled in the Cross of Christ where the messiah's blood was posted on the cross as a sacrifice for our sins.

The main idea in propitiation is that the sacrifice of the innocent blood of Jesus both removes our guilt and expiates God's wrath against us. To propitiate is to "cover over" and to expiate is to remove or blot out. Both of these Jesus did for us. **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 5:7** says, "*For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*" John the Baptist said it, "*Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*"(**John 1:29**)

### **Benefits of Christ's "propitiation"**

First of all- God has forever cleansed us of all unrighteousness. Our sins are gone, blotted out forever. See **Col. 2:14** where this one sacrifice for sins removes all guilt for all time.

Second, this means God is not mad at us anymore! His wrath toward us who are saved is GONE! Jesus took God's wrath upon himself on the cross. Therefore when a Christian sins (and we all do) he need never fear the wrath of God. God's love for us in Christ is unconditional. Even God's discipline to sinning believers is not punishment to get even for offended justice, but is the work of love teaching us to walk by faith.

Propitiation says, "God has cleansed me and loves me eternally."

**Reconciliation**= In **Romans 5:10, 11**, Paul uses another picture word several times. It is the family word *reconciliation*. This term was illustrated for us by our Lord Jesus, in the parable of the prodigal son (**Luke 15:11-32**). When the wayward son came home to this father, and the two embraced after the son's confession; that was a picture of reconciliation. To be reconciled to God basically means to be restored to fellowship with our heavenly Father, because all the barriers are down. Because the sin, guilt, and wrath are gone, we now have eternal peace with God. God is our Father; we are His children, and fellowship is secured.

### **Putting the Puzzle Together**

Paul has been painting a picture for us. It is entitled *Saved by Grace*. This picture is like a giant puzzle. As we put the pieces together, we gain a perspective of the whole. Notice this progression:

*Propitiation*: God has cleansed us and removed all guilt.

*Justification*: God has pronounced us innocent; we are pardoned.

*Redemption*: God has freed us from bondage and death.

*Reconciliation*: As a result, we are reconciled to God and restored to fellowship.

Paul says in **Colossians 1:22**, “yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.” These are the results of grace salvation. We have forgiveness, freedom, and cleansing, so He can present us before Him “. . . holy and . . . beyond reproach.” All of this simply means that God has accepted us in Christ. Sins are no longer the issue. All the barriers are gone, removed forever. No matter how many sins you have committed, nothing can keep you from God. His grace is greater than all our sin.

### **Eight troublesome scriptures:**

There are only 8 Passages in the New Testament that seem to indicate “*falling from Grace*.” is possible. We will examine them one at a time to see what is taught here.

**John 15: 5,6** “ *if anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned*”

1. The verses are allegorical & symbolic, we should not base any critical doctrine on allegory.
2. The issue Jesus is addressing is bearing fruit (righteousness), not salvation, or disobedience. The issue is our “abiding” in Christ which is about our fellowship with Christ not our relationship to Christ (salvation).
3. He who abides bears fruit as the life of Jesus’ Spirit flows thru him. We are worthless to any spiritual production apart from abiding in Christ. This allegory of roots, fruits, vines and branches is about our being in close fellowship with Christ which will make our lives fruitful and worthwhile, not “worthless.”

**Galatians 5:4** “*you have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from Grace.*”

1. This sentence must read this in the “context” of the whole book & theme of Galatians, in which the Apostle Paul is defending “grace salvation” against those Jewish believers from Jerusalem who came to Galatia teaching a “different gospel.” See **Galatians 1:6**.
2. These false teachers (Judaizers) were mixing law & grace; telling the church that the men must be circumcised, they must observe Jewish Mishnah rules and holidays. They were adding these “laws” to the cross of Christ as saving works.
3. Paul taught Grace-plus-nothing salvation. He calls their teaching a “different” gospel. It is different because it adds works to the completed work of Christ. See **Galatians 2:20, 21**.

4. Paul affirms to the Galatians that our sins and religious performance are no longer the issues, but that God's grace given to us in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ is all sufficient for salvation-plus nothing. To add any human work is to "fall away from the principle of salvation by grace."

#### **Hebrews 6: 4-6**

"...if they should fall away..." This phrase raises the question of can a Christian lose his Salvation thru disobedience.

1. If it teaches losing salvation, it also teaches that a believer who can lose it, cannot get it back. He has committed the "sin unto death" of **1<sup>st</sup> John 5** If it is teaching that you can be saved, then sin away God's grace, then it is also teaching total apostasy-that you cannot ever be resaved. I do not think that is the teaching here.
2. The writer of Hebrews describes those in **Heb. 5:12-14** as those who "*ought to be teachers*" thus they are saved but immature. They need to grow up in the faith. Then in the following passage in **6:1-6** he tells the same saved people to go on to maturity. He further describes them as:

"Those who have been enlightened...

Having tasted of the heavenly gift,

Made partakers of the Holy Spirit,

Tasted the good word of God,

And the powers of the age to come"

All these are descriptions of a born again believer in Christ. The writer then declares that "if" it were possible for these true believers to fall away from the faith (renounce faith in Christ) then it is impossible to renew them to salvation ever again. Why? Because there is no other name under heaven by which we can be saved (**Acts 4:12**) Christ would have to come back and do it all again! Thus if it were possible to be saved, then lost, you can never be resaved!

3. Probably, this section (verses 4-6) is a "hypothetical" straw man statement showing that Christ is the only way of Salvation, and to turn away from him is to be forever lost. See **1<sup>st</sup> John 2:19** I believe it is a hypothetical not actual statement. It is a "what if" situation. This passage is in reality teaching the impossibility of a truly saved person ever being lost.

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 2:20-22** "...a dog returns to its own vomit."

1. To whom were these words spoken? See 2:1= false teachers, who denied the Master who bought them with his precious blood (see **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:18,19**)
2. Peter is speaking to those who came right up to the door of salvation in Christ, perverted the truth, and then turned back to their sensual ways.
3. This is not unlike many thousands of Church members who "prayed the sinner's prayer" but there was no true repentance & re-birth. Then they 'fall away' without having ever truly been saved.

#### **James 5:19, 20** "...will save his soul from death..."

There are several possible ways to understand this verse:

1. If a Christian strays from the truth, turn him back and save his soul from the death of hell. If this is the meaning, the verse is teaching apostasy.
2. If a Christian sins, turn him back and save his soul from the “death” of lost fellowship here on earth. This idea minimizes the word “death” making it equal to darkness or deprivation.
3. “*save his soul*” could have the idea of “delivering his personality” from death. It would thus translate, “deliver his life from the deadly results of sin.” This is the most probable meaning in the light of other scriptures like **James 4:8** and **Galatians 6:1,2**

***Revelation 3:5 ...and I will not erase his name from the book of life”***

1. The context is the Seven Churches of Revelation
2. The Sardis church has two kinds of people in its membership, saved and lost. He is telling the saved that their salvation is secure, and because they are worthy, their name is forever in the book of Life. This phrase does not imply that God has an eraser he uses on folks that commit some unforgiveable sin.

### **Final thoughts**

Those who are saved forever from God’s wrath are described by Jesus, Paul and Peter as “born again.” When you are born from above (spiritual birth) you cannot be unborn. When you are adopted into God’s forever family, you cannot be unadopted. What grace gives, it does not retract. God’s only requirement of us is to trust his love for us. He asks us to live by faith. He even offers to give us faith as a gift of his grace. Whether your faith is weak or strong, it cannot affect your acceptance with God. Faith is the empty hand, the instrument by which we accept God’s free gift.

# Traditions and the Gospel

## **Introduction:**

Every culture has its manifold traditions. Indeed, culture and traditions are often synonymous. History has shown that when the pure truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ penetrates a culture, it will challenge cultural traditions. The Light of gospel truth penetrates the darkness, and much of secular and religious culture is manifold darkness.

## **A Two fold dilemma:**

We must sort out and resist those traditions that are man-made and against the truth of the Gospel; and secondly, we must affirm those traditions that are from the Gospel and thus are good traditions.

Also, many cultural traditions are “neutral” in that they are not evil just simply cultural legends passed down from generation to generation.

## **Definitions: What is a tradition?**

The Greek word that is used in the New Testament is “*paradosia*” it is a combination of two Greek words- *para*=above or over & the Greek word- *dokeo*= to give. Thus a tradition is “*to give over to*” This is the fundamental meaning of traditions. They are ideas, customs, beliefs, stories, and cultural habits that a group “gives over to.” They embrace them as truth and give them over to the next generation.

There are many kinds of traditions, some are tribal, some are cultural (many tribes doing the same tradition), some are religious; some are evil and demonic.

**Example:** In John chapter 13 is the story of Jesus washing the disciple’s feet. It was never meant as a tradition, but only as an illustration of servant hood. However, there are Christian groups that have made it a doctrine, a lifestyle, a part of their traditional way of life. In Kentucky there are “Foot washing Baptists.” They have made foot washing as a regular part of their worship.

## **Culturally Conditioned or Abidingly Relevant**

The challenge to any Biblical theologian or student is to discern what is “*culturally conditioned*” and what is “*abidingly relevant*.” In doing so, he hopefully can remove bad traditions from the life of the Church, and keep those Godly traditions that bless the Church.

## **See Mark 7:1-15 & Matthew 15: 1-20**

Both Matthew and Mark record an event in Jesus’ life where He encountered Jewish religious traditions which stood in the way of truth. The Pharisees held their traditions (interpretations) over the commandment of Moses. They gave it more importance than God’s law. In **Mark 7:13** Jesus says to them, “*you invalidate the word of God by your tradition which you handed down; and you do many such things like that.*” They did it then, and we do it now! Jesus resisted such traditions and we must do likewise. We must discern what is only cultural; and what is eternal truth. We must discern what is abidingly relevant in any age or culture

**Question:** What traditions has the Church adopted that we hold equal to or greater than the Gospel? What traditions have we “added to” the Gospel that have changed the Good News into man-made bad news? As we look carefully at both cultural traditions and even denominational traditions, we like Jesus will need to sort out what to keep. Some traditions can and will advance the Gospel, others will not.

### **Guidelines for discerning the value in a tradition:**

#### **Guideline #1-Where did the tradition come from? What is its source?**

**Explain:** This was the method of Jesus and the Apostles regarding traditions. Jesus often began his teaching on traditions by saying, “*You have heard it said by men of old...but I say unto you...*”

Jesus as the living Word of God knew the difference between a worthy tradition and a man-made custom that distorts truth or is added in the place of truth.

**Christ’s example** regarding traditions:

1. He kept the Law of Moses- none could accuse Him of breaking the Law.  
Jesus honored the Decalogue as God’s truth given to Moses.
2. He resisted and often rejected the Mishnah (the 613 Talmudic laws of the Rabbis)  
Jesus did not always agree with rabbinical interpretations of the Law, and many times broke their rules intentionally in order to teach the truth.
3. Jesus gave us the New Covenant to fulfill the Old and created new traditions for His Church to live by.

**Paul’s example** regarding Traditions:

1. Paul was a learned Rabbi, schooled in the Law. See **Galatians 1:14** “*I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.*”  
As a devout Jew he sought to keep the Law and the traditions of his people.
2. Paul had to re-evaluate his childhood traditions in the light of the Gospel and began to reject those traditions not worthy of the Gospel.  
He refused to burden his gentile brethren with circumcision, dietary rules, and feast days etc. that were common to the Jews. See **Col. 2:16-23**
2. Paul followed Christ’s example in establishing new traditions based on the Gospel.  
His teachings and instructions became Church traditions. “““*stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.*”  
**2nd Thessalonians 2:15**; then again he says, “*...keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.*”  
**2nd Thessalonians 3:6**

**Summary of Guideline #1-** The Gospel when correctly taught and lived out brings with it those good traditions that advance the Gospel. It also will expose false and useless traditions that hinder the Gospel. We today must do as Christ and the Apostles did-Reject those traditions that hinder the Gospel and embrace those New Testament traditions that advance the Gospel.

**Guideline #2-Is it from God or is it man made?** Paul tells the Corinthian church “*hold firmly to the traditions just as I delivered them to you.*” **1<sup>st</sup> Cor. 11:2**

**Explain:**

Paul came to Corinth and led many to Christ, then began to teach them both the Gospel (doctrine) and also, many instructions (traditions). Among those traditions was teaching about the observance of the Lord's Supper. Observing the Lord's Supper meal is a Christ given tradition. Jesus told his followers to gather and eat the meal as a way to remember Jesus and His sacrificial death on the Cross.

The early church had many good traditions handed down by Christ and the Apostles. These traditions were often instructions about various matters like foods, holidays, elders, church policies and behaviors within the Church. The Apostles had established those traditions which are “**ABIDINGLY RELEVANT**” in any age. They had removed and rejected those traditions which were “**CULTURALLY CONDITIONED**”.

#### **APPLY:**

Each Christian generation must examine its traditions. Have we taken cultural traditions which are culturally conditioned and made them abidingly relevant? This is a gross error. The Jews did that and missed the Messiah because of it.

**Illustration:** The Church in Corinth was guilty of changing and abusing the Lord's Supper. Rather than using the Supper to remember Christ and His sacrifice on the Cross, they made it into a wild, indulgent drinking party. The tradition was being changed as to its meaning and practice.

Much of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 11 is concerned with correction from the Apostle regarding the misuse of traditions.

#### **History of the Passover tradition into the New Testament Church**

When we look at the evolution of the Jewish tradition of Passover, we can see how traditions change and often morph into something entirely different than when they began.

The Passover observance was a God directed tradition given by Moses to remember how God delivered the tribe of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The Hebrews were instructed to put the blood over the door posts of their houses so the Death Angel would see the blood and “pass over.” The Egyptian houses without this Blood over them were not spared but the first born died, even Pharaoh's son.

This passing over event became a Hebrew tradition celebrated in Jewish homes from that time onward. It is celebrated in a “Seder” meal with many symbolic portions of the meal-all remembering God's rescue of the nation Israel from Egypt. It was this traditional Seder meal that Jesus ate with his disciples the night of his betrayal by Judas.

#### **The changing of a Tradition**

Jesus kept the Passover tradition, but He also changed it forever. He moved the past into the present and future. He told his disciples that the ancient Passover is a type and shadow of God's Passover on the Cross, when the blood of the Lamb of God would not be smeared over the doors, BUT UPON THE WOODEN CROSS. His blood will allow God to pass over our sins. Thus, Jesus turned an Old Covenant tradition into a New Covenant Church ordinance. He made it a “new remembrance;” not remembering Egypt's Passover, but a remembrance of

His sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The Lord's Supper was to be celebrated as a remembering of Christ's death and resurrection. It was never meant to be more than that-a reverent remembering of Christ and His Cross in our behalf. Later the Roman Church will make the Supper into a Sacrifice with saving merit. In so doing a tradition is changed into a means of Grace and thus a Doctrine added to the Gospel! This then becomes a good tradition gone bad!

**Apply;**

Each generation must evaluate the history of its traditions, consider its source, origins and merit. Always weight it against the truth of the scriptures.

**Paul's comments about women and length of hair**

Paul raises issues like the length of a man's hair in comparison to a woman's and the issue of a woman covering her head in prayer. These customs are culturally conditioned but can teach us eternal principles that arise out of the Gospel.

**Paul's eternal Principle**=God's order for men and women is that a man has headship over the woman and there is to be distinctive differences in men and woman in the way they dress and behave.

