

Acts and the Epistles
Bible Study Questions and Commentary

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ACTS AND THE EPISTLES
Bible Study Questions and Commentary
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Preface

This collection of Bible studies and commentaries covering the New Testament from Acts to Revelation are essentially my notes as a result of roughly a five year period of group Bible studies conducted at the Chicagoland Church of God. The primary format of this collection of studies comes in the way of questions and answers, progressing through each chapter, with commentary interludes in various places.

As with any Bible Study, the aim is to provide the student a better understanding of God's Word, enabling growth in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. The questions posed to the group varied between simple and complex, but three general guidelines were in place when the studies were prepared and conducted. Firstly, the studies were primarily non-topical; focusing only on the current message of the scripture under study and the context it was given. Second, answers were encouraged to come from the chapter under discussion minimizing references to the student's already understood Biblical concepts, designed that the student learn something new. The third, as a general guideline, attempt to find application of the scriptures under discussion, which often meant challenging current ways of thinking.

These studies should be considered suitable for the Sabbath keeping Church of God community and are consistent with the doctrines regarding annual Holy Day observances. At times, excerpts from other commentaries are used to further amplify the application of the scriptures under study; however this should not be considered an endorsement of the full theology of these commentary authors.

I wish to thank Pastor Duane Nicol, who instituted and encouraged these studies. I am grateful for his mentorship. I am grateful for my wife Kim, for all her support and encouragement when these studies were conducted. A special thanks to Jean Janzen, whose special talents she applied to edit and comment on these studies have been of immense worth.

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Acts

The Book of Acts, also named 'The Acts of the Apostles,' is the continuation of the Gospel of Luke, but The Book of Acts should not be considered a full account of all the acts of the apostles. Luke is giving an account of the salvation of the Gentiles to Theophilus, a Gentile convert.

Luke has a particular purpose in mind. He gives the history of the early church from the time of the ascension of Christ and directs the account to the salvation of the Gentiles, where Paul becomes the central figure. It is this gospel that our historian, Luke, has most fondness for, being a Gentile convert himself. We are given the greater picture of the Gospel going to all the nations as commanded by Jesus Christ.

The questions are designed to provoke thought and discussion as well as enlighten the participants on the development of the early church by examining the people in Luke's story, inclusive of their backgrounds and behaviors; as well as observing the influence of the Holy Spirit

Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to all things that I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.

– Matthew 28:19, 20

Chapter 1

1. Who wrote the Book of Acts? What do we know about the person wrote it?

Luke wrote the book of Acts. It takes up the history where his gospel account leaves off with more detail of the ascension of Jesus Christ.

Luke was likely a Gentile convert. His gospel account shows special sensitivity to the Gentiles. Luke's gospel is the only one with the parable of the Good Samaritan. It records the grateful Samaritan Leper who Christ healed (Luke 17:11-19). Throughout Luke's gospel there is greater emphasis on women, where women were not deemed equal with Jewish men.

We know he had some kind of medical training (Col. 4:14). Being a physician did not necessarily mean having status, as slaves were given medical training so their owners had somebody on staff if they needed medical help. Luke's training is indicative of his style of writing. It is different from the other Gospels in that Luke is meticulous in describing details and events without adding his own commentary.

Luke was likely very loyal. He was the last to remain with Paul. (II Tim 4:11)

2. What is the former treatise (account) mentioned in verse 1?

The former account is the Gospel according to Luke.

3. Who is Theophilus?

He was a Gentile convert. His name suggests he was a government official. His name means "a friend of God."

4. In verse 3 'after His Passion'. What does this mean?

Suffering

5. In verse 3, are these 40 days referenced anywhere else in the gospels? When did the 40 days start, and when did they end? What happened during these 40 days?

Again, Acts is a continuation of Luke's Gospel account, so we go back to Luke 24:50. He walked with the disciples to Bethany. This would be part of the 40 days He spent with them. Verse 3 is the only reference to the time between the resurrection and the ascension. During these forty days He taught to them those things pertaining to the kingdom of God; however these details were not recorded.

6. What Power does the Lord refer to in verse 8? Describe the meaning of this Power.

Greek - *dunamis*

Strength, power, ability 1a) inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth.

It is a perpetual power that is continually fed, or continually feeds. You expel this power, or let it flow; there is always more to follow.

7. How far is a Sabbath day's journey?

About 1000 yards.

8. What happened to Judas?

Matt. 27:5 says he hung himself. However, what Peter describes is something less ordinary, and it is better known. Speculation by some scholars assert, that Satan strangled him and cast him down, bursting asunder. In all likelihood, since it was Passover and nobody wanted to touch the body and be unclean, his body must have bloated due to decomposition over a few days, perhaps the rope broke and became a scene much as Peter describes.

9. What does it mean to cast lots?

From Strong's Concordance - an object used in casting or drawing lots, which was either a pebble, or a potsherd, or a bit of wood 1a) the lots of several persons concerned, inscribed with their names, were thrown together into a vase, which was then shaken, and he whose lot fell out first upon the ground was the one chosen.

Proverbs says 'The lot is cast into the lap; but its every decision is from the lord' (16:33).

Ultimately the Lord decides. In casting lots, it is Matthias. However, the Lord chose Saul, who later became Paul as the last of the twelve.

Chapter 2

1. What are they all talking about in verses 4 to 11? Did they speak what they wanted to speak about or was there more to it than that?

Note in verse 4 they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. In verse 11 they spoke of the wonderful works of God. It appears the Spirit motivated them to speak with some excitement based on how others described them in verse 13.

2. What is it about Peter's address (vv. 14 to 36) that pierces the hearts of the listeners (verse 37) that causes them to ask what to do? Was it the WAY he said

his words, or was it the events that occurred (the rushing mighty wind, the tongues) just prior? Or was it a combination of both or what? How would people today, Jewish people in particular, respond to Peter's address?

This was no doubt a divinely delivered message with power going with and in it, as many listened and responded to it. However, we know it is the Spirit of God that convicts mankind of sin, so Peter's words and the prior events could not alone cause men to repent. The uneasiness comes from the Spirit of God, and without it true repentance cannot be achieved.

Thought: this uneasiness is lacking these days in a world so influenced by a rebellious spirit.

Thought: David must have held an almost divine stature with the Jews. Perhaps how Peter's description of David's hope and belief that in his own offspring there would be hope in raising him from the dead.

3. Peter quotes Joel in this chapter. Is this THE fulfillment of the Prophet Joel's message or is there some kind of later fulfillment? Is Peter aware of any possible later fulfillment?

This prophecy is open ended and subject to future fulfillments, which is indicated in the promise for salvation for 'whoever calls on the name of the Lord'. The Book of Revelation reveals this event will be repeated at the end time. We see this event in the sixth Seal with the heavenly signs, which occur before the final day of the Lord. Revelation 7 indicates many are saved.

Peter must have believed in a later fulfillment:

“To refute the charges of drunkenness, Peter introduces the quoting of the scripture in Joel as 'This is That' in verse 16. In modern terminology, we would say 'this is the kind of thing' which Joel prophesied would take place in the last days. Peter did not say 'then was fulfilled' nor 'as it is written'.”¹

In his quoting of Joel, he also includes in verse 30 and 31 'how the sun shall be turned into darkness, and blood and fire and columns of smoke, etc.' I doubt he was expecting this part to happen anytime soon, as they were told to preach the gospel to all the nations. (Luke 24:47)

Chapter 3

¹ (The Companion Bible), p. 205, Appendix 183

1. What was the purpose in healing the lame man? Was there more than one purpose? What compelled Peter to do this?

This particular lame man everyone knew. Peter must have seen him at the temple many times before.

The purpose was to spread the gospel.

More specifically – to convict those around them of sin. We know this by how dramatic Peter brings this about. The crowd amazed and in wonderment, rejoiced over the dramatic healing of a man they knew (there was no mistake he was a cripple), and then Peter tells them they had murdered the source of this healing. It makes for a bigger fall, leading the people to truly regret what they had done, and repent.

2. In verse 22 and 23, what scripture is Peter referring to?

‘The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, ... and I will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I shall command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.... And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him’ – Deut. 18:15-19.

Peter warns them of the consequences of continued rejection.

Chapter 4

1. Why were the priests and Sadducees grieving that Peter and John taught the people? Who are the Sadducees anyway?

It challenged their authority and their institution.

The Sadducees were a religious party at the time of Christ among the Jews.

2. What does it mean they marveled in verse 13?

Admired in a negative way.

3. What was Peter and John threatened with do you suppose? If you were in their shoes, what do you think you would be threatened with?

They were likely threatened with anything from stoning and attacking the welfare of their families to just plain foul language. Today, we should not expect anything different.

4. What did Peter and John say and do in response to the threats (Consider v. 29)?

They didn't care about the threats of the Sadducees; they cared about the Lord's wishes. Their response was a request for boldness. Paul teaches in Ephesians 6:19, 20 that he must speak the Word with boldness.

5. How comfortable is the Church today about verse 34. Did this mean they sold everything?

It does not expressly say that they sold everything. Rather we can interpret this as selling those things that they had in excess, to share with their fellow brethren who were in need, so that they would no longer be lacking.