**Illustration:** The Masai tribe in East Africa has the unusual custom of the young men growing their hair long during initiation rites into manhood. The women always have short hair. The long hair worn by the Moran (young warrior) is a mark of his manhood. After he is initiated into manhood, he will cut his hair. The idea is that he is a MAN, not a woman!

**Apply:** God would not approve of a cultural tradition where men and women dressed alike and behaved as one gender. We are not to be trans-sexual, cross-dressers, or the like.

**Summary of Guideline #2**

We must ask is the tradition Biblical. Does it advance and testify to the Gospel. If not, then it is man-made and must be rejected. This was the teaching of Jesus as He came up against the organized traditions of Judaism in His day. The Jews had taken God's Ten Commandments and added 613 Talmudic rules to God's Ten! Their traditions stood between them and God's Messiah.

**Guideline #3- What is the Motive behind the Tradition?**

**Explain:** a God given tradition will always point to Christ, and the Gospel. A Godly tradition will give God glory! The motive behind the tradition will be pure, not fleshly, man centered, nor self-serving. This explains why Jesus rejected the outward show of religion he saw in the religion of the Scribes and Pharisees. They loved to be seen of men doing their religious duties (traditions).



This is the context of **Matthew 15** and **Mark 7**. The Jews criticized Christ's disciples because they did not ceremonially wash their hands before eating. Christ's response to them is a scolding rebuke, *"Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."* **Mark 7:9**

**Apply:**

Any religious tradition that glorifies you or is used to prove yourself "religious" in God's eyes is not worthy of the Gospel, and must be rejected. Why is this so? Because the flesh (Paul's term for our sin nature) can be both incredibly evil and also remarkably religious. The "Flesh" is manifested as both bad and good. There can be in the life of a man both selfishly evil deeds and he can dress up the flesh in religious robes like the Pharisees and murder the Son of God! It was this fleshly Judaism of the Pharisees who used their traditions as a means to work their way to heaven. This was the lifestyle of Rabbi Saul, who tells us that before he knew Christ as Savior and Lord, he was *"advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions."* **Gal 1:14**

**Illustration:** In Paul's letter to the Colossians Paul condemns those who seek to use traditions to gain favor with God. In **Colossians 2:16-23** he lists the many practices of those who use their religious new moons, worship of Angels, festivals & Sabbaths as means of the flesh justifying itself before God. All these traditions fail the motive test. Our Christian traditions should come out of the Gospel, advance the Gospel, and glorify Christ.

**Question:** What traditions are used today to gain favor with God, rather than to trust God's Grace-gift of salvation in Christ? All denominations contain the traditions of men that alter, distort or deny the Gospel. It is the task of the Biblical preacher/teacher to see this error and expose it, correct it, and apply the Gospel to it.

**Summary of Guideline #3-** each so-called Christian tradition must be evaluated as to its source (the Gospel) and its motive. If it distorts Grace, adds works, or denies the sole sufficiency of the Cross- we must reject it.

**Guideline #4- Does the tradition promote, protect and defend the truth of the Gospel?**

**Explain;** there are some traditions within the Church that appear on the surface to be Christian, but when looked at carefully they contain many elements of paganism.

**Examples:** Infant baptism; the worship of Mary, the doctrine of purgatory, teachings regarding blessings and curses, the modern day “prosperity gospel” and many other man-made church traditions will not stand the test of Biblical orthodoxy.

**Illustration:** The observance of December 25<sup>th</sup> as the day of Christ’s birth should be disputed, challenged, or even rejected. Its origins are rooted in the pagan holiday of Saturnalia, (the winter solstice), a week of drunkenness, rape and free rioting that climaxed on December 25<sup>th</sup>. It was not until the late 4<sup>th</sup> Century that John of Chrysostom declared December 25<sup>th</sup> the date of Christ’s birth. The two holidays were joined by the Roman church to attract pagans into the Church! For centuries orthodox believers knew this to be true and rejected practicing this pagan Christmas holiday. In America, the Puritans denounced Christmas as “non-Christian” and it was forbidden in many cities of New England for many years.

**Apply:** How successful would modern day denominations be if they rejected the pagan elements in Christmas? What would happen if the Elders in major denominations were to apply the criteria Jesus applied to Judaism? What if our Church leaders questioned the church traditions about Christmas? Just by questioning its SOURCE, it’s MOTIVE, its ADVANCEMENT of the Gospel or its self-serving elements- Christmas as we know it today will fail the test!

If any famous American pastor were to formally renounce Santa Claus as fable, declare Rudolph a myth, and tell our kids that reindeer do not fly, he will get his nose bloodied by the media. He dare not renounce Christmas!

Being realistic, it will never happen. Commercial America is too loud a voice. Christmas is big money for all who sell it as truth. What is remarkable about this is that the Christmas tradition in America began as a celebration of the Advent of the Christ-child. Not so today! Jesus is not invited to His own birthday party. Manger scenes are no longer welcomed in public places, government buildings, or elsewhere by our pluralistic society. “Season’s greetings” has replaced “Merry Christmas” in secular America. Perhaps the church has lost Christmas forever.

**Summary of guideline #4** every church leader, bishop, and pastor must question each of his cultural traditions or denominational traditions in the light of these biblical guidelines. Most important of all is this principle- does the tradition promote, protect and advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ? If not, is he willing to oppose the tradition? Does he have the prophetic courage to challenge it?

Examples of African cultural traditions that come against the Gospel:

1. Practice of witchcraft, or the combining of witchcraft with the Christian faith.
2. Praying to one’s ancestors

3. Keeping and using amulets in the house
4. The male dominated culture in African tribes that does not willingly educate, advance or treat women with dignity.
5. Polygamy
6. Female circumcision
7. Some extreme Pentecostal practices like slaying in the spirit, & other practices need to be tested in the light of scripture.
8. Any and all church traditions that have come to Africa thru denominational teachings that are not Biblical, Apostolic and Christ honoring.

Conclusion:

- Let us remember that traditions are Not the Gospel but they can and should support the Gospel.
- Never do as the Jews did- elevate a tradition to the position of "law." Traditions serve the Gospel not the other way around.
- Accept the challenge to do as Jesus and the Apostles did- apply these guidelines to every tradition within the church or in the culture.

## **Blessings and Curses and the Gospel of Grace**

### **Introduction:**

A very common teaching among Christian pastors and denominations is the Old Covenant concept of blessings and curses. Although this teaching is in the Old Covenant, it is only a shadow that is fulfilled in the completed work of Christ on the Cross. Jesus became a curse for us on the Cross and as result, there are no blessings apart from Him and no curses that come upon us from him. Because there is much misunderstanding of this teaching, the following is to clarify this Biblical truth.

### Obey, Obedience

Behind the idea of curses and blessing is the issue of obedience and disobedience. In the OT “obey” is very close to the word “to hear.” To obey is the correct response to the voice, the call or the word of God. In the OT the idea that you can casually hear God’s voice or his word and not obey is unimaginable. When God speaks- you are expected to “hear” or obey. This explains why the word for obey in the Greek NT is literally, “super-hearing.” Thus to hear God’s word is to obey God’s word. Also, in the OT there is no word for disobey, but rather words like “rebel” or “revolt,” are used.

### Trust and obey

In the OT obedience is intimately connected to our humble agreement with and our unconditional trust in God’s commands. This trust and obey connection began in the Garden of Eden. There we see Adam living in perfect trust in God to provide all his needs. Adam lived in harmony with his Father/God, trusting God, loving God. We see him humbly enjoying God. Adam and Eve experienced the highest level of peace by trusting God’s character, his love and concern. This perfect trust was reflected in their obedience to all God asked of them. This pre-fall relationship of trust and obey was a perfect pattern for human existence.

This is a lesson for all of us. Distrust is the open door to disobedience. When the serpent came to Eve his goal was to create distrust in God’s character. His weapon was doubt. He wants us to doubt and distrust who God is. Satan always wants us to either distrust God’s sovereignty, God’s compassion or his interest in us. Think about it- when the enemy can get you to distrust the Father’s sovereignty you will be tempted to distrust and disobey. Why? Because if God is not all powerful, then he cannot always be in control. He cannot change the mess our lives are in. Satan will often try to get you to distrust God’s care for you. If you distrust his compassion, you begin to manipulate him to gain his favor. Finally Satan will tempt us to doubt God’s interest in us. The enemy tells us the Father is detached, totally removed from human affairs. He has no interest or purpose for us. When we begin to believe this lie we no longer trust God to order our lives. All this leaves us with is the need to manipulate God by using our obedience as a weapon to control him in some way.

## Faith and Obedience

In the scriptures the idea of trusting God is synonymous with “believing” God. Faith and

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obedience are closely related ideas. The best example of belief that produces obedience is that of Abraham in Genesis 15. Abraham is 99 years old and his wife Sarah is barren. God tells Abraham that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. When Abraham hears God’s pronouncement, the scripture says, “*and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.*” (**Gen. 15:6**) Paul quotes this verse in **Romans 4:3** to demonstrate that believing God is evidenced by obedience. Paul’s point is that Abraham’s obedience came out of his faith (trust) in God.

When we read carefully the book of James we understand that real trust/faith in God produces good works. These faith/works are the obedience of faith, see **James 2:26**. Faith in God brings about a pure kind of obedience.

## Obedience without faith

What we learn from this is that any obedience we offer to God that does not come from our trusting God is potentially evil. It is tainted with self-will, self-pride, and the need to control. Sadly, many Christians continue to offer God a false obedience that comes from a religious spirit that dishonors our Heavenly Father. In point of fact, obedience that comes from distrust actually has created much of the world’s religion. Being obedient to impress God, to get something favorable from God, or to manipulate God will never produce fellowship with God.

## Distrust and faulty obedience

### 1. Fear as motive:

There is much obeying God that comes from the fear of God. It sees God as a tyrant who is eager to punish and slow to forgive. Those who obey out of the fear of hell or other judgments have never seen the face of God in the face of Jesus our suffering servant lord. When we serve out of fear of punishment, it reveals a fundamental distrust in the cross of Christ to make us “right” in God’s eyes.

### 2. Duty as motive:

The apostle John described folks who think God’s commands are a burden to keep. In **1<sup>st</sup> John 5:3**, he says Christ’s commandments are not “grievous” or burdensome. All legalistic religions that keep score on your good days and bad days think obedience is a duty or burden we must bear. John says because we have experienced God’s love in Christ, his commandments are not a load to bear but rather an opportunity to express our joy in serving him. Only obedience that has delight in it, is truly NT obedience.

### 3. Guilt & Shame as motive:

Guilt and shame are twin sisters. Both are ugly! Guilt over failure produces shame. Shame is guilt gone toxic. There are many, many toxic Christ-followers whose obedience is guilt motivated because they distrust God’s love & mercy. Their obedience is reluctant, casual, and filled with regret. They just know that curses from God are right around the corner-about to catch up with them.

### 4. Manipulation as motive:

Few believers would readily admit to trying to manipulate God, but thousands do it- and often. Their distrust goes like a game played out this way- “God, if I do this, then you are honor bound to do that.” I can get God to serve me and my wishes by obeying certain rules he has laid out. For example; manipulators use **Luke 6:38** as an excuse for a “give to get” theology. They actually think they can treat God like a casino slot-machine that is rigged in their favor. They give (obeying) expecting to get more than they gave- even a hundred fold. Those who try this manipulation game totally ignore the context of Luke 6:38 which is to love your enemies, pray for them, and do to others as you want them to do to you (**Luke 6:31**)

### Better than Sacrifice

For example, God says to King Saul after he disobeyed by offering his religious sacrifices as a substitute for obeying God’s voice, *“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion*

*is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.”***1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 15:22-23.**

Religious people daily offer God a kind of obedience that comes from shame, guilt, duty, fear, or manipulation. Modern day radical Islam is a prime example. Their interpretation of Islamic law (sharia) tells them that through Jihad they can manipulate Allah to give them blessings of virgins in paradise. The jihadist foolishly believes God can be bought and controlled by human efforts.

Many Christians do much the same thing when we think that by tithing we can get blessings from God. The so-called “prosperity gospel” tells millions that God delights in our sacrifices (obeying without trusting). It says by giving money you can bribe God to give you more money. You can give in order to get. The other side of this false teaching is that if you do not give or “plant your seed money,” then the devourer (curses) will come to your house. Thus obedience is manipulation to get blessings and to avoid curses.

### Blessings and Curses

You may be wanting to remind me that the OT teaches us to believe in blessings and curses. We often site **Genesis 12:3**, *“I will bless them that bless you, and I will dishonor them that curse you,”* to teach that God will bless those of us who bless modern day Israel, and God will also put a curse on those who do not bless modern day Israel. Another OT passage commonly used to teach that blessings and curses are in the church today is **Malach1 3:10, 11**. We are told (by some) that tithing will bring us God’s blessing and that refusing to tithe will bring the devourer (curses) upon our prosperity (crops). Are we to believe this is still God’s word to us today? I do not think so.

### Progressive Revelation

All of those who teach that curses come upon those who disobey, get their theology from the Old Covenant, not the New Covenant. Their mistake is in a failure to understand the proper relationship between the OT and the NT. Mature bible students understand the concept of progressive revelation in the scriptures. This means that Moses knew more of God’s character, purposes, and will than his predecessor Abraham. Abraham did not have the Law, Moses did. Then later, the Prophets of Israel are given more revelation of God’s purpose for Israel than

Moses knew. They speak repeatedly of God's desire to send a Messiah to redeem mankind. They knew more than Moses. God was progressively revealing himself to us. Even so, Jesus knows more of God than Moses because he is greater than Moses. He is greater than the prophets because he fulfilled the Law & the prophets. Jesus the Christ is the full and final revelation of God. In Him is the fullness of God.

#### Curses in the Old Covenant

This helps us understand why blessings and curses are taught throughout the OT, but not in the NT.

In the OT narrative God is working out his purpose to redeem and restore what was lost in the Garden of Eden. The curse comes upon fallen mankind with Adam's rebellion. Disobedience brings God's wrath often called a "curse." When God makes Covenant with Abraham he again stresses obedience, but warns of curses (disfavor) on those who disobey. Then God gives Moses his Law and the standard is raised even higher. Israel's standard to measure obedience is the Law. The law is full of promises to bless those who obey, and also curses upon those who do not. This blessings and curses principle is true for those OT peoples living in that era of history-under the Law.

#### Curses in the New Covenant

The Apostle Paul receives even more revelation as he interprets what happened at the crucifixion of

Jesus- God's Messiah. Jesus is God's chosen lamb who through his death and shed blood has taken away the sin of the world (**Ephesians 1:7**). In writing to the Galatian Church, Paul says in **Galatians 3:1-13** that we, the new people of God, are no longer under the Law and its condemnation. He calls us the true sons of Abraham because we are saved by faith in Christ's sacrifice and not saved by our deeds of the law (**Gal. 3:7**). We are blessed along with Abraham the believer (**Gal. 3:9**). He then boldly declares we are free from all the curses of the Law:

*"For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, and do them." Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "the righteous shall live by faith." But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.-so that in Christ Jesus the blessings of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith."*

What a joyous declaration "*Christ became the curse for us.*" Notice that the curse is removed for those who believe in Christ's saving work. Because we are "in Christ" our curses, disobedience and sins were on the cross with Jesus, we are freed from living under the law's condemnation and curses. There is no more curse for the believer, only blessings.