Chapter 5

1. What sin did Ananias and Sapphira commit?

In Peter's words, they lied to the Holy Spirit (verse 3). It is important to realize the circumstances of their trespass. Firstly, in verse 4 we read he *'conceived this in his heart'*. This implies careful deliberation and not sudden temptation. We should not compare this to our own trespasses we commit out of ignorance and temptation. Secondly, the Church was in its infancy, and if Ananias and Sapphira got away with their deception, others may have been affected. Perhaps the authority of the Apostles would have been challenged as well. As it turns out, great fear came upon the Church (verse 11 to 13).

2. Why did Ananias lie to Peter? What is Peter telling Ananias in verse 4?

Ananias did not lie to Peter. He lied to God.

3. What sentence did Peter pass on Ananias?

Peter passed no sentence on Ananias. It was God who passed sentence.

4. What does Peter say about those with God's Holy Spirit?

In verse 32, Peter says God gives His Holy Spirit to those who OBEY Him. Key is Obey.

5. What is in the message given by the Pharisee named Gamaliel? Think of perhaps two or three things.

Three possible things are:

- God's will and plan can be seen in world events.
- Don't get involved, think before you act.
- What is of men will come to nothing.
- What is of God cannot be overthrown.

6. What else do we know of Gamaliel?

- He was a Pharisee (See Acts 23:8)
- He was the grandson of Hillel. Hillel founded a school of Jewish law
- He was given the rare title of 'Rabban' (master)
- He was the famous teacher of Saul of Tarsus, who later became Paul

Chapter 6

1. Who are the Grecians and what is their problem? What is the daily ministering?

The Grecians, also known as Hellenists, were Jews who had been scattered and dispersed all over the world by Romans. Many of the Grecian Jews would return to Jerusalem for the Feasts of the Lord (Pentecost and Passover). What is also significant is that they adopted Greek culture and spoke the Greek language.

The problem was the Hebrews or Palestinian Jews who rejected all Greek culture completely and despised it. They were a tightly knit group and were reared to despise all that was Gentile. They felt God cursed the Gentile nations. This hatred extended to the Grecian Jews. The Hebrews were probably having difficulty getting rid of their prejudice against the Grecians. This is a record of the first problem encountered in the Church due to rapid growth. The Grecians accused the ministers of neglecting their widows.

The daily ministering means ministering in an official capacity as the minister. Ministry means to serve following Christ's example. (Phil 2:7, 1 Peter 2:16).

“serve tables” (v2) is just a metaphor. It refers to the hands on job of ministering concerning widows versus preaching of the word. Compared to the crucial job of preaching, looking after widow's needs were summed up in this metaphor “waiting on tables.”

2. What was the solution?

The office of deacons was set up to meet the needs of the Church for the day-to-day ministry. The apostles needed help in order to fulfill their own preaching mission.

3. What lesson can we learn from this solution?

It was the opinion of the apostles that it would take men of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to take on the problem of waiting tables. The function of waiting tables is not our usual impression of this task; it is about ensuring the needs of the brethren are addressed as individuals and as a group. There is an important lesson to be gained here.

It takes a kind of person the apostles describe, being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom to properly deal with a diverse group of people with varying needs and predisposed ideas of right and wrong. Some individuals need more attention than others. Dealing with a diverse group of people can be complicated, especially if they are new converts who may have any number of challenges imposed on them by accepting this new and radical faith. It takes, therefore, the special gifts of the Spirit and wisdom to deal with diverse situations so as to limit offenses and demonstrate a right example for others at the same time.

The Church of God today must have such people. Although we may not be organized as the first century Church, situations arise continually during times of assembly, festivals and at other times when members need assistance or guidance. People do not change overnight and prior biases as to what is equitable and fair need to be dealt with effectively and appropriately so that needs are met in ways that are not offensive.

In the Church today some take a certain level of pride in scriptural knowledge, and feel that the kind of ministry described above does not match their talents. In light of the above, such thinking is erroneous considering what talents and gifts it took to fill the roles of those called upon to *wait on tables*.

4. Who could those of the synagogue resist and who could they not?

They were able to resist Stephen, but they could not resist God, as we see in verse 10. It was the wisdom and Spirit with which he spoke that could not be resisted.

5. What does somebody do with a `problem' like Stephen?

Set up false witnesses. Stephen was a credible person, and they could not resist the words he spoke, so the immediate answer comes in verse 11, where the false witnesses were engaged.

6. Did Stephen go willingly with those who apprehended him?

This is a debatable subject. It is likely he did resist, as he was already on trial for his life with the charge of blasphemy. Some say he went willingly having inner confidence that God would ultimately decide the outcome.

Chapter 7

1. Did Stephen answer the question put to him in verse 1?

The high priest asked 'Are these things so?' which may or may not have been a direct question to Stephen. The 'these things' the high priest refers to is what is said by the accusers in verses 13 and 14 of chapter 6, namely destroying the temple and changing the customs which Moses delivered them. In reality, it was they who were destroying God's institutions and the customs of Moses. Therefore, Stephen answered the question in his lengthy defense essentially pointing out it was they, his accusers, who should be charged with blasphemy for destroying God's institutions, not him!

2. What was Stephen trying to accomplish in his lengthy sermon from verses 2 to 53? Was it effective and convicting? Did it achieve the desired result?

Stephen was defending himself while exposing their guilt (see question 1 above). The effectiveness was clear because they did not like what he had to say, and he may have seen that in their faces as noted in verse 50, where he appears not to enlarge on the history of David or Solomon. In verse 57 we see them making all kinds of noise for distraction to drown Stephen out, a sure sign of the sermon's effectiveness.

Stephen did not desire to die. God chooses His martyrs. God's desire was to have Stephen witness and be martyred; also inferred by Stephen was the sight of the Son of Man (God) in the heavens. The desired result may have been achieved, and is recorded forever in the Bible.

3. Regard verse 51. Does Jesus' saying in Matthew 21:44 relate to Stephen's charge? Think about: Resist or Stumble.

Stephen's charge in verse 51 is often quoted in that a man can successfully withstand the Holy Spirit instead of stumbling or being convicted at His words. Matthew 21:44 Jesus says that 'whomever falls on this stone (likely referring to Himself) will be broken', meaning if we stumble over His words, we turn to see what we stumbled over, which brings us to see our error and repent of our ways. On the other hand, if we resist, the stone will fall on us and grind us to powder. Consider the old saying: 'the wheels of God grind slowly, but grind exceeding fine'.

4. What does he mean in verse 53?

We may refer to Romans 13:1,2, Acts 7:38, and Galatians 3:19. In times past angels, messengers of God, have by His command delivered messages pertaining to judgment and the law.

Noted scriptures on Chapter 7

Matt. 23:29 to 23:39 comes to mind in this chapter, specifically verse 30. Also refer to Luke 11:47, Mark 7:9, Eph. 5:6, Heb. 2:2,3 and Heb. 10:28-31.

Chapter 8

1. Can persecution lead to spreading the gospel? Does the scattering of the Church mean they left Jerusalem to escape persecution? Is it wrong to flee persecution? Why did the Apostles remain in Jerusalem?

We see in verse 4 that they were scattered abroad and went everywhere preaching the gospel as a direct result of persecution of the Church.

Jesus Christ protected Himself on a few recorded occasions, so seeking safety is important. We are not asked to subject ourselves to persecution when it can be avoided.

It is likely the apostles remained in Jerusalem to service a persecuted Church. They may be supporting a new and fledgling Church.

2. Who preached the gospel in Samaria?

Those who were scattered (verse 4). It's significant the apostles did not preach the word outside Jerusalem, but regular disciples. What is to stop anyone in the Church today?

3. Why did not Philip (not the apostle) lay hands on the believers he baptized in verse 12, which brought the Apostles John and Peter to come and lay hands on them that would receive the Holy Spirit? This is a tough question in a way; however, think about the situation with Simon in this chapter.

Philip was likely instructed not to. In verse 16 we learn they have not had hands laid on them. The apostles reserved that duty to themselves.

The reason for this can be found in the example of Simon the Sorcerer. Philip baptized Simon, but the Apostle Peter would not lay hands on him, as Peter judged his heart was not right. As the Church was in its infancy, the apostles kept a tighter rein on something as significant as the laying on of hands to avoid possible confusion. The example of Simon illustrates this. Luke does not tell this story to dramatize Peter telling off Simon the sorcerer.

Chapter 9

1. What do you suppose the early Christian Church members called themselves?

They did not call themselves Christians, as this term was not coined until Chapter 11. In verse 2 of chapter 9 Luke writes `... if he (Saul) found any who were of the Way...`. They likely called themselves `Those of the Way`. The Way, the Way of Life. Jesus Christ calls Himself `The Way`.

2. Did the Lord answer Saul's question in verse 6?

No. He advises Paul to go to the city and find out what he must do. Jesus Christ put this in the hands of His servants.

3. Why do you suppose the Lord blinded Saul?

It got Paul's attention as it must have been frightening. It was a serious trauma...meaning God meant business (blindness would be quite a miracle also.) Another is that he was left only to his thoughts, to contemplate all he had done by persecuting the Church of God so vehemently. Another to consider is that there fell from his eyes something like scales (v18). This may be symbolizing how scales of spiritual darkness and sin were removed from him. He was spiritually blind, and now he can see.

4. How was Saul able so quick to preach the Gospel?

He was familiar with the scriptures, having had significant training in the law. He was familiar with his former enemies' teachings and he was no longer spiritually blinded. All this with God's Spirit and the blindness removed, made him ready and equipped to preach the gospel. We also learn it was soon after he went into Arabia to be taught personally by Jesus Christ for his special mission of teaching the Gentiles. (Galatians 1:11-18)

5. What confounded the Jews in Damascus?

The sudden change in Saul, from an oppressor of the Way, to an outspoken advocate confounded them. Instead of searching to see if what he said was true, the Damascusenes were more preoccupied with his change of behavior and attitude. There is no record of believers or an epistle to a Church in Damascus.