#### Not keeping score

What this means to the believer in Christ is that God is no longer keeping "score." The "score" (debt) was put on Jesus' shoulders and carried to the cross. The score card is full, then paid in full.

Now think on this- it is impossible to make “points” with someone who is not keeping score! Therefore, any obedience I offer God that comes from a motive to impress him, get something from him, or to make him love me more is foolish and useless. Any obedience that is based on distrust in Christ’s all sufficient sacrifice, will ultimately create a religious spirit that can never create fellowship with God.

#### In Christ, or under Law

So then, we are free to choose, we can be free in Christ or under bondage to the law. The choice is ours. Those Christians who live in guilt, shame, or bondage have not “believed” in the obedience that comes from faith in the completed work of Christ. They are living like OT Israel- condemned by the law.

Galatians tells us if we offer God any kind of obedience that has any motive to gain God’s favor, then that obedience nullifies Grace.

Think of it this way- all OT law keeping was based in distrust in God’s character, love and mercy. That’s evidenced by Israel’s first and greatest commandment in **Deuteronomy 6:4, 5** *“Hear, O’ Israel: The lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”* Here is proper motive to obey God. We obey him because we love him, trust him, and want to please him.

Which do you choose- Law or Grace? Christ or Moses? Blessing or curse? You cannot have it both ways.

#### Transformed people

The only thing that ever changes people is a transforming look at the Cross of Christ. Facing the Ten Commandments does not change people; it may tame them for a while, but it can never change them.

God’s love when revealed and received is what changes a man. When we are captured by the amazing grace of Christ, then and only then can begin to serve and obey out of faith and trust.

#### How then does God bless us?

Since there are no curses for those in Christ, how about the blessings side of obedience? Since I cannot obey to get more blessings- how do they come to us? Think of it this way- since God only blesses perfect obedience, none of us is that righteous. (**Romans 3:10**) All we can ever offer the Father is our partial obedience. That can only disappoint any child of God who desires to please God. God only has one Son who has offered him perfect obedience and that of course in his only begotten Son-Jesus. He gave God perfect obedience by always pleasing the Father (**John 8:29**).

The only pure grace filled living that can satisfy the human spirit is the obedience that comes from faith. It is born out of trusting the Father. Only Christ in us can live out obedience thru us.

#### What God demands he supplies

For the believer, who wants to please God, he must know and trust the fact that what God commands us to do, he beforehand supplies the power to do for us, in us and thru us.

It is recorded in Matthew 12 that Jesus was in the synagogue and he sees a man with a crippled hand. He commands the man to “*stretch out your hand!*” (**Matt. 12:13**) Jesus was asking the



man to do something that was impossible for him to do. However, the man trusted the word of Christ and stretched out his arm and was immediately healed. What God commands, he also supplies the power to do.

Again, the scriptures tell a man to love his wife as Christ loved the church. This is another of those impossible commands to obey. No man can love his wife like Jesus can love her. That is why we are indwelt with the love of Jesus which is spread aboard in our hearts by His Holy Spirit (**Romans 5:5**). What God demands, he also supplies by his grace. God will never ask us to do something he is not eager to supply the power to do.

#### He is the blessing

Finally, a mature believer has come to realize that Christ himself is better than all his gifts, blessings or favors. He is better for me than what he might do for me. My greatest blessing is that I get to live in fellowship with my heavenly Father and to experience his pleasure in my being his partner to bring in the kingdom of his dear Son.

## The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1: 5 & 16:26

*“...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for his name’s sake. **Rom. 1:4-5***

*“But now is manifested, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith;” **Rom. 16:26***

### Introduction:

Scripture reveals a progressive revelation concerning God’s will regarding obedience. As we move through the time line of God revealing his will to us we see the kind of obedience that honors God and the sacrifice of his Son for our disobedience.

### The Old Covenant (OT)

Obedience in the Old Testament is based on fear of retribution. It is an obedience to avoid God’s displeasure or even His wrath.

There is a problem here; obedience that springs forth from the well of fear, or duty only lasts as long as the fear lasts. Fear is a motive, but it is inadequate to change a heart. When the fear is gone-so is the obedience.

**Illustration:** it is like a child’s obedience done for fear of being caught or punished. Once out from under the thumb of the punisher (parents) the child will rebel. He never “owned” the obedience, he only owned the fear of punishment.

Secondly, the fear of the Lord, brings genuine guilt when disobedience occurs. In Israel this guilt is not just individual, but corporate, penetrating the whole tribal community. Guilt is such that God calls them a “disobedient people.” The result is a culture motivated by morals, mores, and Moses. Social pressure becomes the policeman of obedience.

Finally, Paul tells us in Galatians that God gave the Law to Israel not to save them or reform them, but rather to lead them to a higher and greater motive for obedience-faith in Christ’s completed work on the Cross. (See **Galatians 3**). He is saying you must meet Moses before you meet Jesus! The high standard of Moses’ law will reveal your sin and show you the need for a Savior.

### The New Covenant (NT)

Jesus comes and puts a new face on Israel’s God. He introduces them to His Father in heaven. His Father is the dad in Luke 15’s parable of the prodigal son. Jesus lifts obedience out of the muck and mire of the pig pen struggle for perfection. He reveals by his own obedience a kind of

relationship with God that seeks only to please a loving Father, and to give Him glory. It reveals an obedience that is of faith and trust in the Father's heart of love.

### **What really changes people, making them willing to obey God?**

1. Will Laws, rules and principles do it?

Not really. In fact just the opposite happens. You might put a sign up in your yard that says, "*Do not walk on the grass.*"

What will it accomplish? Only that it will guarantee every kid in the block will defiantly walk, fun and bike on your lawn! Laws and rules can restrain and restrict, but never transform. Laws only reveal our selfish sin nature, they can never transform it.

2. Will God's grace+ works bring about obedience?

No, not really. It is human nature to not trust grace or God's love as all sufficient. We seem to want to add something to the Cross of Christ. Our impulse is to not fully trust God's Grace, but to add rules or morals as proofs of our good intentions. This idea came up before the early Church in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabus, along with other brethren go up to the Jerusalem mother church to debate this issue of grace + works (obedience). After much intense discussion the Elders of the Jerusalem congregation wrote a letter to the Gentile believers saying in effect, "*we must not put a burden on you Gentiles that we ourselves cannot bear.*" (See **Acts 15:19-29**)

Here is their conclusion about serving God to gain favor with God: "if you include any obedience on your part to gain favor with God, you are nullifying God's grace."

### ***Why is this true?***

1. Only Perfect Obedience can please God

Back in the 1990's here in America, a men's movement became popular known as **Promise Keepers**. Many thousands of Christian men attended these rallies. It was a movement that meant well but was misguided somewhat. Why? Because we make promises to God that we cannot keep apart from His grace. Making promises to a Holy God is futile because His character demands perfect obedience not just partial or promised obedience. Only Jesus has offered God perfect obedience. Hebrews tells us Christ was tempted, tested, and suffered, yet still was obedient through his suffering. (**Heb. 4:8**) Our job is not to try to copy him or imitate him, but rather to trust in Him. Our task is not the imitation of Christ but rather simple trust in His perfect obedience in our behalf.

2. Religious Manipulation

There is also a kind of obedience that seeks to control or manipulate God. The idea being that we can control the Deity by our behaviors that earn his favor. Thus by obeying, some think they can balance the scales between blessings and curses from God. They suppose that God has a super scoreboard in heaven and he has angels keeping score on us.

The gospel (good news) is that you cannot score points with a God who does not keep score! The Cross of Christ is God's scoreboard. The Cross shouts out to us-"the debt is paid!" **2 Cor. 5:21**

says it well-“*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*” Do you see that? In Christ we have been declared “righteous” because the righteousness of Christ in ours by simply trusting in the completed work (perfect obedience) of Christ. Someone has said, “How do you score points with a God who is not keeping score?”

It is impossible; so why do we keep trying, performing, and even manipulating?

### **The Obedience of Faith**

Like book-ends the letter to the Roman church begins with the “*obedience of faith*” (**Rom. 1:5**) and ends with the “*obedience of faith*” (**Rom. 16:26**). A good translation of this phrase is the “obedience that results from trusting God’s Grace in Christ Jesus.” It is an obedience that springs forth in joy from trusting the loving Grace of God. It is an obedience that faith (trust) produces. In **Romans 1:4** Paul even says that the whole purpose of the Gospel is to bring about “*the obedience of faith*” to all the nations. This obedience that faith produces is God’s gospel for all men.

This gospel of trusting God is the opposite of man-made religion. Religion is self-trusting performance, whereas true Obedience is not about getting something from God but rather faithfulness to what God has already done in Christ. Any efforts to relate to God that is based on distrust (of God) is evil. Why is it evil? Because it is obedience that is rooted in *SELF* and self-promotion. Any obedience based on distrust in God’s goodness, grace and mercy will always create religion. It will not produce fellowship with God.

### **Commands and Provision**

The good news of the Gospel is that when God demands our obedience, he has previously provided for it. He never asks us to obey without first making provision.

For example: God commands husbands to love their wives even as Christ loves the Church and gave Himself for it. My question is- Who can love like that? I cannot! In fact you cannot either! Only Christ in us, living and loving through us can love our wives that much.

In Luke’s Gospel we see a great example of trusting/faith. Jesus enters a synagogue and as he was teaching there he sees a man whose right hand is withered. Jesus tells the man to raise up and walk over to him (the man obeys). Jesus commands the man to “*stretch out your hand!*” and *the man did so; and his hand was completely restored.*” (**Luke 6:10**) Notice the command and the provision of power to perform. The man’s hand was crippled, he could not stretch it out, yet he trusted Christ and did as he was asked to do, and his faith allowed him to obey.

This is how Grace-filled obedience blesses those who obey and blesses God. We obey God because we worship and adore God. We are Sons of God eager to please God.

Oswald Chambers calls obedience, “my utmost for His highest- my best for His glory. “When we sin (disobey) we have no sense of condemnation or shame, but we run to the Father claiming our forgiveness and trusting God’s grace to cover our disobedience.

Living in grace provides fellowship with the Father and turns duty into joyful service. Every command becomes not a burden but a promise of a blessed fellowship and partnership with God our Father.

*“Obedience that does not have ‘delight’ in it, is not New Testament obedience.”*  
*Dudley Hall*

## HOW TO RECOGNIZE, EXERCISE, AND DEVELOP YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFT

### Review:

1. Every born again believer has one or more Spiritual gifts.
2. A Spiritual gift is a supernatural Christ-ability received at the time of spiritual birth to do spiritual work in the life of the church and the world.
3. Spiritual gifts are not "merit badges" or proofs of spirituality; they can be used wrongly, in the flesh or satanically counterfeited.
4. Thus, it is very essential that we be Christ-filled believers so He can guide and empower our ministry.
5. YOUR GIFTS ARE YOUR MINISTRY. You are to be a good steward of your gift. (1<sup>st</sup>

### **Peter 4:10)**

A. A steward is one who received from his master the care of an estate while his master is away. He then is to give an accounting upon his return.

B. See **1st Peter 4:10**, it tells us that God has placed His "*manifold grace*" in our hands; you and I are administrators of God's grace! What a staggering truth! Your gifts are in reality God's supernatural grace committed to your care and your stewardship! The point is that one day every Christian will give an accounting of the use of his or her gifts at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

### I. HOW CAN I RECOGNIZE MY GIFTS?

Explanation: You are your gift. Your "new self" in Christ is characterized by your gifts. Your gifts motivate and dominate your personality. If you have been obedient to Jesus in your daily walk, you have been exercising your gift whether you know what your gift is or not! You are your gift! Your gift is what you, as a Spirit-filled Christian, enjoy doing in kingdom service. You do not have to know what your gifts are to exercise them. Many Christians have faithfully served the Lord for years without knowing that they had a supernatural ability! The following suggestions are practical ways for the believer to recognize his or her gifts:

1. Through Personal Inclination - It seems that when God "gifts" His children that He gives one motivating gift. This gift seems to be the most influential and colors the use of any others that the believer might have. Paul gives us a good example of this. Paul was motivated as an "apostle to the Gentiles." This was his main ministry - that of apostleship. The word apostle means "one sent forth with a message". We call this gift today a missionary; one who goes to a new area and starts a work for God. The gift of apostleship (missionary) should be distinguished from the office of the Apostle which was unique (twelve men) selected personally by Christ. Paul had other gifts; prophecy, teaching, or even miracles; but these gifts served his apostleship to the Gentiles.

### Questions to ask yourself:

- 1) What turns you on as a Christian? As a yielded, available child of God, what do you personally feel inclined to do? Your gift is evidenced by your spiritual passion.

It is the "fire in your belly." What do you really enjoy doing in kingdom service?

2) I suggest that you study the various gifts of the Spirit. Set aside a time for prayer and fasting. Seek God's leadership to reveal your ministry to you.

3) As you do this, you will feel inclined toward one motivating gift. This is your answer! Let's suppose that after a period of study, prayer and fasting you feel that teaching is your motivating gift. How can you test your inclination?

2. Public Recognition - If your personal inclination is led of God, your supposed gift will be affirmed by the public recognition of the church. That is, others will see your gift and desire to use it. This public recognition comes two ways:

1) The church will use it. Suppose you request a teaching position such as a bible study class, a Bible study group, etc. then you study and prepare to teach. If you get discouragement or no response from those whom you teach, then that is a pretty good evidence that you have not been given a teaching gift. If you are gifted to teach, the church will run to your gift. People will seek and use it.

Note this: Some teaching gifts are not "speaking/teaching. The gift may be in a strong desire to study God's word, to do research, even writing theology books. Some teachers do not speak well, but they teach well.

2) God will bless it. When you find your gift and begin to exercise it, there will be an anointing and blessing of God upon it; especially if you are a yielded, Spirit-filled Christian. God's Spirit will reaffirm your ministry. The church will seek your gift and God will bless and enlarge your effectiveness in using your gift.

3. Personal Exaltation: Another way of affirming your gifts is that there will be great joy in the exercise of your gift. If teaching is your gift, you will enjoy studying the Bible. Preparation for the lesson will be a joy and not a drag. You will get a personal satisfaction in a job well done and you will take heart that you have been used to communicate divine truth.

4. Proper Confession - Also, if your gift is of God there will be a proper confession as to the Lordship of Christ. Your ministry will bring glory to God and not the flesh. **Matthew 7:22, 23** says, *"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name cast out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you who practice lawlessness'".*

1) Here, Jesus declares that not all supernatural gifts are from God! These people could exercise gifts of prophecy, demon deliverance, and miracles; but Jesus never knew them. They were lost people; their gifts were satanic.

2) If your gift is of God, it will be used for His glory. **In I Cor. 12:3**, it says that no man can call Jesus Lord unless the Holy Spirit leads him. If a man's ministry is of the Holy Spirit, he will always allow Jesus His proper pre-eminence. His gifting, when properly exercised, will Glorify Christ, not self.

5. By Prophetic Declaration - In **1st Timothy 1:18** and **4:14** there are interesting statements. It seems that Paul, or someone else in authority, spoke a word of prophecy about Timothy. Later, the elders laid hands on Timothy to set him aside for ministry. Sometimes a person may come to

recognize his gift through a prophetic utterance. That is, someone tells you what your ministry will be.

1) When Charles Haddon Spurgeon was a small boy, about age twelve, a preacher visiting in his home told young Charles that he would be a great preacher someday. Spurgeon never forgot it, and of course the statement came true.