Chapter 10

1. What is significant about the conversion of Cornelius to the Way in this story? What is the difference between him and the Samaritans?

Up until now no one had been baptized into the Church but the Jews, Samaritans, and those converts who had been circumcised and observed the ceremonial law. Cornelius is the first Gentile disciple to the Way without becoming a Jew first. The

Samaritans were not Gentiles, although they practically were, as they differed from the Jews in their manner of worship.

2. If this is the first Gentile convert to the Way, then what about Luke, the writer of Acts and the gospel that bears his name? We established he was likely a Gentile convert himself.

To answer this question, it is generally agreed that the Gospel according to Luke and the Book of Acts form a single two volume work. Turning back to the beginning of the gospel of Luke, Luke admits in the opening two verses that he was not an eyewitness to the events he reports to Theophilus, but had access to writings and the actual eyewitnesses. He had sifted sources carefully, and it is believed he had access to Mark's gospel, and was no doubt guided by the Holy Spirit. His assembling of the events he declares to Theophilus continues into the Book of Acts until such time he is converted to the Way, although he makes no specific reference to that time or event. His conversion was after the conversion of Cornelius.

3. Was Cornelius already saved considering his prayers were heard, feared God, and gave alms? Does God hear the prayers of the unsaved?

Cornelius was not saved. He was probably in the process of being called. He definitely was a man of character, and a devout worshipper of the true God, but that does not save a person for he had not yet heard the *'...words by which you (he) and all your (his) household will be saved'* (Acts 11:14).

God does hear the prayers of the unsaved. We read Peter acknowledging this fact in verse 34 and 35, where in *'EVERY nation whoever fears Him and works Righteousness is accepted by Him'*. However, those who call on God who do not fear Him and practice iniquity will certainly have their prayers hindered.

4. Why did God have to teach Peter what he himself explains in verse 28? Didn't he understand his Master's instructions in Luke 24:47?

“It is true, that in their final commission (Luke 24:47) He (Jesus) had commanded them to disciple and immerse all nations; but they very naturally interpreted this in the light of past experience, and concluded that all nations were to be gradually absorbed into the Jewish commonwealth by circumcision, and afterward brought into the Church. They had not hesitated, therefore, to immerse proselytes, and even to give them office in the Church, ... though they still regarded it as a sin to enter the house of a Gentile who was uncircumcised. (Acts 11:3)”²

² (McGarvey), 10:1

“This fact in the mental state of the apostles shows that they were not guided by the Holy Spirit into all truth at once, but their knowledge was extended according to the demands of the occasion. It was a prejudice, however, belonging to them as Jews, which had prevented them, thus far, from perceiving the particular truth here involved; and this involves the conclusion that prejudices previously were capable of impeding the inspiring influence, so that special measures were required for their eradication. The time had now arrived when this prejudice must be uprooted from the heart of Peter.”³

Chapter 11

1. How deeply rooted is the problem the Jews had with those who were not of the circumcision? What did it take for them to get over it? If someone said it took God's Spirit to `get over it', then why didn't this happen already?

Simply put: Very deeply rooted. The Jews were taught from an early age extreme prejudice towards the Gentiles. Even converted Christians were disconcerted learning that Peter entered the house of an uncircumcised man and ate with him (verse 3).

2. What do we know about Barnabas?

Barnabas means Son of Consolation. He was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. In Acts 4:36 we know his surname as Joses. The apostles named him Barnabas, which means Son of encouragement, because he must have been a very encouraging individual. His name stands first in the list of prophets and teachers at Antioch. Luke calls him a good man in Chapter 11:24.

Barnabas may have been someone who bridged the gap, as he took Saul and introduced him to the apostles. They may have been companions as students in the school of Gamaliel.

3. Why did Barnabas seek out Saul in particular in verse 25?

The work in Antioch may have been so exhaustive that Barnabas went to Tarsus in search of Paul to assist him. Perhaps knowing Paul, he was more inclined to seek out him.

³ (McGarvey), 10:1

Chapter 12

1. This is all we learn about James in Acts is his martyrdom. What does this tell us though?

He must have been very active by the mere fact Herod chose to silence him.

It should also be noted Luke writes only a partial history of the early Church. Many more acts of the apostles were going on in parallel that we know nothing about. Luke chooses to write this sliver of Church history because it recounts the conversion of the Gentiles, for Luke was one of them and so was Theophilus, the intended receiver of the document we now call the Book of Acts.

2. The believers prayed for Peter constantly (v5). Yet, they didn't believe he was saved from Herod when they were told he was knocking at the door. What is up with that?

Prayers are answered often in ways so unexpected. They may have been expecting Herod to release him formally, or in some other manner, not just showing up at their door. Another possible thing to discuss is how we may pray and ask; even constantly; yet not really believe in getting an answer because of the circumstances. In this case they already lost an Apostle, James, now they faced losing another.

Chapter 13.

1. What do we know about these fellows that make up this motley crew in verse 1? Why do you suppose God assembled such a group of individuals together with such diverse backgrounds?

Antioch was a diverse Church. We know little about some of these men but offer the following:

- Barnabas: a wealthy Cyprian, born on Cyprus (see also Chapter 11, question 2)
- Simeon or Niger: the Niger means black, referring to the complexion of his skin. The name is also Roman, where he was likely a Roman citizen.
- Lucius of Cyrene: little known, but perhaps one of the poor persecuted believers who fled to Antioch for safety.
- Manaen: from a higher class of society, as he was a foster brother to Herod Antipas (the same Herod who had tried Jesus, and murdered John the Baptist)
- Saul of Tarsus: much more known of him, but a Roman citizen, a Jew and a Pharisee.

These men have little in common. They were men of prayer and fasting, which they were doing concerning world evangelism. God uses men who sense the need, enough to forgo food and put other things aside to seek God's will.

2. Chapter 13 sets the scene for the launching stage of what?

The first three phases of the Great Commission had been launched, namely to witness in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. God was ready to send the gospel out to the whole world, reaching the uttermost part. (Acts 1:8)

The Antioch Church was chosen by God to launch the mission, but Jerusalem was too narrow and traditional to do the job. The Jerusalem Jewish Church members held too many feelings against the rest of the world. Although they may have recognized the calling, they were unprepared and could not wholeheartedly commit themselves to world evangelism. They refused to let go of their exclusiveness and formal approach to God. The Antioch Church, however, was diverse, uninhibited, perhaps a Church that reached out to everyone with less prejudice. Out of this Church, God raised leaders mentioned in chapter 13:1, who were committed to spreading the Word to the Gentiles, unlike the leaders in Jerusalem.

We find this reaffirmed in Paul's account to the Galatians chapter 2 where Peter, after the events recorded in Acts 10, separates himself from the Gentiles he was dining with, fearing those of the circumcision. Peter was not ready for world evangelism.

In light of what we have learned thus far, and of what is said in Chapter 13, consider the following questions:

3. What similarities do we see in the growth of the new Church of God in Acts to the Church in the last 70 years?

Prejudice has been a similar problem. Leaders should be warned that God is prepared to take His gospel further and not rely on an established center that's too rigid in their approach to spreading the Word.

4. Does partiality and prejudice in a church discredit the church entirely?

Despite the issues discussed above, we should not discredit the Jerusalem Church. The Spirit working in a child of God continues to work in transforming the mind of an individual, including a church. Jesus Christ is the judge on such matters, and we must be careful in discrediting a church, past or present, on the problems it has, including prejudice and other errors in judgment.

Chapter 14

Paul and Barnabas set out on the calling from Antioch at the beginning of Chapter 13 and return at the end of Chapter 14, where they gather the Church together.

1. What did God have in mind for their mission?

In Chapter 13:2 the Holy Spirit said 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'. What the work itself is, is not specifically mentioned, or discussed by Luke. This is clarified in Chapter 14:27, when reporting to the Antioch Church they declared all that God had with them, and that '...He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles', which is exactly what God had in mind for their mission.

We should also pay attention to the fact that Paul and Barnabas acknowledge all that God had done, taking no credit for themselves what was done. They recognized it was done with them, or through them. It is important to know it is God who must receive the glory in the work of the gospel, not man. We, however, are given to rejoice to take part in His plan, and feel the joy in seeing the results.

2. Some Jews and Gentiles believed and some didn't. Why is that? Are those who disbelieve condemned? Does Paul condemn the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles, as well as those who persecuted and stoned him? Is he upset with them?

We know by the words of Jesus Christ that none can come to Him unless the Father draws him. At the beginning of this chapter, we see the unbelieving Jews 'stirred up and disaffected the minds of the Gentiles against the brethren'. Perhaps these Gentiles may have been receptive to the Gospel, been drawn by God, but they choked the message by their negative influence. This may well have been possible, considering the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13).

The unbeliever is always condemned. We must also let go of the mistaken notion that an unbeliever who dies an unbeliever faces an eternity of condemnation. Jesus saves the condemned, as we all once were, and the plan of salvation permits the opportunity of salvation for all in the resurrection of the dead, commonly known as the Great White Throne resurrection.

Considering Paul consented to the stoning death of Stephen, and perhaps others, now being stoned himself we wonder if he felt anger towards his persecutors. From the standpoint of justice, he should not feel unfairly treated. From the standpoint of being a mortal human, he may have felt remorse for having subjected others to the same treatment, or perhaps he did feel anger toward his persecutors.

In all this, including the persecutions and the resistance to the gospel, we must remind ourselves of one thing, that 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Ephesians 6:12). These evil powers work

against the gospel, and influence mankind. These words to the Ephesians from Paul may tell us why Luke does not record Paul expressing words of condemnation for unbelievers or his persecutors.

3. Did they succeed despite all the resistance they encountered?

We could rephrase the question to ask, "Did God succeed, and what did God want to achieve?"

We read in Chapter 13:48, 49: *"And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the Word of the Lord was published throughout all the region."*

And in Chapter 14:27 *"... they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles."*

If we believe the characters in the story and the writer, then God succeeded, and He achieved an open door to the Gentiles for salvation.

4. Why must we go through so much tribulation to enter the Kingdom of God? Is there a purpose in this?

We read in verse 22 that in all three cities; Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, Paul and Barnabas declared to the brethren "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God". Perhaps the best understanding of purpose of tribulation can be best told in the following story:

Malachi 3:3: "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; ..."

This verse puzzled some women in a Bible study and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and nature of God.

One of the women offered to find out the process of refining silver and get back to the group at the next Bible Study. That week, the woman called a silversmith and made an appointment to watch him at work. She didn't mention anything about the reason for her interest beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver. As she watched the silversmith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a hot spot then she thought again about the verse that says: "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver."

She asked the silversmith if it was true that he had to sit there in

front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silversmith, how do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy -- when I see my image in it."

If you are feeling the heat remember that God will keep watching you until He sees His image in you.⁴

Chapter 15

1. What made the teaching for the requirement of circumcision to be saved so troubling? I.e. what does it imply?

It implies one had to become a Jew before becoming a Christian. The issue is not the physical act of circumcision, for there is no difficulty in submitting to that; but the implication is that works of the law are needed for an individual to be accepted by God, which is contrary to the message of the gospel. See Colossians 2:14.

2. What is important in what Peter said in his address to the Church and what was important in what James said?

Luke does not report everything that was said. What is most noteworthy, according to Luke in Peter's address, is found in verses 8 and 9. In these verses Peter teaches that the Gentiles' hearts are purified by faith, and in the same way the hearts of the Jews. There is no distinction between a Jew and Gentile in Jesus Christ.

What may be most important in what James says is that although he advises they write to the Gentiles: that they abstain from sexual immorality, things strangled and from blood (verse 20), this is not a comprehensive list of instructions they must be careful to observe. There was no need to write an extensive list of instructions since the Torah was read in the synagogues of every city on every Sabbath, and the Gentiles were familiar with the law. It was only necessary to name particular things that gave the greatest cause for concern.

Chapter 16

1. Was finding Timothy an important discovery for Paul? Study the language in verse 1.

⁴ Author Unknown

Timothy provided a wonderful surprise and exciting discovery for Paul. This can be found in the word 'behold'. The Greek word for behold is *idou*, implying a look of wonderment on the discoverer. In verse 2 Timothy was well reported of, and impacted others in other townships.

Paul found a likeminded, but younger kindred spirit. In Philippians 2:19 Paul writes 'For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state'. This was written while Paul was in prison. Paul was to send Timothy, his trusted protégé, in his absence.

2. After what we understood in Chapter 15 regarding circumcision, why did Paul circumcise Timothy?

Paul circumcised Timothy essentially for the sake of expediency. He wanted Timothy to have no difficulty entering the synagogues to teach, which was essentially the reason why Luke alludes to it in verse 3.

This measure would seem to contradict Paul's writings (1 Cor. 7:19, Gal 5:2), but there he speaks in terms of salvation. The circumcision of Timothy was essential to overcoming possible cultural differences.

3. What two companions of Paul are first introduced onto the scene in this chapter?

We are introduced to Timothy and Luke. Luke makes first mention of himself in verse 10, where he uses the word 'we'.

4. What is one way the Holy Spirit can lead? Does God have to give us reasons for what we are told to do or not to do, what he blesses and doesn't bless?

We read in verse 6 that they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. They tried to go into Bithynia, but again the Spirit did not permit them (verse 7).

We are not told how the Spirit prevented them. It appeared they did not know why, but concluded that the Holy Spirit did not permit them. Luke writes this account sometime after the fact, and possibly reflected on these cases compelling him to draw this conclusion. We, upon reflection, may also see how God interfered with certain plans and objectives we had, whether to preach the gospel or otherwise. In this manner the Spirit can lead us in the direction according to His purpose and schedule.

Discussion question:

In verses 35 to 40, what was Paul trying to assert? Was it his honor, or was it justice: if justice, was it for himself, or his cause? Is this something we should emulate as Christians when we are treated unfairly?

Paul was asserting his rights as a Roman citizen. This incident demonstrates Christians can and should make use of civil laws to protect themselves. We should not use privileges to inflict punishment on our enemies.

Chapter 17**1. What similarities does the society in Athens as described in verses 21 to 23, have with society today?**

Athens was a great intellectual and cultural center. Knowledge, literature, art, architecture and thought flourished in Athens at this time. There were also many idols. This is not unlike developed countries today.

2. Regarding verses 24 and 25. So what are you then going to do for God? What are you going to do to give Him glory?

We ask this question because of the manner of worship these people of Athens gave the unknown God. We worship God in Spirit and Truth (John 4:23, 24). To give God glory we turn to John 15:8 to find out.

“By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be my disciples.”

We are to bear MUCH fruit, the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). Consider the magnitude of what a Christian's growth has and the impact the bearing of fruit must have on the God of the Universe.

3. Consider verses 26, 27, 30 and 31. What does Paul mean in saying these words? Is everyone being called now? Is there a single day of judgment? Is this the same as Jesus' words - `Repent, for the Kingdom is at hand'?

Jesus sent the disciples into all the world to preach repentance and remission of sins. God's command to repent goes to "all men" through the preaching of the gospel. This speaks of the universality of the commission. As it reaches them (though not all at once), they are commanded (through the gospel) to repent.

4. In verse 32, do you suppose Paul was encouraged by the fact they said `we will hear you again on this matter' considering what we know about these people? Do you think he wanted to go back and follow up on them?

It was unlikely from their indication they would be interested to hear him again. These people were religious hobbyists, and intellectually converted 'New Age' type of society. We can contrast these religious hobbyists with those who believed in verse 34. The believers took the message in faith.

Today we have the written Word of God, and there are many religious people claiming to have truth and are well versed in Biblical knowledge. We must recognize, however, the Bible is Spiritual, and only through the Holy Spirit we can comprehend its messages. The truth might be aided by scholarship, but does not come through scholarship.

Chapter 18

1. Why did Paul hook up with Aquila and Priscilla?

It is uncertain whether Aquila and Priscilla were believers when Paul first encountered them in Corinth. It is evident that Paul hooked up with them because he shared the same occupation as a tentmaker. Every Jewish boy was taught a handicraft. Paul needed a job to sustain him.

Consider also that Paul did not preach and evangelize full time. He occupied his hours working with his hands, concentrating on things besides the gospel. We can become exhausted and unbalanced not to get our minds on other things, even if they do not pertain to the gospel. In verse 4 we know he continued his labors spreading the gospel in the synagogues on the Sabbath.

2. What does it mean in verse 5 'pressed in Spirit'. Does the apostle relate his condition in his first epistle to the Corinthians?

The NIV version translates this passage as: "... Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching ..." Paul was engrossed with the word of his testimony. The word translated 'spirit' in most texts reads 'word' from the word '*logos*' in the Greek.

The first five verses of chapter 2 of 1 Corinthians, Paul describes himself as being troubled, but credits his words and efforts to the Spirit of God, and maintained a focus on the gospel (verse 2).

3. Why does Paul say what he does in verse 6? Have we heard something like this before from Paul in Acts? Does he repeat himself? Why?

It appears he was fed up with them. Christ advises us not cast our pearls before swine and it's not so unexpected, as He also advises the Christian to shake the dust off his feet when departing a city that will not hear the gospel. Paul has no trouble declaring, after making a concerted effort to persuade Jews that Jesus was the Christ, they are

unworthy of eternal life as he did before in chapter 13:46. It is fitting for Paul to advise the unbelieving and resistant Jews that he will turn his efforts to the Gentiles, whom the Jews despised and felt unworthy.

4. What Feast does Paul want to keep?

Pentecost

Chapter 19

1. Why did these disciples get re-immersed? Does this mean that everyone whom John the Baptist immersed, has to be re-immersed? Did John himself baptize these disciples?

The response to Paul's question was into John's (the Baptist) immersion. They were likely in contact with Apollos, who only knew the baptism of John.

The baptism of John was the baptism of repentance, and that they should believe on Him who is to come. Jesus Christ, before his ascension into heaven, instructed the disciples to baptize in His name. It was not until Pentecost the Holy Spirit was given, and the laying on of hands that a disciple would receive the Holy Spirit.

It was by divine authority that John's baptism was superseded by the baptism into Jesus Christ. Those baptized by John, including the disciples, had already been baptized by John's baptism while it was still in effect. We know later that Jesus 'breathed' on them so they may receive the Holy Spirit.