2) George W. Truett, the famous Baptist pastor of Dallas, Texas was studying law when a pulpit committee from his home church told George that God had selected him to be their pastor, even though George Truett had no desire to be a preacher. He obeyed the call and became one of God's great champions.

3) This kind of affirmation is very rare and must be carefully discerned. There is always some crazy person running around laying hands on people and telling them to get a gift! Watch out! Be careful about letting anyone lay hands on you unless you know and respect their spiritual life and authority.

4) Laying of Hands: This early church practice was symbolic of the following:

1. Act of Consecration = set aside for blessing or dedication
2. Act of Commendation = approval - we do this with young ministers, deacons
3. Act of Commission = set aside for a task, ministry or mission **Acts 13:2, 3**
4. Act of Communication = passing down apostolic power, communicating the Holy Spirit

## II. HOW AM I TO EXERCISE MY GIFT?

**Explanation:** All the gifts are subject to misuse. This is evidenced by the Corinthian church mess in the first century! It is not enough to know what your gifts are. There must be a proper way to exercise your gifts.

A. *There must be a proper acceptance of your gift.* - Paul teaches us four things in **Romans 12:3-6** about accepting your gift.

1. There should be no boasting in your gift. - Verse 3
2. There should be no dissatisfaction in your gift. - Verses 4-6
3. God has measured out enough faith for you to exercise your gift. - Verse 3
4. God has given you enough grace for your ministry. - Verse 6

B. *There must be a proper assessment of your gift.* - **Romans 12:3**

1. There should be no superior attitude.
2. There should be no inferior attitude.

All gifts are equal in the sight of God. We each have job to do, a ministry to perform.

C. *There must be a proper application of your gift.*

1. We are told in scripture to not neglect our gift. **Ist Timothy 4:14**
2. We are told to stir up our gifts, to rekindle the fire!! **II Timothy 1:6**
3. We are told to minister to others through our gift. **Ist Peter 4:10**

- a. It is poor stewardship not to apply our gift.
- b. It is a sin not to be a good steward!



- c. It is to be done all the time! (The verb "minister" in the Greek is present tense= continuous action)

D. *There must be a proper adjustment of the gift.* - **Ephesians 4:16** says that every member should be properly adjusted to the Head. So, every time you exercise your gift outside the Lordship of Jesus Christ, God will reject it for reward because it will then be a work of the flesh.

### III. HOW CAN I DEVELOP MY GIFTS?

**Explanation:** Use them under the Spirit's control! There are two reasons why Christians do not develop their gifts:

1. No use

Some Christians never develop their gifts because they are not willing to serve the Lord in ministry to others. Neglected gifts wither like an unused limbs of the body.

2. Or misuse.

Some Christians fail to develop their gifts through misuse. If we fail to let the Holy Spirit guide our ministries, then they become abused through misuse, fleshly or selfish motivations.

### CONCLUSION:

Seek the Lord, offer yourself to Him for service, ask Him to reveal your ministry to you. Follow your personal inclination, backed up by public recognition and personal exaltation.

## The Theology of Suffering

### Lessons from Job

#### Introduction:

The man that can stand up here and thoroughly explain suffering is a man who has clearly never suffered.

God's best attempt at explanation is the book of Job. Job's testimony has withstood the test of time because God inspired it and preserved it.

**The book of Job** tells us there is a deep suffering before which you cannot say a word. All you can do is bow your head and leave room for God to enter and fill it with Himself.

Some suffering is so devastating that one can hardly say "he does all things well."

#### The preface to Job:

Poor Job did not know the preface to his own story. He suffered not knowing God & Satan had made a battleground of his soul! His suffering was **according to the will of God**. It had nothing to do with his sin, failure or life circumstances. God willed it.

**Apply:** there are times when your suffering is for no other reason than God allowed it! You are caught up in a cosmic struggle between God & Satan. There is an invisible battle going on and YOU are the battleground!

**Job=** teaches us that when the saint suffers he does not always know why- but he does somehow know down deep in his soul that all is well!

**Apply:** Job did not listen to his accusers. He knew they were wrong.

**Job=** his friends interfered with what God was doing in Job's life. **Hands off!** None dare interfere when God is working in the life of one of his saints. God is bringing these things into the life of His child for the production of bread to feed the world!

**Apply:** Do not interfere in the disciplined suffering of another saint.

**Job=** The God of the Bible is a suffering God. When the mask is removed from life and we see all its misery and shame, behind it all we see a God who cares, who is involved and who suffers with us. Our Heavenly Father's heart is broken daily by a suffering world. Job's friends mocked and accused him because they were ignorant of who God is and of his dealings with a suffering mankind.

**Apply;** In the midst of our suffering, God is the only one who does not mock us. He too was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and well acquainted with grief.

**Lesson:** All suffering is not for perfecting. We all know people whose suffering has made them mean and insufferable.

**Apply;** Suffering only perfects those who accept the call of God in Christ. Refuse it and suffering can consume you.

#### Suffering is a mystery at times-

Like Job we don't know the Preface (what God is doing) we feel only God's absence, when in reality he is there in the midst of it.

**Apply:** There were three men on a cross- the bad thief, the penitent thief, and the Son of God, all three suffer the agonies of crucifixion. All suffered- yet for different reasons.

**Job**=suffered physical pain- but the Bible knows little of physical suffering, and does not make a big deal of it.

**Apply:** Our culture sees physical suffering as a curse. We demand creature comforts as proof of God's favor. Not so. The Scripture says "*for he that suffers in his flesh has ceased from sin.*" In other words- physical suffering is often God's purifier.

### **New Testament light on Suffering:**

***"If any one suffers as a Christian..." 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:16***

**Lesson:** When the world sees a man willing to suffer as a Christian, it is first amazed, and then it is dazed, then finally disgusted!

**Illustration:** Men like pastor Youcef Nadarkhani of Iran is in prison. In October 2009 he was accused of apostasy by the Muslim government of Iran. He refuses to recant his faith in Christ. Also in 2016 Pastor Saad Abidini suffered in an Iranian prison for over two years before world-wide political pressure caused his release. All he had to do to be released was renounce faith in Christ and accept Islam. He refused.

**Apply:** To suffer as a Christian means that there is a fundamental difference between you and the rest of the world. It is more than just your Biblical worldview they differ with. The world takes exception to your loyalty to a person- Jesus Christ. That is what they find inexcusable.

*"Yea though he slay me- still will I praise him"* The world's spirit of antichrist has a contempt for that loyalty, it disgusts them and they think us foolish even crazy!

**Illustration:** The world slandered Christ on the cross- *"he saved others, why can he not save himself?"*

They take our theology and twist it into contempt, satire, & sarcasm

**Apply:** To suffer as a Christian is to have no answer for the world's satire and sarcasm. The world turned on Christ at his crucifixion by turning his good words into jest & jeer. They will do the same thing to you. He gave no answer and neither can you!

***"If any one suffer according to the will of God" 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:19***

There is some suffering that is intentional, other that is preventable. There is also suffering that is inevitable in that it is from God.

**Apply:** Job's suffering was intentional- by God. Jesus suffering was intentional- by God. Suffering can be grand and glorious when the heart is right with God. A man is never more dangerous than when he is at peace in the center of God's will!

**Illust:** If there were no night, who could appreciate the coming of day. No night –no stars, or moon's splendor against a dark sky.

**Apply:** Your darkness is often God's ***"treasures of darkness"* Isaiah 45:3**

Suffering that is according to God's will is not so much about perfecting or teaching you, but rather it is God's opportunity to show others His purpose and grandeur in life thru our suffering. Through Godly suffering we become God's bread to feed the world.

**Apply:** God's will for you to suffer is rarely stated explicitly but it comes out of a life of obedience. It is impossible to live in continual obedience and not suffer for it. The men who do

not suffer in this life are not worth their salt! The finest men & women of God suffer & the devil uses their suffering to slander God.

**Apply:** Never choose to suffer! That is a sickness of dark religion like those zealots in the Philippines who have themselves nailed to a cross. Rather chose God's will even though it may mean suffering or death. Let it be *"according to God's will."*

**Lesson:** Suffering that is defined by the loss or sacrifice of things for God's sake- is utter nonsense. Paul who suffered the loss of all things=saw it as a "rubbish pile" compared to the gain he found in knowing Christ. (Phil 3)

***"The fellowship of his suffering" Philippians 3:10***

Real fellowship in the Christian sense means we share things in common with another person. We only share his sufferings when our suffering is for His sake. To suffer martyrdom, to lose your life, your friends, to lose your father or mother is only fellowship with His suffering when those losses are because of your relationship to Christ.

**Apply:** Beware of those who have sympathy for your suffering but have no sympathy for Christ himself who is behind, before and after your suffering.

When you suffer- know this- God is after one thing only in your life- he is bringing many sons to glory! And he does not care what it costs us anymore than he cared what it cost Him on the Cross. Your suffering as a child of the king is partnership with him who suffered all things for our sakes.

God has taken the responsibility for Sin, and the proof of that is the Cross. He is the suffering God, not One who reigns above in calm disdain.

**Apply;** very few of us know anything of suffering for Christ's sake. Men will suffer for conscience or convictions, or family or nations or brotherhood. Only those who are in close relationship with Christ can willingly suffer for Christ

## Apostolic Passion

### Introduction:

I want us to think now about “apostolic passion.” Maybe it is a term you are not familiar with. Passion and apostolic-when you join these two ideas together you really have something earth shattering and earth changing.

What is Apostolic Passion? I see it clearly illustrated in Paul’s words to the Roman church, recorded in **Romans 15:15-21**

*“But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience--by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God--so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, but as it is written, "Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand.”*

The word “**Apostolic**” is literally “one sent forth with a message.” It was used much like a King sending a courier with his royal decree. The courier has two distinct characteristics:

1. Authority (because he is on the king’s business. He speaks the king’s words in behalf of the king.)
2. Priority (because the King sent him, it is priority business. He must go and he must deliver the message.)

**The word “Passion”**= is literally “pathos” in the Greek. He delivers the message with urgency, feeling, and heart felt desire. In the New Testament, the word passion can mean:

1. To suffer with=see **Acts 1:3** which says Christ was alive after His passion (suffering)
2. It can describe your strong emotions= See **Acts 14:15** “...men of like passions”
3. It can mean Strong affections= see **Col 3:5**...immorality, passions, evil desires.

**So, from God’s perspective**, your passion is what you are willing to suffer & sacrifice for.

So I see apostolic passion springing forth from the heart of Christ. I cannot get it, until I get Him! We might ask, “What was on His heart that He was willing to suffer for?” Read the book and see that Jesus had the world, including all the nations on his heart. **Matt 24:14**-Declares that the gospel be preached to all the nations.

**Matt 28:19**... to all the nations

**Acts 1:8**-to the uttermost parts of the Earth.

God wants His Son worshipped in every nation tongue and tribe. See **Revelation 4:4** as the four living creatures & 24 elders worship the Lamb! They are from all the nations and from old and new covenant saints.

**Some questions need to be asked:**

**Is apostolic passion for the nations limited only to the Apostles?** No, it is not. Throughout the church's history men and women have been captured by the passion to tell the nations that "*God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself*"

**How can you know when you have lost this apostolic passion?**

- It is evidenced when my quiet time dreams and prayers do not focus on the name of Jesus being worshipped in every nation, tongue and tribe. Far too often our spiritual time with God is telling him what you need and want, not listening to God's heart for the nations.
- It is evidenced when I can sing about heaven but live as if earth was my home. I am earth bound when I am "stuff" possessed.
- Apostolic passion is dead in my heart when I aspire and strive for sports, toys, places to go, and people to see, and not striving for the nations to know God's Son.
- I know too I have lost it when I make decisions based on the dangers or cost involved and not if Christ will be glorified in it.

**How can you know if you- like Paul are striving for the nations to hear of Jesus?**

- When you are planning to go, but willing to stay.
- When you are deeply disappointed that God has not called you to leave your home and go out to the nations.
- If you are not willing to suffer and sacrifice for something-you are not passionate about it.

**How can I deepen my passion for the lost and the nations?**

**First of all-**you cannot order it like a pizza or by calling an 800 #. Caring about what God cares about will need some time and work from both you and God's Spirit working in you.

**Secondly**, you must know Him, living so close to Him you can hear his voice and are willing to obey what you hear. After Paul's Damascus road experience, he gave himself to knowing Christ. He desired more and more revelation of Christ and his purpose in the earth.

**Thirdly**, you must chose it-That's what Paul did. In **Romans 15:20** he says, "*I am earnestly striving.*"

Paul's lifelong ambition was to tell the gentile world of Christ's love. He chose to see that nations worship and gather around the lamb. In **Romans 15:16** he sees the gentile nations as his love offering to Christ.

**Finally**, you must strive for it, seek it passionately, making apostolic passion your ambition. Decide now- I am going to care about what God cares about! I am giving Him my life! Who are the most dangerous people on earth- men and women of apostolic passion!

## **Sermon Preparation**

### **By John R. Stott**

#### **1. Choose your text and meditate on it.**

- Read the text, re-read it, re-read it and read it again.
- Probe it, chew on it, bore into it, and soak in it.
- You are not called to preach yourself or your ideas, but charged to “preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:1-2). Clarence Edward McCartney: “Put all the Bible you can into it.”

#### **2. Ask questions of the text.**

- What does it mean? Or better yet, what did it mean when first spoken or written?
- What did the author intend to affirm or condemn or promise or command?
- What does it say? What is its contemporary message? How does it speak to us today?
- Remember: Keep these questions distinct but together—the text’s meaning is of purely academic interest unless you go on to discern its message for today, its significance. But you cannot discover its contemporary message without first wrestling with its original meaning.

#### **3. Pray for the Holy Spirit’s illumination.**

- All the time you study cry humbly to God for illumination by the Spirit of truth. Like Moses, “I pray you, show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18), and Samuel, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9).
- Stott: “I have always found it helpful to do as much of my sermon preparation as possible on my knees, with the Bible open before me, in prayerful study.
- R.W. Dale: “Work without prayer is atheism; and prayer without work is presumption.”

#### **4. Isolate the Dominant Thought of the Text.**

- Every text has a main theme, an overriding thrust.
- A sermon is not a lecture, it aims to convey only one major message
- The congregation will forget details of the message, but they should remember the dominant thought, because all the sermon’s details should be marshaled to help them grasp its message and feel its power.
- Once the text’s principle meaning has been determined, express it in a ‘categorical proposition.’
- J.H. Jowett: “I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching...until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting and the most fruitful labor in my study...I do not think any sermon ought to be preached, or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.”
- Ian Pitt-Watson: “Every sermon should be ruthlessly unitary in its theme.”
- Don’t by-pass the discipline of waiting patiently for the dominant thought to disclose itself. You have to be ready to pray and think yourself deep into the text, even under it, until we give up all pretensions of being its master or manipulator, and become instead its humble and obedient servant.

#### **5. Arrange Your Material to Serve the Dominant Thought**

- the goal is not a literary masterpiece, but organization that enables the text's main thrust to make its maximum impact.
- Ruthlessly discard irrelevant material
- Subordinate material to theme so that it illumines and supports it.
- Golden Rule for Sermon Outlines: Let each text supply its own structure. Let it open itself up like a rose to the morning sun.
- Be precise with your words. It is impossible to convey a precise message without choosing precise words.
- Words to use:
  - Simple and Clear words. Ryle: "Preach as if you had asthma."
  - Vivid words. They should conjure up images in the mind.
  - Honest words. Beware of exaggerations and be sparing in use of superlatives.
  - C.S. Lewis: don't just tell people how to feel, describe in such a way that people feel it themselves.
  - Don't use words too big for the subject.

## **6. Remember the Power of Imagination—Illustrate!**

- Imagination: the power of the mind by which it conceives of invisible things, and is able to present them as though they were visible to others. (Beecher)
- Remember that humans have trouble grasping abstract concepts—we need them converted into pictures and examples.
- Exert your greatest effort for illustrations that reinforce and serve the dominant thought.
- Think of illustrations as windows that let in light on our subject and help people to more clearly see and appreciate it.
- Beware of illustrations that draw too much attention (to themselves instead of the subject) or which actually take people away from the main point.

## **7. Add Your Introduction**

- It's better to start with the body so that we don't twist our text to fit our introduction.
- Stott: A good introduction serves two purposes. First, it arouses interest, stimulates curiosity, and whets the appetite for more. Secondly, it genuinely introduces the theme by leading the hearers into it.
- Don't make the intro too long or too short. "Men have a natural aversion to abruptness, and delight in a somewhat gradual approach. A building is rarely pleasing in appearance without a porch or some sort of inviting entrance."

## **8. Add Your Conclusion**

- Conclusions are more difficult. Avoid endlessly circling and never landing. Avoid ending too abruptly.
- A true conclusion goes beyond recapitulation to personal application. (Not that all application should wait till the end—the text needs to be applied as we go along.)
- Nevertheless, it is a mistake to disclose too soon the conclusion to which we are going to come. If we do, we lose people's sense of expectation. It is better to keep something up our sleeve. Then we can leave to the end that persuading which, by the Holy Spirit's power, will prevail



on people to take action.

- Call the congregation to act! Our expectation as the sermon comes to an end, is not merely that people will understand or remember or enjoy our teaching, but that they will do something about it. If there is no summons, there is no sermon!
- The precise application of your sermon depends on the character of the text. The dominant thought points us to how people should act in response. Does the text call to repentance or stimulate faith? Does it evoke worship, demand obedience, summon to witness, or challenge to service? The text itself determines the particular response we desire.
- Consider the composition of your congregation. It is good to let your mind wander over the church family and ask prayerfully what message God might have for each from your text. Consider their unique circumstances, weaknesses, strengths and temptations.

### **9. Write Down Your Sermon**

- don't take too long to get to this stage! Get something on paper, don't endlessly noodle on vague notes (this is my temptation).
- Writing obliges you to think straight.

### **10. Edit it Again**

- View hitting your time goal (40-45 minutes) as just as essential to its overall effectiveness as anything else you do. People will take more away if you say less.
- Ruthlessly cut the unneeded and extra. Look for places where you can be more concise.
- Err on the side of cutting things—especially long quotes.

### **11. Pray over Your Message**

- Use the 30 minutes before you leave for church to pray over your message.
- Stott: "We need to pray until our text comes freshly alive to us, the glory shines forth from it, the fire burns in our heart, and we begin to experience the explosive power of God's Word within us."

## **Preparing a Sermon from the Word of God**

### **By Barry Wood**

A Biblical sermon is a message from which the major points come directly from the Scripture under consideration. This is exegesis. Too many times preachers are more prone to eisegesis, than they are to exegesis. They read into the Word, rather than extract truth from the Word.

A good sermon is interesting to listen to. The three most important minutes a speaker is on his feet are the 1<sup>st</sup> three minutes and the last three! You have three minutes to get the crowds attention, or you may never get it! So begin with your best attention getter. This attention getter is to be related to the subject matter of the message.

Good Bible preaching is really an uncomplicated art when practiced consistently. Each major point in the message that comes out of the text itself will have three parts to it:

1. EXPLANATION
2. APPLICATION
3. ILLUSTRATION

**For Example:** Let's take a simple verse like **John 3:16**

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

**Preparation:** See if you can state the whole sermon idea in a sentence. For example, let's write a sermon on this verse called, **The Greatest Story Ever Told.**

**Key sentence:** This verse tells us the story of the greatest *lover*, the greatest *love*, the greatest *gift*, and the greatest *choice* the world has ever heard.

Now you create an outline that explains, applies and illustrates these truths.

#### **I.     The Greatest Lover...for God**

**Explanation: (the Who, What, Where, and How of the message.)**

Here is where you answer some basic questions:

1.       To whom was it written?  
          Look to the historical setting- why did God say this to them?  
          What was its meaning to whom it was written?

**Note:** Jesus says these words to Nicodemus, a ruler and religious leader. In the preceding verses Jesus uses an illustration (verses 14, 15) of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness to show the cross as evidence of God's love.

2.       What does the text say?  
          Look at it in several translations.  
          Review it in commentaries  
          Look up key words in a concordance  
          Cross reference verses

3.       How did it happen?

4. What does it say to us today?

Look for the eternal principle in the earthly setting. In this verse seek to explain these things. Explain who God is. God is love (1<sup>st</sup> John 4:8) anything else that gives truthful information is put here. God is just, merciful, and God is wrath, etc; however, God is love and love must have an object.

**Application: (the “so what” of the message).**

After explanation we come to application. Just as “Explanation” is the *Who, What and Where* of the sermon, even so application is the “*so what?*” of the sermon. In the application portion of the message the preacher applies the truth to his congregation. He answers the unspoken “so what” of the listener. He may ask, “What is your view of God?” “How do you see him?” The Kikuyu people of Kenya for centuries called God, “Mungo”, and believe he lives on Mount Kenya! The preacher may say, “Do you know that God is love?”

Application makes the message personal. Jesus and the prophets all did this. They applied the truth to their listeners. Peter at Pentecost, turned to those Jewish leaders responsible for Jesus’ death, and said, “*this same Jesus... you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.... and Peter said to them, “Repent...” (Acts 2: 23-38)*

The point here is that preaching must be applied truth. If a man cannot go away knowing what God wants him to do or be, then he either wasn’t listening or the preacher didn’t do his job very well.

**Illustration: (the visual “windows” of the message)**

Now we need a story, a picture to visualize the truth. The illustrations are the windows that let in the light of God’s truth to the soul. Long after a listener forgets the rest of your sermon, they will remember the stories. Jesus knew this and preached picture sermons so men could remember. In **Luke 15** Jesus gave us a picture sermon. He tells the Pharisees a story of a man who had two sons in order to teach them about God’s Grace and Love. In **John 3:16** the preacher can give them an illustration to show that God is love.

## II. The Greatest Love...so loved the world

**Explanation:** there are different kinds of love. This word for love is “agape;” it means unconditional love. Only God can love totally unconditionally. Only God can look beyond your faults and see your need. Because we are guilty sinners we need this kind of love. This is GRACE from the Father’s heart. Notice that God’s love has an object, the entire human race. He loves the whole world. None are excluded.

**Application:** Has God’s love reached your world? God can love you but if your heart is closed to Him by your sin and unbelief, you will not experience the joy of His love. There is a God shaped hole in every human heart that only God’s love can fill.

**Illustration:** Now we need a picture again, a window to let in the light. Include a good story, a poem or a saying, even humor to illustrate this truth.

So, on it goes through each point, explanation, application, and illustration. This is a simple tool to create a Biblical sermon.

## III. The Greatest Object ...the world

**Explain:** Here you can explain to your audience that God loves all people, all tribes, all nations, and all sinners –regardless of color, race, creed or condition. Quote scriptures to support this idea. See **Romans 5:8; Luke 19:10; Romans 6:23;** and many more.

**Application:** Tell your audience that you can write your own name in here. God loves YOU so much He gave His only begotten Son-for you. Jesus died for your forgiveness and YOUR salvation.

**Illustration:** Now you give them a good illustration of this personal salvation. Some story they can relate too. Maybe you tell the story of the prodigal son in **Luke 15**.

#### **IV. The greatest Gift... that He gave his only begotten Son**

Again, you repeat this process of Explaining, Applying, and Illustrating. Sometimes only an illustration is needed- without much explanation.

#### **V. The Greatest Condition...that anyone who believes in Him**

#### **Vi. The Greatest Salvation... should not perish but have everlasting life**

#### **One point-several applications**

One more thought is helpful here. Not every sermon has to have three main points. It does not even need two points. Some sermons only have one main idea. For example, this **John 3:16** verse can be presented as one main idea- That is, “how much God loves the lost”. If you choose to use only one point, you can vary the three parts of your message by using Explanation, Application, Illustration, in different orders.

#### **Mix it up**

There are times you can use two illustrations together, or explanation, then illustrate, then apply. You can mix it up if it better serves communication. Your audience and how they “hear” you are vital to how you communicate.

**For example:** In African cultures the people are story tellers. Their ancestry is an oral tradition. Also, the African way of thinking is not analytical like the western mind. So; if your audience is African-use many stories (illustrations) then use the application to apply the stories to real life.

You can even use explanation to give biblical authority to your illustrating and applying.

#### **Conclusion:**

Finally, every sermon needs **a conclusion**. The ending or conclusion is when you ask the hearers to respond, to take action. You want them to do something in obedience to God’s spoken Word. The Conclusion is when you tell them what they should do. Again, you should be brief, be decisive, and be clear about what you are asking for. The action is related to the body of the sermon. It states what the sermon said. Here you are seeking a response to the good news of the message. So, your conclusion is strong on Application. This is the “*what do you want me to do*” of your sermon. This conclusion is where you ask them to do respond. Maybe here you explain what it means to believe in Christ. You can lead them to pray a prayer of faith that invites Christ to come into their lives and be born again

#### **Work at it- you will get better**

Do you want to become a messenger of God? If so, you must work hard at your craft. Practice, study, and meditate on God’s Word. The preacher is God’s spokesman. As His Spirit speaks truth into your life, you can learn to speak it back to the people in language they can understand. Ask God to make your voice a prophetic voice for your generation. He is eager to bless His prophets.

## Born to Reproduce

*Activity is no substitute for production, and production is no substitute for re-production.*

Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, once wrote a little pamphlet entitled, *Born to Reproduce*. I first read it in about 1960. In it Dawson Trotman stresses the concept that we are saved to be disciples and then commissioned of Christ to “go and make disciples.” (**Matthew 28:19, 20**) It is an enormous folly to think that when Jesus gave this challenge to take the message of salvation, “to all the nations,” that He did so without a plan. Indeed, how was it possible that this little group of followers could hope to make disciples of all the nations of the world?

There are those of us who think the great commission is in itself the plan. It contains Christ’s strategy for world conquest. Look at the instructions carefully:

- **Go** = the call to witness & evangelize.
- **Make Disciples** = the call to equip believers
- **Training them** = the call to reproduce ourselves in those we equip
- **I am with you always** = the promise of His power

Actually, all of Jesus’ time on earth with His disciples was spent preparing them to go forth in His name to tell the world the good news. He was enrolling them in the school of discipleship.

Robert Coleman’s classic work, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, shows us vividly that Christ had a plan & purpose in all that He did with the twelve. Coleman’s book outlines Jesus’ method as follows:

- Selection
- Association
- Consecration
- Multiplication

### Selection

Christ’s first method was to select the right men. Have you noticed that Jesus was very selective in the men He chose to be His “twelve?” He didn’t call everybody, or just anybody. He only called a select few. They were not much to look at from the world’s perspective, but they were men who would follow Him. They were “fat” guys- faithful, available, and teachable. There was a plan in Christ’s choosing of those twelve men. They were not perfect or even supermen as the world values talent, but Jesus saw their potential and built His purpose into them.

Even so we are to “go” and witness to all who will listen. We are to then baptize that new convert. The next step is to make a disciple out of him. Here is where we can learn from Christ. Even Jesus could not make a faithful follower out of Judas. Being selective is important to the plan. Find the person who will follow you and learn from you. A Pastor can lead a congregation, but he cannot disciple a whole congregation. What he can do is what Jesus did. He can prayerfully select two or three.

### **Association**

His second method was the “with Him” principle. Coleman in his book makes much of this strategy. He says it was Christ’s plan to keep the Twelve near Him those first three years. Long after they might forget where they went, or whom they met, they would always remember Him! This being associated with Christ would forever change these men. The command to “follow me” was a deliberate plan and purposes to mentor the Twelve. They “caught” as much as they were taught. Just being with Christ intimately day in and day out, won their hearts. They would eventually die for Him. Christ understood the “with Him” principle of leadership.

We too, must adopt the “with me” strategy. You cannot reproduce your life and lifestyle in another person without spending much quality time with him. This is true in raising children and it’s true in rising up spiritual disciples. Parents who spend long hours with their child will forever imprint themselves in the soul of the child. Discipleship is “caught” as much as it is “taught.” It was said of the early disciples, “they took notice of them that they had been with Jesus.” He who would lead others must be as available to his disciples as Christ was to His. Spiritual reproduction is a birthing process, and takes time and painful labor.

### **Consecration**

Jesus’ plan included getting those men He called to “*seek first the kingdom*” Priorities are primary to the disciple. In Luke 14, Jesus parables are all about counting the cost. Three times in Luke 14, our Lord says, “*you cannot be my disciple,*” unless you love me more than people, places and things. His plan calls men to a holy, disciplined walk with Him. Over and over again during those three years they traveled together, Jesus let the disciples see His commitment to God’s Kingdom and He challenged them to be as He was.

We too, must live consecrated lives in order to lead others. It is a spiritual principle of leadership, that you cannot lead others where you’ve never been. You cannot lead others out into the deep, when you yourself cannot swim. You cannot lead another man to live any closer to God, than you yourself live. Why? Because he spends much time with you and he will “find you out.” If you tell him to pray, but he does not see and hear you pray often, then he will not believe he should make prayer a priority. Do you think the twelve ever forgot their hours in prayer with Jesus? Never! When Jesus prayed to His Father,

those men hungered to know God like that! Leading others to be disciples is about “being” a disciple first, then telling others about it.

### **Principle of Multiplication**

It is amazing to think that Jesus could look at that odd collection of men; fishermen, tax collectors, Zealots, and common men, and see the Kingdom of God in them. He saw what no one else could see; he saw the world being saved through their witness. Not one of those men had ever traveled a hundred miles from home, yet Jesus commanded them to tell “all the nations” about Him! He must have had a plan. He did. His vision was for each man to win one other man, and train that man to win another. The plan is spiritual reproduction. It is the principle of multiplication.

How does this work, and does it work? It is so simple that few have really tried it. It works like this. If a disciple wins one person to Christ and spends the 1<sup>st</sup> year training that person to win another; meanwhile the disciple is also winning his second person. The convert that he has trained now wins his 1<sup>st</sup> person to Christ. So, at the end of a year there will only be four of them.

This doesn’t sound like a very successful plan to win the world. Few pastors could build a church this slowly. You might think this will never win the world.

Think again. Now the **second year**, there will be eight disciples, because each disciple is winning and training one each year. In **ten years** there will be 1,024 disciples doing the same strategy. In **twenty years** the world will have 1,048,576 followers of Jesus. This isn’t so bad is it? Then if just each one will win and train one, in **thirty years** there will be 1,073,741,824! In one generation, **forty years**, over 1 trillion will come to Christ in salvation! Think about the Master’s plan for a second. This figure of 1 trillion people is such a staggering number the church has had enough time since Jesus gave us this plan to win the world a 100 times over! The church could have fulfilled the Great Commission in the first generation through those twelve men. It’s not a bad plan; it’s just not been tried very faithfully.