This forces us to conclude that they had been immersed with John's immersion after it had ceased to be administered by divine authority. Apollos had been preaching this obsolete immersion in Ephesus, and he may have immersed these persons. If so, they submitted to an institution that had been abrogated for more than twenty years. Paul needed to baptize them again, followed by the laying on of hands.

Chapter 20

1. Verse 35. What does it mean it is more blessed to give than receive?

It is more than an act; it is a way of life of giving that makes it a blessing.

Chapter 21

1. Who was correct about Paul's insistence to go to Jerusalem; himself or the Church at Tyre? What about the prophet Agabus, what do we know about him? Why did Paul not heed the warnings to the Church in Tyre or the prophet Agabus? How did he interpret these warnings so that he was able to convince himself to go to Jerusalem? Was it an emotional decision on Paul's part?

Paul was a man of great conviction. He is now a famous man of history, and a renowned saint. There is a desire to believe that he would not make errors in judgment, but great men are not beyond making mistakes. The Bible is frank in showing the errors of God's great men. We can ascertain from the information that Luke tells us to answer this question, and not permit ourselves to come to Paul's defense because he is Paul.

In verse 4, Luke writes that through the Spirit he should not go up to Jerusalem. It is evident the Holy Spirit is compelling the disciples in unity, including Luke, that Paul not make this journey.

In verses 10 to 12 we learn of the prophet Agabus coming all the way to Judea to give Paul a message. A clear prophesy that Paul will be bound by the Jews in Jerusalem. Agabus was a true prophet of God. In Acts 11:28 he is introduced as making a prophesy, signified by the Spirit, regarding great dearth around the world in the days of Claudius Caesar. His message was clear.

Luke and the other disciples, after hearing these things from Agabus, pleaded with Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul's response was defiant. He was ready to suffer, even die for the cause he was passionate for. Note he did not indicate he was told by Jesus Christ to go to Jerusalem, nor is there any record of Christ's instructions to do so.

There is no doubt Paul had a deep desire to return to Jerusalem (20:22). It was years since he was last there. He felt he would never be able to return. Perhaps his compulsion to return was too great for him to handle. Someone in this state of mind may not heed the warnings he was given, and interpret such warnings as information only.

2. Looking ahead in Acts, was Paul's decision correct?

Looking ahead one thing is known: in the book of Acts, Paul, for the remainder of his life, for as far as we know, was constrained from further missions. He was limited to national leaders and those who made their way to him. He was a prisoner for Christ throughout the rest of the recorded time in Acts.

We should make note of what our passions are, and try to ensure that they are not contrary to God's Will. Although we may have done the Work with all conviction to serve the Lord, we may still be trapped, or bound in the spirit, to other compulsions and not pay serious attention to the warnings and the consequences.

We must not forget, however, that the Lord is graceful, and most certainly salvaged the life of Paul and found him a way to continue. We can hope to expect the same if we are willing to be His servant.

(Special note, in verse 19: Paul acknowledges all that God had done, not what Paul did through his ministry. God works through His people, and we should have a rewarding feeling that God is (should be) doing through us, and that we give God the credit.)

3. In verse 21, is this accusation true? What customs is James referring to? What is the Law of Moses anyway?

Not true according to James who in verse 24 says they '... are nothing....' What is not true in particular is that Paul is not teaching the Jews to forsake 'Moses' regarding circumcision of children, but what is true he is telling the Gentiles there is no reason for them to do so.

Other customs James is referring to are the temple ritual laws.

The Law of Moses is the 'so called Law of Moses'. God's laws were in effect before Moses. God gave through Moses the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, in the form we know.

4. What thing is James referring to in verse 25 that the Gentiles should not observe?

The letter from the Jerusalem conference was not intended to be an exhaustive list of instructions. It included only things the apostles and elders deemed necessary to mention, perhaps because the four things mentioned were the four areas most likely to be problem areas in the churches. A good percentage of the Gentile converts had been God-fearers who attended the synagogues regularly and worshiped the God of the Hebrews, so they were already familiar with the main components of God's law, including the weekly and annual Sabbaths and festivals.

At the conference, James said, "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts

15:18-21). There was no need to write an extensive list of instructions since the Torah was read in the synagogues of every city on every Sabbath. It was only necessary to name particular things.

You'll notice that the apostolic decree did not include instructions on honoring parents, refraining from theft and lying, observing the Lord's Supper, or dealing with anger and rage. All these items are addressed elsewhere, however.⁵

Chapter 22

1. What was Paul's purpose in addressing the Jerusalem mob? Did he mess up in his speech if it was in defense? Was there something else he hoped to achieve?

Looks like he relates to them, first giving his credibility as a Jew, and how he felt and persecuted the Way. He perhaps hoped that they would understand how he went to the Gentiles, which would address, or begin to address the general accusation in verse 28 of Chapter 21.

He messed up his defense by quoting Jesus' words in verse 21, although he was being honest and forthright.

We ask, however, if his speech was a defense. Paul may not have had a personal defense of his actions in mind, because his real intentions were to witness to the Jews.

Chapter 23

1. In verse 3 what does it mean by the term 'whitewashed' or 'whited' in directing it to Ananias?

It is the same word Jesus used in Matthew 23:26 in describing a hypocrite, who on the outside appears white, but are on the inside unclean. If anything, Jesus Christ despises hypocrisy.

2. Did Paul lose his temper? Was it important for him to back down from his comment to Ananias as he did in verse 5, even though his words in verse 3 are true?

Paul did not lose his temper, but in controlled righteous indignation he made his statement to Ananias. This can be likened to Jesus Christ overturning the money

⁵ (Stinson, Minister, Church of God, International)

changer's tables in His Father's house. Paul was almost certainly struck at the command of Ananias, causing him to make his statements.

When Paul realized Ananias was the high priest and he should not speak evil of the ruler of his people, as it is written in Exodus 22:28, he then backed down from his comment. It has been suggested that Paul was being sarcastic, which appears in several of his writings.

There is judgment here. To speak evil is to speak slanderously to and about those in authority. There is an envelope of respect that should be maintained even though we live in a free society.

Romans 13:1-7 is another reference to our conduct toward our leaders.

3. In Acts, specifically in the last few chapters we studied, does Paul use the fact he is a Roman and a Pharisee to his advantage?

Yes he did. In Acts 16 he asserts his rights as a Roman citizen before the magistrates who ordered the beating of Paul and his companions openly without investigation, which is in violation of Roman law. In chapter 22 he saves himself a beating by the centurion by advising him he is a Roman.

4. In 23:11, do Jesus' words vindicate Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem?

Not necessarily. However, Jesus Christ tells him he did a good job of testifying before them.

5. Consider and think about the following statement and be prepared to discuss it: 'The New Testament was not intended to be a systematic theology or a thorough exposition on the 'cans' and 'cannots' of Christianity'

In the book of Acts we encounter a few controversies. One in particular is the conflict over circumcision. The controversy was introduced in Chapter 15:1, where certain men from Judea taught the brethren saying 'Unless you are circumcised according to the Law of Moses, you cannot be saved'. After consideration of the matter, the decision was laid out in a Jerusalem decree, summarized in verses 28 and 29 that circumcision was not necessary, but that the uncircumcised abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled and from sexual immorality. This decree tells us that circumcision would profit the Gentiles nothing. In this way, circumcision is not a requirement, but neither was it a prohibition i.e. a 'cannot'.

Jesus tells us in Matt 5:17

'Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill'.

Fulfill: Jesus will pay the penalty of the law. Secondly Jesus magnified the law. The magnification of the law is richly given to us in the New Testament. As we grow in Grace in knowledge, the clarity of Jesus Christ's purpose renews our minds.

The 'cans' and 'cannots' are outlined in the Old Testament and the New Testament builds upon these. The sacrifices are not worthwhile to us as Jesus is our Passover and has made atonement for us, but the sacrificial system itself was not outlawed i.e. became a 'cannot'.

See also Chapter 21, question 4.

Chapter 24

1. Where do you suppose Paul's mind is now? Does he regret the move to go to Jerusalem? What is Paul accomplishing for the Lord in this chapter and for the two years he was bound (v 27). Does he know where he is headed?

For the two years he was bound we know nothing of his activities. We know of no epistles that were written during this time. If we judge by the silence in Luke's account, these two years were the most inactive of Paul's career as an apostle. We can presume he is rethinking the process and the decisions that got him where he is now.

He does know, however, that he is to go to Rome. In Chapter 23:11 he heard from the Lord that he should be of good cheer, having testified in Jerusalem, and that he must also bear witness in Rome. It is a time of waiting for him, wondering when the time would come.

2. Why doesn't the Lord intervene and set him free as He has in the past?

It was simply not the Lord's will. It was the Lord's will that Paul testify in Rome, and his impoundment ensured his safety from those wishing to kill him, and ultimately did provide safe passage to Rome. Perhaps we can speculate that his imprisonment kept Paul even safe from himself, as he also indicated earlier he was prepared to die for the cause, and the Lord was not prepared for that to happen just yet.

3. What judgments or comments, personal or otherwise does Luke pass on these kinds of questions above?

Luke does not make any comments that directly relate to the kind of questions asked above. We are digging into the scripture to see more and to extract our own feelings as to what is taking place, which is relevant to, and developing a sense of the people involved.