Now, we all know there are flaws in this idea of spiritual multiplication. Not every person you train will be faithful to win one each year. However, they should. It isn’t too much to ask, is it? Is it Unreasonable? Certainly not! The Apostle Paul multiplied his life in Timothy, Luke, Silas, Titus, and Trophimus. He by himself was an evangelist, and won many. However, through those he trained he won multitudes. He says of the Thessalonian believers, *“you became imitators of us. And of the Lord...and so you became a model to all the believers... in that the Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia- your faith in God has become known everywhere.”* (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:6-8)

It is critical that we understand the Master's plan for bringing in the Kingdom. We are not called to make converts, whom we baptize, put on our church roles and then forget them. We are not to be about getting numbers of converts, but we are to be about growing disciples. Dawson Trotman said it well, *"Activity is no substitute for production, and production is no substitute for reproduction."* Christ calls us to "make disciples, and train them." We are born to reproduce ourselves in others. Jesus did it with His chosen men and we are to follow his example.

### **What are you doing?**

Are you committed to the Master's plan? If not, you've misdirected your energies. One day you will look back on your life and look for some lasting difference you made in this world. Jesus told us to pray, *"that you bear fruit and that it would remain"* (John 15) He himself prayed for His disciples "fruit" when He prayed for those who would believe through their witness. (See John 17:20) In effect Jesus was praying His followers would become disciple makers!

When I was a young man, a spiritually mature leader challenged me. When I saw him at a conference, I greeted him, "how are you doing?" He responded, "I'll not ask you how you are doing, but how are others doing, because of what you've been doing?" I was stunned! His words penetrated my heart. That question has stayed with me all through the years I've served the Master. This is the lifestyle we as followers of Christ are to live. What are others doing, because of what you've been doing?" That is our Lord's question to every true disciple. Are you reproducing fruit that will remain? Can you point to your "Timothy" and say, "There is my effort to help fulfill the great commission in my lifetime? These men and women are my life's work."

### **I am with you always**

Finally, we go forth in His name, filled with His spirit, and anointed by His power. Jesus gets excited when we try to fulfill His plan. He will go before us, get behind us and speak through us. You have his promise of that blessing. *"Go and make disciples, teaching them to do what I've commanded you to do, and I myself will be with you"*



## The Pastor as a Disciple-Maker

### The Pastor's calling

Becoming a pastor should be a “God calling” not a just a job or profession. Being a pastor is in fact a spiritual gifting. Paul the apostle, describes the fivefold gifted Church leaders in **Ephesians 4:11-12** “ *and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ...* ” We notice that these leaders are “given” to the church by Christ. They are gifted and called to serve the body of Christ (the church.) Each of the gifted and called leaders has a specific job to do.

### The Pastor/teacher

Uniquely, the role of the pastor is described as that of “*shepherd/teacher*.” It is a combined gifting. Obviously the pastor is a shepherd of God's flock, the church. He is to do what a shepherd does for his sheep. He guides, protects, feeds, and cares for them as a loving shepherd. He also has the dual role of teaching them Kingdom values and Kingdom truths. In his teaching role he feeds his flock the bread of life-God's Word. This is most often done through the pastor's role as preacher of God's Word. However, there is much more to being a Shepherd than just telling the sheep what to do in a sermon. He is to grow the saints into mature men and women who can then equip and train others to do ministry work. Experience has shown us that you cannot disciple a congregation through preaching. It helps, and is a part of teaching, but is not adequate to grow men & women into mature Christ-followers. Paul's admonition in **Ephesians 4:11-13** requires that a pastor become a disciple maker. The Pastor is to be a trainer, resulting in reproducing himself in others.

### Teacher/trainer

The African church is full of preaching, not much teaching, and almost no training. However, making disciples is the one thing Christ called Church leaders to do. Jesus set the example for us. He had the Twelve and spent three years preparing them to change the world. So, much good can be done following Christ's example. This example included training the Twelve, not just preaching to them and teaching them. Jesus equipped them to carry on his ministry after he was gone.

As we have already noted in the Disciple Leader Manual (pages 155-157) Jesus had a strategy for training the Twelve. We can learn from his strategy and apply it today in guiding our churches. In his wonderful book, The Master Plan of Evangelism, Robert Coleman reveals the plan Jesus followed with his disciples. There are four parts to it:

#### 1. Selection

Christ's first method was to select the right men. Have you noticed that Jesus was very selective in the men He chose to be His “twelve?” He didn't call everybody, or just anybody. He only

called a select few. They were not much to look at from the world's perspective, just ordinary men,

but they were men who would follow Him. They were "fat" guys- faithful, available, and teachable. There was a plan in Christ's choosing of those twelve men. They were not perfect or even supermen as the world values talent, but Jesus saw their potential and built His purpose into them.

Likewise, every pastor should be praying for, looking for, and calling forth select men to be his disciples. The Apostle Paul saw Jesus' method and copied it. Paul knew that the only way to fulfill the Great Commission of **Matthew 28:19** was to do as Jesus did- train more men. Paul was a reproducer. Paul says to Timothy, his beloved son in ministry, *"The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (2nd Tim 2:2)"* Here we see Pastor Paul, who planted so many churches, was working out Jesus method of selecting key men to invest his time with.

### **Pastor- where is your Timothy?**

Even so we are to "go" and witness to all who will listen. We are to then baptize that new convert. The next step is to make a disciple out of him. Here is where we can learn from Christ. Even Jesus

could not make a faithful follower out of Judas. Paul could not disciple John Mark. Being selective is important to the plan. Find the person who will follow you and learn from you. A Pastor can lead a congregation, but he cannot disciple a whole congregation. What he can do is what Jesus did. He can prayerfully select two or three good men who have a heart for God and want to learn.

Every pastor should be able to point to his "guy" and say, that's my Timothy!

## **2. Association**

Christ's second method was the **"with Him"** principle. Dr. Coleman in his book makes much of this strategy. He says it was Christ's plan to keep the Twelve near Him those first three years. Long after they might forget where they went, or whom they met, they would always remember Him! This being "associated" with Christ would forever change these men. The command to "follow me" was a deliberate plan and purpose to mentor the Twelve. They "caught" as much as they were taught. Just being with Christ intimately day in and day out, won their hearts. They would eventually die for Him. Christ understood the **"with Him"** principle of leadership.

We too, must adopt the "with me" strategy. You cannot reproduce your life and lifestyle in another person without spending much quality time with him. This is true in raising children and it's true in rising up spiritual disciples. Parents who spend long hours with their child will forever imprint themselves in the soul of the child. Discipleship is "caught" as much as it is "taught." It was said of the early disciples, *"they took notice of them that they had been with Jesus."* He who would lead others must be as available to his disciples as Christ was to His. Spiritual reproduction is a birthing process, and takes time and consistent, often painful labor.

## **3. Consecration**

Jesus' plan included getting those men He called to *"seek first the kingdom"* Priorities are primary to the disciple. In Luke 14, Jesus parables are all about counting the cost. Three times in Luke 14, our Lord says, *"you cannot be my disciple,"* unless you love me more than people, places and

things. His plan calls men to a holy, disciplined walk with Him. Over and over again during those three years they traveled together, Jesus let the disciples see His commitment to God's Kingdom and He challenged them to be as He was.

We too, must live consecrated lives in order to lead others. It is a spiritual principle of leadership, that you cannot lead others where you've never been. You cannot lead others out into the deep, when you yourself cannot swim. You cannot lead another man to live any closer to God, than you yourself live. Why? Because he spends much time with you and he will "find you out." If you tell him to pray, but he does not see and hear you pray often, then he will not believe he should make prayer a priority. Do you think the twelve ever forgot their hours in prayer with Jesus? Never! When Jesus prayed to His Father, those men hungered to know God like that! Leading others to be disciples is about "being" a disciple first, then telling others about it.

#### 4. Principle of Multiplication

It is amazing to think that Jesus could look at that odd collection of men; fishermen, tax collectors, Zealots, and common men, and see the Kingdom of God in them. He saw what no one else could see; he saw the world being saved through their witness. Not one of those men had ever traveled a hundred miles from home, yet Jesus commanded them to tell "all the nations" about Him! He must have had a plan. He did. His vision was for each man to win one other man, and train that man to win another. The plan is spiritual reproduction. It is the principle of multiplication.

How does this work, and does it work? It is so simple that few have really tried it. It works like this. If a disciple wins one person to Christ and spends the 1<sup>st</sup> year training that person to win another; meanwhile the disciple is also winning his second person. The convert that he has trained now wins his 1<sup>st</sup> person to Christ. So, at the end of a year there will be four of them. This doesn't sound like a very successful plan to win the world. Few pastors could build a church this slowly. You might think this will never win the world.

Think again. Now the **second year**, there will be eight disciples, because each disciple is winning and training one each year. In **ten years** there will be **1,024** disciples doing the same strategy. In **twenty years** the world will have **1,048,576** followers of Jesus. This isn't so bad is it? Then if just each one will win and train one, in **thirty years** there will be **1,073,741,824**! In one generation, **forty years**, over **one trillion** will come to Christ in salvation! Think about the Master's plan for a second. This figure of one trillion people is such a staggering number the church has had enough time since Jesus gave us this plan to win the world a 100 times over! The church could have fulfilled the Great Commission in the first generation through those twelve men. It's not a bad plan; it's just not been tried very faithfully.

#### Training/ Skills

If a pastor is to fulfill his calling he must learn to train others. Paul told Timothy (his disciple) "*all scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.*" **2nd Timothy 3:16** Notice the profit to us "*training in righteousness*" A good pastor is a trainer! He must learn how to develop "skills" in his disciples. What exactly does this mean?

**For example:** If a pastor is a man of prayer, that is a good thing; but until he trains others to pray, very little is accomplished thru the power of prayer. How does he train his people to pray?

He SHOWS THEM HOW TO PRAY! Until they pray with him, hearing him pray, learning to pray like he prays, they will not be passionate about prayer. Jesus spent long hours in prayer with his men. After watching him pray and hearing him talk to his Father, the disciple cried out *“Lord, teach us to pray like that!”* (Luke 11:1)

There are many skills that a pastor can sharpen in his disciples. What he knows how to do, he can train someone else to do. He can train them to witness, to pray, to teach, to lead others, to serve humbly, to be good stewards, to trust God, to even become disciple makers themselves.

### **The African Church**

Every African pastor has a choice to make. He can continue to lead his congregation in the traditional African manner, or he can choose to lead the way Christ led his men. He can follow his tribal, traditional model; or he can become a Biblical pastor leading his people according to Ephesians 4. If he chooses to become a disciple maker; some remarkable things will result.

1. His Timothys (both male & female) will become an extension of himself. He multiplies himself in others.
2. These new disciples are potential elders, evangelists, even pastors to plant new churches. Through his disciple making, he becomes an apostolic leader, a bishop in the biblical sense of the word. He becomes a mentor to many.
3. He will set an example to others in the African Church that there is a better way to lead than the denominational model he was raised up in. When many men and women begin to multiply themselves, the word will spread that God is indeed at work here.
4. Making disciples will become the pastor's true legacy. He will leave behind him changed lives, mature leaders who can carry on the work he started. If he does not make disciples, the work dies when he dies. It is that simple.

### **Which Generation are you living for?**

The Disciple Making leader is not living for the immediate generation. He is a future, forward thinking leader. He wants to leave a changed culture behind him when he is gone. By training a generation of disciples, he leaves behind an army of those who can change a culture for years to come. What he does now with his Timothys will be like waves upon the seashore, forever reshaping the landscape.

So, pastor, what kind of leader are you determined to be? We challenge you to follow Christ, Paul, Peter, Titus, Timothy and many other New Testament leaders who changed their world by making disciples of all the nations.

# The Church, the Kingdom of God and Church Planting

By  
**Pius Kutto and Barry Wood**

**Definition:** What do we mean by “Church?”

**Ekklesia** in Greek –the word means literally, “*the called out ones*” thus an assembly of citizens in the Greek culture. See **Acts 19:32, 39, and 41**; where Ekklesia is a secular civil assembly. In the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) it is the congregation of Israel in the wilderness. **Acts 7:38**

In the New Testament the Christian community of saints on earth or heaven or both. Jesus and His brethren = the church. In **Matthew 16**, Jesus used the word ekklesia and called it “my church” (assembly).

**Hebrews 2:12** (quoting from Psalms 22:22).....*I will declare your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you....*”

The writer of Hebrews attributes this saying to the Lord Jesus who calls the members of His church...*”my brethren...”* and says He...*will sing praise to you in the midst of the assembly...”* which is the church.

**Therefore-** It is a congregation of the called out ones, those who have been predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God, called, justified and glorified. **Romans 8:29-30**

**John 6:68**=the true church are those who don’t stumble at the sayings of Jesus-

**John 5:24** “*most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment but has passed from death to life.*”

These are men and women under the kingship and dominion of King Jesus. They are in the Kingdom of God and His Word is the constitution that governs them.

**What then is the KINGDOM OF GOD in relationship to the church?**

**Definition:** we can define the Kingdom of God as, “*God’s people, in God’s place, under God’s rule.*”

Defined as such, anywhere you find God’s people, living under God’s rule, serving in God’s place (purpose & will), you can find the Kingdom. However, this happens only when they are in God’s place (doing his will and purpose) and under God’s rule. When the King is ruling in and through one of His children, the kingdom of God has come to earth. This was Christ’s meaning when He said, “*the kingdom of God is within you.*” (**Luke 17:21**)

**Illustration:** If twenty believers are gathered together, but they are a carnal, fleshly body of Christ, the King will not manifest His presence or glory.

When those same twenty Christ-followers are a Spirit filled body of Christ; they are an earthly extension of the King and His rule. They can and should manifest “Kingdom Come” reality among them. They have been given the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (**Matthew 16:19**) they are God’s people in God’s place, under God’s rule. In this instance the Kingdom and the church can be the same-as they should be.

### **Kingdom Awareness**

The local church must never become just an earthly man- made institution. Nor is it a corporation doing God’s business. The church is to be the place on earth where you find the King doing His work by reigning and ruling in and thru His people. When king Jesus is ruling, demons flee, the sick are healed, the lost are saved, the Kingdom is come in manifested glory. That is to be the goal of every pastor and people- to see the Kingdom come when they gather together to worship, pray, praise, and proclaim.

### **Take Aways:**

1. We know that the Gospel we preach is the Gospel of the Kingdom. We proclaim that the King has come and has brought His kingdom with Him. King Jesus is reigning in and through His Church. He is returning again to establish His reign and rule on the earth.
2. Church planting is not about gathering a few people together so a pastor can have a job and take up an offering to support himself. Church planting is an attempt to establish the Kingdom of God in a designated, specific local community. Church planting is to be a spiritual venture, bathed in intercessory prayer, advanced by a powerful presentation of the Gospel, and followed up with mentoring the newly saved with Biblical teaching.
3. We know that the church and Kingdom of God are not identical. All those who are in the Kingdom belong to the church, but not all those who are members of a local church are in the Kingdom of God. This is why God’s sheep must be fed, protected, and guided. Sheep are fragile creatures and must have a Shepherd lest they perish. Church planting will never succeed without a shepherd to watch over the new flock. Mentoring a man as a Shepherd is vital to the success of the new Christ community. The Shepherd gives the Sheep the training and teaching they need to live the Kingdom life and reach others with the Gospel.

### **“I will build my Church...” THE CHURCH IS BUILT BY JESUS:-**

**MATTHEW 16:18-** We have the first mention of the word church—“*ekklesia*” here!

1. Only Christ can build His Church. The church is not built upon Simon Peter! When Peter by the help of the Holy Spirit was allowed to see Jesus as the Christ,
2. Jesus promised to build him into a church that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. He was handed over the keys of the kingdom to bind and loose.

**Apply:** Likewise, anyone who is given a revelation of Christ as the Son of God, and believes that revelation, is born again, and is given the privilege to build into this church and the same key

that was given to Peter is handed over to them. They get the mandate to bind and loose.....*where two or three are gathered in my Name I shall be in their midst.....whatever they bind or loose on earth shall be same in heaven...***Matthew 18:18**

3. Christ is the head of the church which is His body-**Ephesians 5:23, Col 1:18**

4. The church is also the house of God-**Hebrews 3:6**

## **WHAT THE CHURCH IS NOT**

-It is not a building with a steep roof, a steeple, and tinted windows.

-It is not a manmade institution or denomination but rather a living body-the body of CHRIST on earth.

It is not every member of a given local church in a given denomination but rather true saints who are submitted to Christ's rule.

## **PLANTING THE CHURCH**

In the New Testament it is evident that the church met in houses. **1Cor 16:19**"*Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartedly in the Lord, with the church that is in their house...*"**Romans 16:13** ....*Greet Aquila and Priscilla, my fellow workers in Christ...vrs5 likewise greet the church that is in their house"*

While the church in Jerusalem frequented the temple and Paul hired the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus, the church of the New Testament predominately met in houses. This is indisputable. A home is a conducive environment for planting the church. You don't need spent money on rent, buy sound equipment, have a choir etc.

**In ACTS 16:13-15** we read of Lydia who..."*opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul...*" She was baptized and said to Paul... *if you judge me to be FAITHFUL to the Lord, come to my house and stay..."*

It seems that a house church grew up in her home and this is where the brethren met, vs. 40..."*So they went out of the prison and entered the house of Lydia, and when they had seen the brethren, they encouraged them and departed..."*

**The biblical model of planting the church is in the house.**

**Acts 2:42-** *and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine (the teaching of Christ) and*

*fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, Vs 46. "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple and from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart"*

**Acts 20:20-21-** Paul proclaimed-preached and taught publically and from house to house.

## **7 STEPS IN FRUITFUL CHURCH PLANTING**

There are 7 steps in fruitful church planting that if put in place and practiced we can have a lasting impact in our communities.

### **1. Prayer-**

Gather and pray in agreement for the will of God to be done-**Mt 18:19-20**

Pray for souls to be saved-**2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:9**

Pray for the lost by name-**John 6:44, 65 and Psalms 2:8, Mt 7:7**

### **2. Evangelism-**

Reach out to the community with the **Jesus Film** and **Evangelcube**.

Make converts and start following up those who have prayed the sinner's prayer, by getting names and other contact information. Visit and encourage them. Let them know which house around their village you are meeting in and invite them there.

### **3. Nurturing-**

Begin to care for the baby Christians by feeding them the milk of the pure word of God.**1<sup>st</sup> John 2:12-14** Let them know that their sins are forgiven for His name sake, and let them come to the knowledge of the Father. Introduce them to the NLIC manuals Vol. 1 & 2 so that they come up strongly. Let them understand the 1<sup>st</sup> principles of the oracles of God as listed in Hebrews 6:1-2 through these new beginners' manuals (NLIC)

### **4. Disciple making**

Have each one of them discipled in the Word of God and not in a great ministry or person or leader.

- Teach them the precept and principles of the Word of God that they may grow thereby.
- Teach them how to hear the RHEMA word of God- **ROMANS 10:17**

### **5. Training and Equipping**

Teach them how to do a basic Bible study, set them basic assignment of Bible reading, study, prayer and witnessing.

Go along with them, let them see you do it and then allow them to do as you watch. Appreciate them when they do well. Correct them in love where they have not done well.

### **6. Church planting**

As they grow in capacity and numbers split them in small clusters to be responsible of their own as you do the oversight. Bring on board new villages.

### **7. Emerging of new ministries.**

As you get more responsible workers, you have new ministries emerging. Their spiritual gifts will begin to be seen. Leadership follows the giftings. This is how one can reproduce himself in others.

With this model many shall be reached and have a direct conduct with the disciple leader.

As they grow in numbers they can affiliate to a registered ministry for formality, but the DL will still have a direct touch and spiritual oversight. Plots and buildings come in as the Lord supplies resources.

### **7. Sons/Timothys**



This are the men you can count on in the ministry. Since they have been proved by God and approved by you, you can go along with them in father/son relationship as Paul went along with men like Timothy, Titus, etc. This are the men who will propel this ministry.

They are not just slaves who are out for wages. They are sons/slaves of Christ who have an inheritance. They can take over the baton from you and move on even better as it was in the case of Elijah and Elisha.

Even when you are not present, you can still be felt hard in this men. This is what we call legacy- a lasting fruit that will continue even minus your physical presence.

Grace and peace to you.

# Great Things to Know about Good Leaders

## **1. They know that leadership is influence.**

Leadership is many things, but essentially it is about influence and the ability to influence others. The English word, “influence” means literally to “flow into” others. A leader is a person who directly and intentionally “flows into” others. The greater the influence he has, greater the leader. You can measure your effectiveness as a leader by the number of persons you directly influence each day, week, month a year or a lifetime.

## **2. They know that leadership is a process.**

It has been said that leaders are born not made. This is only a half truth. Some are born with a temperament that can facilitate leadership skills, but the great leaders of the world know that leadership develops over time and requires discipline. Leadership grows daily not in a day; so busy yourself by sharpening your skills. The greater your skills the greater will be your opportunity to influence people. Moses begins by saying to God, “But Lord I stutter, how can I go to pharaoh and speak?” After God equips him, and faith moves him, Moses can lead a nation! He grew into the job. You can become more than you are if you set your mind and heart to do so.

## **3. They know that only you set the limits of your influence.**

John Maxwell calls this “The Law of the Lid.” How great a leader do you want to be? Whatever you decide will “cap” or determine your influence and your future as a leader. You can increase your skills and only you can decide how good a mentor you wish to be; it means you are as good as you set out to be. “Hitch your wagon to a star, open your eyes and there you are!” Many people of great potential accomplish little because they cannot hitch a trailer to a car, much less a wagon to a star! Don’t limit yourself or God’s purposes thru you, by being lazy, or indifferent to a high calling.

## **4. They know that the fuel of the leader’s drive is his passion.**

Leaders are passionate about their cause. Leaders have a fire in their belly that drives them to succeed. The leader is usually “consumed” with his vision or passion and he must share it with others. Leadership is as much caught as it is taught. Much of a leader’s ability is in his emotions as it is in his knowledge or ability. Give me a warrior who loves the battle any day over a soldier who has all the training but no

heart for the fight. Passion wins over planning most of the time. Both are needed for success, but it is difficult to stop a passionate leader.

#### **5. They know that leaders are Navigators & Visionaries.**

While flying my airplane I asked my wife if she wanted to “fly” the plane. She said “yes.” After holding the wheel for a few minutes, she said, “I can steer the plane but I don’t know where I’m going.” This tells us that most anyone can steer the ship, but only the leader can set the course. A leader is like the pilot who navigates. They have a vision, a direction they are going. To say a leader is the navigator, or pilot is to say that they are “big picture thinkers.” Usually leaders will leave the details to others. That’s why managers are not leaders. Managers must give attention to the details of the day to day. The Leader has a bigger vision than “our daily bread.” He is planning how to make enough bread to feed the world!

#### **6. They know that leaders have learned to prioritize.**

Jesus told us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. [Matt. 6:33] This is the way great leaders think. They are good at putting 1<sup>st</sup> things 1<sup>st</sup>! Leaders have a unique ability to focus on the things that really matter. They don’t “sweat the small stuff.” The ability to prioritize your values, your time & energy is a good leadership talent.

#### **7. They know that leaders are servants not bosses.**

In the national bestselling book, “**Good to Great**” we learn that all the really great companies have a leader who is a servant to his people. This is a Jesus principle of Leadership. In John 13 is recorded the experience of Jesus washing the disciples feet. He tells them, “Do you know why I have done this to you? I am giving you my example, that even as I have washed your feet, you must also wash one another’s feet.” A great leader will never ask his followers to do something he himself is not willing to do. Military people tell legendary stories of their commanding officers leading the charge into battle. Risking life and limb, their general leads the fight. Like Mel Gibson in “**Brave Heart;**” portraying William Wallace he fearlessly leads his men into the fray. Leaders are servants, not bosses. Great leaders are not so much “Supervisors” & over-seers as they are “under-seers” and supporters. They lead from the bottom up, not from the top down.

#### **8. They know that people will follow the man, before they will commit to his vision.**

Often a young or immature leader will be very passionate about his vision and will try to get others to accept his vision and follow it. John Maxwell calls it the Law of “buy-in.” However, when people don’t

follow or “buy-into” his vision he cannot understand why. The reason is that men follow the leader before they accept and own his vision.

Think of how Jesus led his followers. He spent years with them letting them get to know Him, love Him, and eventually commit themselves to Him. Only then did He share His vision with them. Great leaders know that men follow a MAN of vision before they follow the vision. By being a humble servant, and a person of integrity & purpose, the leader is like a magnate drawing others to himself. Then he can compel them to follow his dream.

#### **9. They know that a leader must win your heart before asking for a hand**

Great leaders know that trust is a key to gaining followers. Men are not captured by ideas so much as by a man’s spirit. When people trust you they will follow you. Jesus knew this and before He asked his followers to do anything for Him like “take up your cross and follow me;” He first won their hearts. Far too often immature Christian leaders will ask others to support them financially, or to get involved in their projects, without first winning the trust and confidence of those they are asking to help them. For an example, some African pastor will hear that this “white guy” loves Africans and helps churches & pastors financially. So without so much as knowing the “white guy” he e-mails him his “vision” to build an orphanage. The white guy gets the e-mail proposal asking for money for orphans, and thinks, “Who is this African guy, whom I do not know, asking me for money?” I don’t know him and yet he dares to ask me to fund his work. Let me tell you Jesus would not do that. He would not ask for a helping hand without first winning your heart. A good leader will develop trust before asking anyone to adopt his vision.

#### **10. They know that people follow a man they respect.**

In Africa we call this the “Law of Mzee.” In Kiswahili language an “Mzee” is a wise older man. He is an older person whom many admire because of his life-experiences and wisdom. The African culture honors and respects the elderly. Our western culture tends to discount and devalue older people. However, a leadership principle is that people will not follow a man they do not respect. They may fear him, and come along, but they will not adopt his vision if they do not believe in him & respect him. Thus a good leader understands that it takes time and effort to win the people’s respect. His life message is the foundation of his leadership. It takes character to lead.

#### **11. They know that great leadership is about reproduction.**

A great leader can look at one man and see an army behind him. He knows that if he can inspire that one man, & train him to lead others, then he can multiply himself in his disciple. The Leader can do the math- multiplication is better than addition. To spread his vision he must reproduce himself in others. A

truly great leader of Christian men, Dawson Trotman, used to say, "Activity is no substitute for production, and production is no substitute for reproduction." The apostle Paul, another great leader told his young disciple Timothy to reproduce himself in other faithful men. {2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:2}

Ask not what you have been doing, but ask yourself, "what are others doing because of what I have been doing." Leaders are born to reproduce. Jesus looked at the twelve disciples and saw the whole world in them! He trained them then gave them the great Commission to "Go and make disciples of all the nations..." He understood a leader's need to reproduce.

## **12. They leave a legacy.**

This desire to multiply your vision in the lives of your followers comes from a passion to leave a legacy behind you after you are gone. A great leader is not just living for the "now;" but rather is living for the next generation. In John 17 when Christ is praying for his disciples he prays, *"I ask not just for them, Father, but for those who will believe in me because of them."* See, He was living for the legacy, for the future generations that would be saved thru the faithfulness of his followers. All great leaders believe that their cause, their vision is worthy to be perpetuated into the future. So leaders give themselves to investing their best time into their best people. They see a changed future; yes even a better future, lived out in their followers and their followers, followers. The leader's legacy; you are either building yours now or you are neglecting yours now.

## The Servant Leader

I once saw a cartoon of a boy scout leader who took his troop of boys hiking, got lost and said to them, “anyone bring a compass?” The very first quality of a leader is that he has the ability to lead! When the Apostle Paul gave his various lists of Spiritual Gifts, one of those gifts of the Spirit is “leadership.” **Romans 12:8** says, let “*he who leads, lead with diligence*”

We can learn much about how to lead by watching Jesus lead his disciples. In fact, the gift of leadership is nothing less than Christ the leader living out his leadership in and through the life of a gifted child of God.

It has been said that leaders are born, not made. For the Christian leader this is really true. He is born again and gifted with the spiritual gift of leading. He was reborn to lead.

## Leading through Character

He who would lead others in Christian service can learn from Christ. He led by principles, not by His strong will, or by dictating or by intimidating. Jesus showed the Twelve how to lead by Godly virtues and Biblical principles. Jesus’ character was his greatest mentoring tool. Out of His character, he taught eternal principles to live by.

## How Jesus Led Men

Christ’s true genius as a leader of men is that he was a servant-leader. His style was to lead by serving others. His humility, love, and servant heart won the affections of those he mentored. Jesus did not measure the greatness of a man by how many servants he has, but rather the greatness of the man is how many men he serves.

Indeed, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy that the messiah would be “*meek and lowly at heart.*” (**Isaiah 53**) The Messiah is to be a king, but he is a servant-king! Paul tells us that Christ came “*in the form of a servant,*” (**Phil. 2:6, 7**) this then is the “mind” of Christ, it is his set attitude and lifestyle. He leads others by being a servant leader.

## Washing Feet

**John 13:4ff** records the great life-message Jesus gave his men in the last hours of his earthly existence. He washed the disciple’s feet. He is training them by his example. They will never forget this example of the King of Glory down on His knees, humbly washing the feet of those men He loved. Let’s learn some eternal principles from Christ’s example of washing dirty feet:

### 1. Humility is the Key to Servant-Leadership

Seeing King Jesus washing their stinking feet was an object lesson in humility. Jesus, dressed only in a towel, like a common slave washes their feet to show them that the way up is down! The path to great leadership is humility. The leader is willing to do the most menial task to inspire others to service. A leader must not ask others to do what he himself is not willing to do. The Christ-spirit in you will give you His humility to fulfill the words “*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.*” (**1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5:6**)

### 2. The Servant-leader doesn’t wait to be asked to serve

The image of Jesus wrapped in a towel, washing feet is that of a volunteer spirit. No one asked Him to do this humble task, but He chose to do it. He sees a need and meets it. The disciples would never have dreamed of asking Jesus to wash their feet. That is why great leaders are volunteers. They inspire others to volunteer by their example. The fact that Christ was a volunteer (even on the Cross!) inspires us to be like Him.

### **3. The servant-leader does not pick and choose whom he will serve**

Remarkably, Jesus washed the feet of Judas, knowing full well that Judas was a traitor! There is great love and mercy in that act. Like Jesus, great leaders are willing to serve whomever needs it, regardless. Servant love is unconditional. We can learn from Christ's example.