4. What judgments does Luke make in the Book of Acts?

What is very refreshing about Luke is that he gives us exactly what he promises his friend Theophilus, an account. Luke seldom, if ever, injects his own viewpoints or opinions throughout the book of Acts. He is very much a historian. We, the reader, must dig into the words to possibly ascertain the behaviors, emotions and feelings of the people in Acts.

5. What was on Felix's mind in v22-27 that prevented him from making a decision regarding Paul? What issues was he having?

After hearing Paul's discourse, and having a more accurate knowledge of the Way, he again, along with his wife, who was also familiar with Jewish tradition, spoke to Paul concerning faith in Christ (v24). Having his conscience pricked (v25), and now afraid, instead of responding he chose to procrastinate, allowing the flames of conscience to be smothered by worldly ambition. He was not prepared for this kind of life change. The conclusion was to leave Paul bound.

Chapter 25

1. What was Festus trying to sort out, Paul's beliefs (what did he think of Paul's beliefs) or Roman law in regards to what to do with him? Why did he confer with King Agrippa on the situation? Was this situation important to Festus?

Festus thought it was all a bunch of superstition, not the first story of a man being raised from the dead and probably not important to Festus as it took 'many days' v14 before he discussed it with King Agrippa. King Agrippa was a Jew and more familiar with Jewish customs than Festus.

'From this speech it appears that the perplexity of Festus was not so much in reference to the main issue between the Jews and Paul, as in reference to the bearing which the case had upon Roman law. He discovered that the main issue between the parties had reference to that "Jesus who had died, and whom Paul affirmed to be alive." This Jesus being claimed by Paul as an object of worship, he supposed it was an instance of that demon-worship, or worship of dead men deified, which was common among the Greeks and Romans.'⁶

⁶ (McGarvey), 25:1

Chapter 26

1. In Paul's testimony to King Agrippa, he repeats Jesus' words to him ` ... It is hard for you to kick against the goads'. What does this mean?

Goads are sharp-pointed sticks used to prod cattle in the right direction as they plow a field. Cattle can and do kick against these prods, but they only hurt themselves. Paul had been avoiding the truth that was confronting him. Although it was difficult, he was kicking against the goads, and his conscience must have felt it. The question for us to consider is, "Are we kicking against the goads?"

However, some believe that the statement, "It is hard for you to kick against the goads," means Paul had guilt feelings and was violating his conscience in persecuting believers in Christ. However, Paul wrote later that in spite of his blaspheming, violence, and persecution of the Church he was shown mercy because he was acting in ignorance and unbelief (I Tim 1:13). Kicking the goads evidently referred to the futility of his persecuting the Church.

2. Anything in verse 15 that makes you think of Matthew 25:31-46?

It is evident that the Lord takes the treatment of His people very personally.

3. Regarding verse 29, is it acceptable and our place to pray that certain others become Christians? Or is already something God has set in His mind, who will or won't be called in this age.

Although Agrippa may be speaking ironically and twitting Paul in supposing he would be an easy convert, Paul's response was of the correct attitude we should have in terms of the conversion of others.

4. Considering what is stated in verse 32, should Paul have not appealed to Caesar? Did Paul recognize this and was he trying to get to Rome?

Verse 22 Paul gives credit to God for his survival.

The purpose of the Jews was well understood by Paul. He remembered the purpose of the similar request preferred before Claudius Lysias, and perceived that his only safety was in frustrating their present attempt.

5. Is Paul an example of what Christ teaches in Luke 7:47?

The Lord teaches that those whom much is forgiven, loves much. That seems to be the case with Paul, who harshly persecuted the Church of God, and to have been forgiven of such sins; he certainly demonstrates this in his life thereafter.

6. Is Paul an example for us to emulate?

Paul was a unique individual with a special calling. He writes to the Corinthian Churches: he wishes they would be like him:

“Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” – 1 Cor. 11:1

But let’s be realistic in our interpretation. We must aspire to be all what God wants us to be, and this is what Paul wanted in all those he ministered to. For example, to the Corinthians he also writes:

“For we are glad, when we are weak and you are strong. And this we also pray, that you may be made complete.” – 2 Cor. 13:9

Christians like Paul aspire to see growth in others. He wants them to succeed. Christians like Paul are not so pre-occupied with their own reality which focuses on the self; a make believe world that does not have true 'agape' love towards their fellow brethren.

The desire to see one succeed can be misconstrued as obstructive and pushy. No doubt Paul suffered much in the way of rejection.

Do you have the desire that others succeed?

Chapter 27

1. In verses 21 to 26, it appears that Paul is assuring them of final safety for all. Why then did he have to intervene as he did in verses 30 to 32 to ensure their final safety comes to pass? What would this tell us about what we do, when we are given assurances from God?

The promise was contingent that all be saved

In the matter of salvation, we should act as Paul did in this case: be as watchful and laborious as though God had promised us no assistance, yet as confident of divine assistance as though all were dependent on it alone.

Chapter 28

1. Why is there no 'Amen' at the end Acts?

The story is not finished; neither will we find 'Amen' at the end of each of the gospels.

2. Why has `the heart of this people waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed'. Who did this? Does this apply to the Gentiles? Who does this apply to and why?

Paul's quotation of Isaiah 6:9, 10, may provide a fitting closure to Luke's account. This book was preserved for the believers, and it is we who need to heed these words.

Can it be we form our own reality, choose to believe what we want to believe, and all the evidence we gather thereafter will only support it? If so, we can no longer see clearly. We can only do this to ourselves.

We must search for the truth, rather than invent substitutes for it. The vehement Jews who opposed Paul had been trusted with the Oracles of God and would not accept the persuasion of Paul to accept the gospel. The prophet Isaiah wrote `... and their eyes THEY have closed...' We can take this literally — it was themselves that closed their own eyes to what is being shown to them, which was an extension of what they already knew.

You being a Christian, accept Jesus as Lord and Savior, yet, but by clever reasoning, substitute your own Jesus Christ for the real one? Does your Jesus Christ accept that you need not attend and serve a Sabbath keeping Church of God congregation? Does your Jesus Christ accept that tithing is not required? Does your Jesus Christ accept your reasons to hold onto an offense? Does your Jesus Christ accept your independence?

We must be perceptive thinkers trying at every turn to see the world as it really is and make every effort to obtain a clearer view of reality. Jesus Christ judges things as they really are, not how we try to portray them as being, or how outwardly they may appear.

Our Lord admonishes in Luke 11:34-36 to take heed that our eye be single, allowing the true light to come in, and to ensure that the light we think we have is not darkness. This is a matter of perception for us all. The Jews of Paul's time had the truth as it was known, but could not perceive the reality, as in always seeing but never see. We must transpose the words of the prophet Isaiah on the believers today to see if they hold true. After receiving the Truth, have our hearts grown dull? Will we close our eyes and ears to the many more things we need to learn? For how we really are is what matters, a forgiving heart, a willingness to serve and to be obedient, a loving attitude and bearing the full fruits of repentance in abundance.

May your perception always be clear!

Romans

The epistle of Paul to the Romans has been given high standing amongst all of Paul's epistles by most scholars and teachers of the Bible. There is no accident Romans was placed first amongst the canonized epistles. There are many study guides and commentaries available on this epistle, but even today popular teachings are based on misconstrued interpretations of Paul's writings.

This study of Romans was conducted on a different premise than most. The following reasonable assumptions are made prior to this study and are reflected in the questions and answers.

1. Paul is writing to the Church in Rome and expects his readership will understand his letter. His writing style would be typical of the day and understood. We, on the other hand, may not recognize the style as Paul did not know this letter would be read by Christians for generations to come.
2. The Church in Rome did not receive the other canonized epistles to which we may refer to help them understand the letter. The letter should stand on its own. Therefore, this study seldom refers to other New Testament texts to enhance comprehension. We will refer the reader to other studies in this series.
3. To appreciate the epistle we must place ourselves in the shoes of Paul's readership as best we can: who they were, what they believed and what prior relationship Paul had with any one of them.

It becomes evident how different the present day Church of God is from the Christians in Rome to whom this letter was sent. These differences appear in the 'Faith and Law' arena and language styles. It is hoped the questions and answers below will highlight these differences.

Introductory Questions

1. What is an apostle?

By definition, a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders. It is specifically applied to the Twelve Apostles of Christ.

However, this is an official position, and the one sent has been given authority by the one who sent him as though it was the sender himself.

We read in Romans 1:2, Paul is implying that his words should be taken as scripture.

2. For what purpose are we studying Romans? What do we want to get out of this epistle?

We want to know what Paul wanted them to know and learn.

A study on Romans should effectively draw out what Paul wants to convey to the Romans. With some exceptions (which we will identify later), what he conveys can be no less beneficial to us as it was to them. We should attempt to ask the kind of questions that draw out what Paul is trying to tell us, and be reflected in our answers.

Chapter 1

1. What does Paul mean when he identifies himself as a 'servant' (verse 1) of Jesus Christ?

The Greek word is *doulos*. The Strong's Lexicon defines it as one who gives himself up to another's will, those whose service is used by Christ in extending and advancing His cause among men. One devoted to another with the disregard of one's own interests. This is likely how Paul sees himself and others in the Faith.

2. What things is Paul trying to establish at the beginning of this epistle?

He is identifying with his fellow brethren many of whom he never met. He is also establishing his credentials so he has to address the subject.

3. Paul mentions obedience in verse 5. What does obedience get the Christian? Where do you draw the line on obedience? Does obedience cost something? If so, what does it cost?

We accept Jesus Christ as Savior, but we also must accept him as Lord. Sometimes it costs you your ego and pride. Our human nature doesn't want to be told what to do. It can inconvenience you and others who make claim on you. Paul mentions in verse 5 that they received grace and apostleship for their continued obedience.

4. Is the Church in Rome a strong church?

In verse 8 their faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. This likely would not only mean how well they have responded to the good news of salvation, but how they have applied it to their lives in the face of opposition. The Church in Rome must have felt considerable hardship at that time.

A brief exposition on the passage 1:16 to 3:20

To gain sufficient understanding of this epistle, it would be difficult to achieve by a question and answer format. We need to examine these scriptures in detail. Paul wants to communicate an important message and his style and content are deliberate. We would like to recognize what he is communicating and how he is doing so. This passage sets up much of the rest of this epistle so we will include a brief exposition of these verses.

1:16 Paul says he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and makes this statement for a reason. From his position, Paul has every reason to be ashamed. Paul was by nationality a Jew, considered a sub-human race, and in human terms he would be apprehensive among non-Jews to whom he was sent. Not only this, Paul was going about proclaiming a message to non-Jews that a Jewish Man was the Savior of the world, that he died for other men, that He is the Son of God, and was raised from the dead. Such a message would be received with contempt by many.

Paul recognized the power (Greek: *dunamis*) that the gospel had for bringing man salvation. This power is within God. Salvation means a deliverance from being lost. It also means deliverance from serving sin (further elaborated on later in this epistle).

The gospel came to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Paul does not mean favoritism, but means first in time order. God does not have favorites.

1:17 Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, as it has the dual ability to reveal God's righteousness and expose mankind's unrighteousness.

First, a man can attain the righteousness that is of God if he believes the gospel, and has faith in God's Son. It is the righteousness that comes by faith. What Paul means in writing '... from faith to faith; ...' is simply that a person must live a life of faith, from beginning faith to ending faith. The righteousness of God is revealed continually to the believer from beginning to end.

Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4, which is perhaps a pre-introduction to one of the great themes of this epistle.

1:18 The righteousness and wrath of God is revealed — the righteousness of God has been suppressed by unrighteous men, and the gospel exposes this unrighteousness of those behind this suppression. Paul's discussion of the wrath of God is in verses 24 to 32.

1:19-20 The suppressors of the truth knew of the righteousness and attributes of God from the beginning, but neglected their conscience and pushed the truth aside.

Although there is a great deal about God man cannot know, there is a great deal that man can know. Thus, there is no excuse for rejection of God (His righteousness, evidence of His eternal power and sovereignty).

1:21 There is a consequence for rejection and ingratitude toward God. A mind without honor toward its Creator is left to its own devices and slips into darkness. A mind in darkness sets itself on vain imaginations, including a self professing wisdom where pride and depravity set in (see Question 6 above).

1:22-23 The depraved mind without God creates a new set of gods. First, the incorruptible God is replaced by corruptible gods, and foremost in corruptibility is the human mind. Man becomes his own god, a form of humanism, where man is made an idol and becomes the master of his own world and destiny.

Throughout history man has worshipped images of men and animals, although this is not common in industrial and scientific societies.

1:24-32 These verses begin with the word 'Therefore' which connects us with the preceding verses. What Paul reveals is that God's wrath is giving men the freedom to do as they will. God's wrath is His expression of displeasure with sin. Although the consequences of sin may seem natural, they are a result of the wrath of God. God's wrath will pour out at the end of times, but now it is revealed to a lesser degree.

In summary:

- God gave men up to uncleanness (v 24-25)
- God gave men up to vile and unnatural affections (v 26-27)
- God gave them up to reprobate and depraved minds (v 28-31)
- God left them to know that death was the end result (v 32)

2:1-3 Suddenly, Paul takes an unexpected turn and appears to accuse his readers of the same things! The style of writing is diatribe (see question 3 below). He is not directly accusing them of these practices. He is having them consider their own righteousness in light of God's righteousness.

As many a preacher can relate, Paul wants his readers to connect themselves with what he is saying. Paul knows his converted and 'righteous' readers will not easily recognize their own past and current

practice of the same things. This verse is a key turning point for he begins the connection of the gospel, which reveals God's righteousness versus man's unrighteousness, and the believers appropriate response to it, be he Jew or Greek.

2:4 The longsuffering and goodness of God, should not be misinterpreted as acceptance of their current behavior. God gives them time to repent of trusting in their own righteousness. The believer should not feel his transgressions are small compared to others. Paul considers such attitudes as despising the goodness of God.

2:5-6 The continuation of self righteously judging others (verse 3), not appreciating the goodness of God, is the rejection of God's righteousness and stores up wrath in the Day of Judgment.

2:6-11 As we read these verses, we can make sense of Paul's early intentions. Although he is writing to converts, misconceptions they have of the faith and how they stand in the faith still exist. This is what we experience in the Church of God today.

The first misconception is a believer should not expect their new belief system an extension of his/her own righteousness.

Secondly, they should re-consider the relevance of one's heritage, whether it be Jew or Greek.

Pre-conceived notions of the Faith must be addressed and removed before Paul can present the doctrine that is the foundation of the believer's life in Christ. Failure would result in confusion. The misconceptions with the Roman Church are strongholds that must be torn down for Paul to make this epistle effective.

There are only two camps of men and women; those who do good (verse 7), or the disobedient and self seeking (verse 8). Of the former glory and honor to the Jew first and also the Greek, of the later tribulation and anguish to the Jew first and also to the Greek. With this formula, Paul makes it plain there is no partiality with God.

2:12-16 Paul must be thorough to achieve his objective, and now enters into a discussion of law in this epistle.

The Gentiles did not have the law in the sense that God did not give it to them, but Paul refers to *a* law, not God's law. This law is identified in verse 14, which is by their conscience knowledge of right and wrong, which is also the basis of God's laws (verse 15). The Gentiles are judged by God's law, not on the basis of hearing it (or not hearing it as

the case may be), but on the basis of the practicing (doing) of God's law. Verse 16 completes verse 12 that God will judge impartially, for the secrets of men are on their conscience, and by this they are judged.

2:17-24 To the Jews he says: Making high claim (boasting) of the law and of God through the law is not in itself a bad thing, but failure to keep up perfect (or near perfect) obedience to it blasphemes the name of God among the Gentiles.

2:25-29 The Jews also boasted in their circumcision. Today our minds are far from how it is possible a physical operation could be of value and make them acceptable before God, which limits the impact these verses may have in modern times that do not have Jewish heritage. However, the Jews felt the rite of circumcision gave them an inherent right before God that He would never allow them to go to perdition (the way some think of their baptism today). Paul then makes an illustrative point. A Jew (of the circumcision) who does not keep the law is as though he is uncircumcised. Conversely, a Gentile (uncircumcised) is of the circumcision if he keeps the law, and if that is the case, then the uncircumcision can judge the circumcision with their written law (although they cannot, as this is just for illustration purposes).

True circumcision is of the heart (verse 29). Physical circumcision was identified by the Jews as obedience to the Abrahamic Covenant which is outward and physical, or, the physical requirement of the law. What appears to be misunderstood is that circumcision of the heart that God proclaimed is the righteous requirement of the law (See Deut 30:6). If the Jews recognized what circumcision of the heart was, (the righteous requirement of the law), then those who advocated circumcision of Gentiles in order that they be saved would not have made such an issue (Acts 15).

Circumcision of the heart is obedience to the New Covenant, and is inwardly. Obedience to the New Covenant is the inward spiritual transformation that occurs by being led by the Holy Spirit, which also manifests outwardly.

All professing God-fearing people want to claim justification from God. This can be misinterpreted to be the same as when praise is received from men. However, Paul concludes that true justification from God, that a person (Jew or Gentile) is a Jew inwardly (circumcision of the heart), and the praise will be from God's standards, not the standards of man.

- 3 At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul, in the language of diatribe, asks possible questions that may arise in the mind of the Jews and then gives emphatic rejections.
- 3:1 Refer to Question 1 chapter 3. Paul could easily attest to the advantages of being a Jew. His training and background as a Jew in the scriptures equipped him greatly in the work Christ called him to do.
- 3:3-4 Paul's question: Does God's faithfulness in keeping His promises depend on the faithfulness of Israel? Would God no longer be faithful if some or even all of Israel had been unfaithful? The answer is certainly not. God remains true and will bless Israel. Paul cites Psalm 51:4, where David testifies of God's faithfulness in light of his own unfaithfulness.
- 3:5-8 The third and fourth questions are to ensure that God's impartiality is not in question. What if it was suggested since the unrighteousness of the Jews magnified the righteousness of God, then surely it would be unrighteous for God not to take that into consideration in His judgment of them? Paul's immediate answer is 'God Forbid!'. The next question suggests the same, but given as an example of the absurdity of what the third question suggests.
- What the modern day Christian can extract from this section of scripture is that obedience to God in one aspect of life (for the Jews circumcision or heritage), does not mean God will overlook sin. This is the unfortunate reality of these questions.
- 3:9 Paul has proven his case and will shortly follow this up. Paul uses the word 'we' which is an inclusive term to identify himself with his Jewish readers. Being under sin (as we learn later) is being under its domination and the condemnation it brings us.
- 3:10-18 This selection of scripture lays out the total depravity of man. This does not mean mankind is not as bad as it could be, but in the sight of a perfect and holy God, man is not worthy or capable of worthiness to commend himself. These scriptures show the universality of man's sin, and sin has invaded his being.
- 3:19-20 It is sometimes useful to personify the law. Paul says the law speaks and will point out to all who are under the law (which is everyone as Paul has established), their sin and their sentence. The law points out man's inability to merit eternal life.