### **4. Servant-leaders wear Khakis**

Wearing a towel, Jesus is ready for the dirty work that needs to be done. This is love in action. It reminds us that *doing* is always a stronger lesson than just *telling*. Leadership is more about what we *do* than what we *tell* others to do. Jesus was "among" His men, being a part of their daily lives. He mentored them by serving them every day. A leader is willing to do whatever is needed to make others around him better. Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart stores, became famous in Bentonville Arkansas the Headquarters of Wal-Mart, because after he had become one of the richest men in the world; he still drove to work in a ten year old pickup truck. He said he drove the old pickup because it reminded him to stay humble and remember where he came from. Leaders wear khakis.

### **5. Servant-leaders give with no thought of return**

Jesus did not ask the disciples to wash His feet. There is a lesson to be learned here. The Servant does not demand to be served in return. This is not about getting from others by giving to them. Great leaders have the greater good in mind, not personal gain. They see the "big picture" not just their own little world.

### **6. Servant-leaders must learn to receive as well as give**

Peter comes forward and says, "*Lord you shall never wash my feet!*" This sounds noble, but it is also prideful. That is why Jesus corrected Peter. Christ wants us to know that leaders must accept service from others. We need the humility to let others be in control, and let them do for us as we do for them.

### **7. Servant-leaders are most like Christ.**

After washing their feet Jesus said to the twelve, "*Do you know what I have done to you? I have given you an example (life-message) that if I your Lord and Teacher has washed your feet, then you ought to wash one another's feet.*" (**John 13: 14, 15**) The lesson is clear to all who will apply it. We are most effective as leaders when we behave toward others as Christ did. He is the model of Christian leadership; He led men by His example. He didn't just tell them to love their enemies; He actually loved His enemies. He made a disciple out of a Roman tax collector! He ate dinner with despised Zaccaeus. He forgave the woman caught in the act of adultery. His example was as strong a teacher as his teaching.

### **Servant-leaders are Pace-setters**

The Greek word for leader literally means, "He who stands before others." A dictator tells others to do what he himself is not willing to do. Not so with a true leader. He is a pacesetter. He says, "Follow me, and my example, and do as I'm doing. I'll show you how. That is Christ's way of leading others. He tells you to take up a cross daily, and then He goes and dies on the Cross for you! No wonder men loved him and still follow Him. We must also be Pace-setters by our example of servant leading.

## **Leaders are Visionary**

Jesus saw the Kingdom of God and He willfully asked His followers to join in on the vision to bring it to reality here on earth. In fact Christ saw the potential in the twelve men He called. He had our salvation in mind when He called them. (See **John 17:18-20**) By leading them he planned to win the world unto Himself. Robert Coleman in *The Master's Plan of Evangelism* sees this vision as part of Christ's leadership style. Every good leader must also have an end in mind.. Leaders see what others cannot see. He doesn't get lost in the details. This is the difference between leaders and managers or administrators. Managers are into the daily routine; they are not leaders of men. They are managers of personnel! There is a huge difference.

## **Wrong jungle**

A great illustration of managers and leaders is the group who go on safari. The group is in the jungle in thick underbrush taller than an Elephant. The manager is organizing the group to cut a path through the jungle. He is handing out machetes, he offers water to the exhausted workers, and is very much in charge as they try to cut their way out. The manager of men is consumed with the details. Then the leader shows up. He climbs a tall tree looks out over the landscape and tells the manager, "Stop chopping! You are going the wrong direction." That's a leader, he sees the big picture, and leads accordingly.

## **Servant-leaders are Committed**

Jesus was totally committed to His vision. He gave the Father all He had for all His days. It is a characteristic of a good leader that he is not easily distracted from his calling and vision. He plans his work, and he works his plan.

He is a man possessed, because there are many who would distract him and discourage him. A leader believes in what he's doing when no one else does. The leader must ask his followers to be as committed as he is. Jesus will say to His men, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

We are talking about accountability. Leaders expect those around them to be accountable to the vision, program or calling. He is accountable and wants the same from you.

## **Servant-leaders are committed to Excellence**

A leader is focused. Jesus our example was a focused man. He was forever about two things: 1.) His Father's business (see **Luke 2**). 2.) Pleasing His Father. (See **John 8:29**) We too must be captured by this concept of doing the will of God and doing it well. Excellence is the byproduct of a heart's desire to please our Heavenly Father. Excellence is about giving your very best effort to the things God calls you to. This is why we must train young men & women early in life to be people of excellence.

By beginning early to train servant leaders we can develop a generation of leaders to shape the world.



Here is a pattern of growth we find in leaders:

- Emerging leaders= Tend to be 18-25 years of age
- Energized leaders= Tend to be 25-40 years of age
- Established leaders= Tend to be 40 years old or older.

### **Your Life Message**

Finally, Jesus modeled the profile of a leader. His life was the message. Long after the crowds forgot His words and deeds, they still remember the Man. His disciples wanted to be like Him. That is the ultimate compliment. We must be “Christ” to others as they see Him in us.

You cannot lead one way and live another way. You must walk your talk. What you are speaks louder than what you teach. The true leader says, “Follow me, I’ve been there.” He has lived what he asks others to do.

# KINGDOM MINISTRIES FELLOWSHIP

## A network of churches

### Description

*“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Matthew 6:33*

*Kingdom Ministries Fellowship* (KMF) is a fellowship of churches and ministries focused on working together in advancing and building the Kingdom of God in our local African regions and throughout the world. It is not a denomination and does not seek to become one, but *rather* works with all denominations and believers who believe **John 3:3**, “...unless you are born again you cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”

#### **The Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal sovereign God over all creatures and things (see **Psalm 103:19**). We enter the Kingdom through a new birth (**John 3:5-7**), also referred to as the “Kingdom of Heaven.”

The Kingdom of God embraces all creation, both in heaven and earth. The Kingdom of God is, therefore, universal in that it includes created angels and men. It is eternal, as God is eternal, and it is spiritual—found within all born-again believers. It is a relationship “*born of the Spirit*” (**John 3:5**), and we have confident assurance that it is so because the Spirit bears witness with our spirits (**Romans 8:16**).

God is sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient and the ruler over all of His creation. However, the designation “the Kingdom of God” encompasses that realm which is subject to God and will be for eternity.

What exactly is the Kingdom of God? Graeme Goldsworthy defines it as “*God’s people , in God’s place, under God’s rule*,” “It is the rule of God on earth in and through His Church. The Church of Jesus Christ is universal. It is made up of all true believers who have been called out of the world into His Kingdom.

#### **MINISTRIES**

Ministries are gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the functioning of the church. The gifts work together for the building of the church because the church builds itself according to **Ephesians 4:16**.

## **We who are many form one body**

**Romans 12:5** states “...and each member belongs to all the others.”

**1 Corinthians 12:12-13** says “*The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.*”

KMF seeks to provide a valuable resource for individuals and churches to identify, connect and network with others who share similar passions for evangelism, discipleship/fatherhood, biblical church government, biblical marriages and other ministries.

## **FELLOWSHIP**

New Testament Fellowship is a relationship among believers that expresses itself in outer cooperation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God’s will on earth. Fellowship in its New Testament sense is an inner unity expressed outwardly. It aims at working together to accomplish God’s will.

New Testament fellowship is important in the following two ways:

1. NT Fellowship occurred naturally as a result of the establishment of the church.

The Holy Spirit came upon these people and formed an inner unity and their natural inclination was to exercise it outwardly. This is described in **Acts 2:44-47**.

This working together to accomplish God’s will continued in the church with the practice of such things as a multiplicity of leadership, diversification of activities, giving to the needy, exercise of different spiritual gifts, support of missionaries called to different mission fields, corporate prayer and group worship.

2. Fellowship is the indispensable means of accomplishing God’s purpose for the church. Paul describes God’s purpose for the church in **Ephesians 3:8-11**.

In this passage God has an eternal plan and the church has a vital role to play

in accomplishing that plan. The purpose of the church as stated in verse 10 is to show the world

the manifold wisdom of God and display every glorious aspect of His being for all to see.

**Ephesians 4:16** tells us that no individual working alone could ever fulfill this plan of demonstrating God’s purpose in the earth, for God works in and through His people in community. The very nature of God’s plan necessitates the Godly capacities of many individuals added together to show His purposes to the world. In order for God to be fully manifested to the world each person in the church must not only play his part but should unite with others who are doing their part as well. The indispensable means we use to perform this is fellowship, our cooperation in accomplishing His purpose. It is only as we work

together in this way that it is possible to accomplish God's plan. This is why true fellowship is indispensable to the church.

**1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 12** makes it clear that every single member of the church is necessary for its proper functioning. Because of the importance of fellowship, no one has the right to amputate themselves from the functioning body of Christ, the Church.

So, then, we see that the practice of fellowship, the outward exercise of our inner unity in doing God's will, is not only natural but indispensable in accomplishing God's purpose for the church. How, then, can we practice fellowship?

### **Practicing Fellowship**

You can practice fellowship by recognizing the goal of the KMF network and taking an active part where you can be a blessing to others in the church. People often do not take part in a church because they see no clear purpose. Our purpose is to show God's glory to the world in all the many ways He has instructed us in the Bible. We participate together to glorify God, to do it His way and to do it together.

You can practice fellowship by taking an active part where you can best help with this goal. You can discover where you can best function by recognizing your spiritual gift(s) and natural abilities and by knowing the needs of the church. You can be a blessing by helping where you can make the church the most fruitful. If you do not know your spiritual gift(s) then you can start serving in areas where you have a natural ability. As you work with others, your gift(s) will surface and you'll find places to function in the church according to your gift(s) and abilities.

So, let's work together. Everyone should practice fellowship as naturally as those in the early church so that the multifaceted wisdom of God might be made known through His Church.

### **CHURCHES**

***Kingdom Ministries Fellowship*** believes that (1) New Testament local churches are autonomous and self-governing and (2) ministry occurs most efficiently and effectively at the local church level, not at the denominational or organizational level. KMF works with churches to overcome denominational barriers and focus on building the Kingdom of God together. While some denominations hold that each local congregation is an arm of the denomination's ministry, KMF believes that Christ is the head of church. KMF holds that the "headquarters" is actually an arm of the local church's ministry. KMF works with local churches to build their most effective ministries through cooperative efforts together for the sake of the God's Kingdom.

## VISION STATEMENT

The vision of ***Kingdom Ministries Fellowship*** is to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) by equipping pastors and leaders in African Churches. We will go, win, disciple and train others to multiply themselves by making many disciples.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Our KMF mission is to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus by all biblical means through partnerships and networks with organizations, churches, ministries and people with proven sound doctrinal statements of faith that are in agreement with the Word of God.

### KINGDOM MINISTRIES FELLOWSHIP-

#### Statement of Faith

1. **WE BELIEVE** the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, and our sole authority for faith and practice in the Christian life. It is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, and training in righteousness. (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16)
2. **WE BELIEVE** in the Holy Trinity as outlined in the Apostle's Creed. There is One God in three distinct but unified persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, co-equal, and co-eternal.
3. **WE BELIEVE** in Jesus Christ God's only begotten Son, our redeemer and Lord. His atoning death for our sins is the only means to forgiveness and eternal life.
4. **WE BELIEVE** all men are lost and in need of God's redeeming grace. There is only one mediator between Holy God and sinful man, and that is Christ the Lord. Salvation is by God's grace, through faith in the work of Christ in His death, burial and bodily resurrection.
5. **We Believe** that water baptism by immersion is the church's witness to the believer's new birth. Baptism has no saving merit, but it is a public act of obedience to Christ

and a witness to others of both the death burial and resurrection of Christ and of the believer's resurrected life in Christ.

6. **WE BELIEVE** we are under Christ's mandate to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth till every nation has heard God's good news of Salvation. **Matthew 28:19-20 , Mark 16:15**
7. **WE BELIEVE** all of history is moving toward the glorious return of Christ to establish His Kingdom. We are praying for "Thy Kingdom come" and striving to hasten the King's return by doing our part to fulfill the Great Commission in our lifetime.
8. **WE BELIEVE** the Holy Spirit has inspired us to go, win, disciple, and train as many people as possible; to help fulfill the Great commission in this generation. Our Method is the Key-Man Ministries, whereby we train potential leaders who in turn train others.
9. **WE BELIEVE IN** The Five-fold Ministry of leadership within the local church according to **Ephesians 4:11-13**; God will raise up spiritually gifted Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers to equip the church.
10. **WE BELIEVE IN FATHER/SON RELATIONSHIP ABILITIES.** The ability to raise up sons in the ministry who tap into grace by their ability to draw from their Leader, not through organizational or structured "theocratic rule" but by a correct understanding of spiritual gifting and covenant relationship. Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy are excellent examples of the father-son mentorship. The corporate unity is seen in the anointing by discerning of the body of Christ and the functioning of each member (**Ephesians 4:15-16**).
11. **WE BELIEVE IN THE** Christian Marriage of one man and one woman. Two individuals living as One in Christ and for Christ can accomplish much by serving the lord in their marriage and ministry
12. **WE BELIEVE THAT** Fellowship is a relationship among believers that expresses itself in outer co-participation with Christ and one another in accomplishing God's will on earth. It is not just being together but working together to accomplish God's will.
13. **WE BELIEVE IN** The ORDINATION of leaders through the laying on of hands through the Five-fold ministry. Church leaders and their calling are to be approved at the time of this ordination service. See **Acts 6:6; Acts 13:3. 41**

## **KMF OBJECTIVES**

To bring Churches, Pastors into a network fellowship which is united for the purpose of building the Kingdom of God together in the African Continent

To execute Christ's Great Commission to teach, preach and make disciples of all nations Mt 28:19-20 and 16:15.

To conduct key man/ key woman conferences until the vision of the Key men is planted in hearts of the key men throughout the various regions of Africa.

To mobilize and train teams and carry out door to door evangelism using evangeucubes

In all our KMF churches, thus developing an evangelist body of Christ.

To plant and establish churches to take care of the new converts, maturing them into disciples who can also reproduce.

To conduct local and general church seminars and conferences for the Churches in the network.

To use any other available avenues to reach people with the gospel, trainig our church leaders to do likewise.

To lead our churches in sexual abstinence with educative films in schools, institutions and communities establishing the True Love Waits clubs in school and churches.

To carry out or promote HIV\AIDS intervention programs in Schools, Churches and Communities in Network regions.

To train and equip the body of Christ (KMF churches) through every means possible.

To train every Christian in their God ordained ministry/purpose/talent/gift through the Pastors and other Leaders in the network.

To promote and develop the establishment of training facilities in network regions and to facilitate the propagation of the prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral and teaching ministry doctrines.

To provide spiritual mentorship oversight, counsel and insight to related ministries, Churches and organizations that have a covenant relationship with KMF Network.

To give guidance to social workers in community development through the Churches in the network

To extend and develop strong relationships with ministries, schools of ministries, colleges and institutions world-wide to facilitate and strengthen spiritual expansion of the ministry and liaise with government and other development partners in Education and Development activities to promote moral behavior change, ethics and integrity of the people.

To publish and distribute Christian literature and materials inclusive of media support for teaching and training of Pastors, Churches and Communities.

To carry out special projects like clean water projects, pastors' education programs, medical clinics etc.

To mobilize and channel relevant resources in order to achieve the above objectives by partnering with organizations, Churches and individuals.