The deeds of the law cannot save, as all cannot keep the law completely in obedience and good works. The only conclusion is that by the works

of the law no one can be saved. The law points out man's inability to merit salvation, which is the knowledge that one has sinned.

Questions resumed:

Chapter 1 (Continued)

5. Discuss this statement: Corruption of the mind occurs when we reject the truth and replace it with a lie. (Answer in terms of what Paul writes about in Romans)

Verse 25 – they had the truth or some of the truth, but suppressed it (v18) by denial and argument (it's OK!), so it was replaced.

Don't believe the lie, because if you want to believe the lie God will let you. There must be something to replace the truth because there can be no void in belief. Therefore, the truth can only be exchanged with what is not truth, as there is no other 'truth' God can give.

Chapter 2

1. What are some of God's principles of Judgment? What does Paul mean in verse 4?

- He judges Righteously (v2).
- He judges based on what really exists, not what appears to be.
- A practice of the same sin in a different way should not be perceived as an escape from judgment, but God is giving time for them to repent (v4), Also 2 Peter 3:9
- He judges in truth.
- God judges based on what a man does, not what he had hoped or intended to do.
- He will treat everyone even-handedly.
- We should not misinterpret God's failure to judge them as an indication they are blameless; we should realize He is giving them time to repent.

The Christian seems to always have time to repent, but we need to realize time runs out. By not recognizing this, we excuse ourselves, only treasuring up wrath from God. We are least excusable of all of God's creatures.

2. Are we able to understand this epistle to the Romans without referring to other epistles? If so, what books can we refer to?

We should understand without referring to them. The Romans did not have any of the other epistles when they received this. Refer also to the introductory questions, where we want to know what he is trying to convey. The letter should be adequately interpretable on its own. We recognize the other epistles and the gospels are helpful as many are from the same writer, but we can also confuse the message. We can assume that the Romans were familiar with the book of the Law, and we can refer to those texts. If we refer to other books, they should be from the OT.

3. Is Paul accusing the reader of these things he writes about in chapters 1 and 2, when he writes 'You' in verse 1, or is his style of writing just sounding that way. Why does Paul start out this epistle in such an accusatory manner?

He's dealing with the self righteousness of the Jews; to break down any notion that God gives favor to a Jew because he is Jew. He wants the readership on an even playing field. He needed to do this before he talked about forgiveness and the grace of God. No sense talking about the grace of God and righteousness that comes by faith until the hypocrisy is dealt with. Otherwise, this discussion would not be effective nor appreciated.

His writing style is called diatribe. It is a way of expressing an argument or debate to someone who you are not exactly arguing with.

Paul utilizes this style here and in other portions in the epistle. Elements of this style include frequent questions posed by the author to his conversation partner or by the conversation partner and emphatic rejections of possible objections to a line of argument using statements like 'May it never be'.

His readership would also be familiar with this literary style as it is used by several ancient authors including Malachi.

Awareness and understanding this style of writing will help us and alleviate the discomfort we feel when reading this unfamiliar style.

Chapter 3

1. What is Paul anticipating early in this Chapter?

He is anticipating objections from his Jewish readers. God has made a distinction between Israel and Gentiles, and Paul must be able to handle this apparent inconsistency.

His readership included Jews. He must remind them that he cannot disregard those who had the Mosaic Law and the circumcision as not having any relevance. His words in chapter 2 would appear to discredit the Jewish faith, although he isn't doing

that. He is saying that their boasting and fruitlessness takes the Jewish advantages away. However, he did not want to leave the impression that the long history of Israel did not have any meaning and alienate his readers.

2. Do the Jews have an advantage in obtaining salvation?

Much in every way, for they were given the Laws of God. The law could not save us from our sins, yet it gave the Jews advantages for obtaining salvation. Their stated ordinances, education in the knowledge of the true God and His service, and many favors shown to the children of Abraham, all were a means of grace, and doubtless were made useful to the conversion of many.

3. If the keeping of the Law does not make us righteous, then what does it do?

We look at verses 19 and 20 for our answer. The law shows mankind is sinful before God, and none can boast of righteousness by their own means. The law does this by showing man he has sinned (has the knowledge of sinning). What Paul sets up with verse 19 and 20 is that the law shows man he is guilty of sin and in need of a Savior where in Him, righteousness before God can be obtained by a means apart from perfect observance of the law (verse 21).

4. How does faith in Jesus Christ uphold (establish) the law (verse 31)?

In verse 27 we are advised that faith **is a law**. By faith we form a relationship with Jesus Christ who is the Law Giver. Faith takes us in the same direction as the law, not in a different direction. Faith in Jesus takes us farther than the law could in our justification. In this way we uphold the law as faith returns us to the Law and upholds it in the way it was intended for our good. (see chapter 7:10)

Paul repeats that by no means is the law now void. The law must be upheld, and the law is upheld. Though by faith in Christ the believer is no longer under the death penalty, when the believer falls short and transgresses the law, the law still must be upheld and enforced. The law seeks to place the death penalty on the transgressor. There is now a most significant difference: the believer is under grace. It is Jesus Christ that stands between you and the law and in effect says to the law 'I paid the penalty for him', and in doing so the law is satisfied and upheld.

`The Law`

The question has been raised in the Bible study: What is the Law? In our church culture we are most often familiar in speaking and hearing in terms of 'God's Commandments' more often than 'the law'. Paul generally does not use the phrase 'God's Commandments' in this epistle. We infer from the question what is the law that Paul is referring to?

Paul is not explaining what the law is; he recognizes that his audience who is receiving this letter knows what he means. Paul also expects his readership to understand what he is conveying in his letter. He has no reason to conceal anything. Therefore, we can expect that whatever assumptions he makes in terms of what they know and understand need not be explained or discussed in his letter. We must know and understand these things too, and one of these is the law and its role in our lives.

The term `law' is translated from the word Torah in the Old Testament

- **Torah literally means `teaching'**
- **This indicates that the primary purpose of the law is to teach**

The law has a second function, and that is it acts as a custodian

- **This is the Judicial role of the law**
- **It holds the law breakers under the death penalty, i.e. under custody**

It does not appear in Paul's letters that he purposely and explicitly distinguishes between the two roles of the law when he uses the term `law'. He expects his readers to distinguish which role of the law he is referring to and sometimes he refers to the law in general. Therefore we must also "distinguish" in the context where he discusses the law.

A scripture where we can extract an explicit statement of the teaching and judicial roles of the law (in regards to mankind) does not exist. For those who have difficulty with this need only to turn to the laws of our nation to recognize this inherent nature of law.

Most of us are familiar with `Westerns'; films that take us back to the old west, where we see the `Wanted' posters that are bulletined, or statements such as `the Law wants him'. The `law' used in posters and statements are the expression of the judicial role

of the nation's laws. The enforcers of the law (such as sheriffs) are also referred to as 'the law' that enforces the penalty the law dictates. At the same time, there are simple expressions such as 'the law says'. The law says you shall not drive faster than 55 miles per hour on certain roads, (the law in its instructive form), which is for your safety and others. What we are illustrating is that we are no different than Paul when we refer to 'the law'. We are either talking about its role as an instructor or enforcer of punishment. It is our contextual use of it that defines which role of the law we are referring to. We do not expressly state what aspect of the law we are referring to, and neither does Paul.

Paul's audience consisted of Jews and Gentiles, and we are not certain which group were in the majority, but this is not a homogenous group of people. Although the Church of God today is comprised of a number of different races, it is generally taken for granted that race has no relevance in salvation. However, in the New Testament times, there was a distinction between Jew and Gentile that remained in the minds of the brethren.

What is the Law then?

- **God's moral and ethical standard**

How was it given?

- **Explicitly through many commandments, statues and judgments**
- **Implicitly through creational narratives**

The word 'law' is not an attractive word, as it implies in our English language a restriction or a punishment. The reality is the law should be an attractive term as illustrated in the following verses:

“The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ...” – Psalm 19:7,8

“But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, and to hold fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.” – Joshua 22:5

More Formal Definition: *Torah*, is a Hebrew word meaning "teaching", "instruction", or especially "law". It primarily refers to the first five books of the *Hebrew Bible*, or *the Five Books of Moses*, but can also be used in the general sense to also include both the Written and Oral law. Collectively they are also known as the *Pentateuch* (Greek for "five containers", where *containers* presumably refers to the scroll cases in which books were being kept).

The five books do not contain a complete and ordered system of legislature but rather, a general philosophical basis, a historical description of the beginnings of Judaism, and 613 specific laws. Much of the five books (particularly Genesis, the first part of Exodus and much of Numbers) are actually stories rather than lists of laws, but many important concepts and ideas are found in these stories.

We are a faith-based society. The Church in Rome was perhaps a law based society. We, too, are a product of our upbringing. We may have been taught an unbalanced understanding of law and grace. It takes mature spiritual growth to use the law in a correct lawful manner.¹ Fundamentally, Christians are not under the penalty the law exacts, but we must strive to obey the law and learn from the law. The best way to understand something is to do it: 'I do, therefore I understand.'

5. Are the statements that Paul writes in Romans 2:13 and in Romans 3:20 contradictory? If not, how do we reconcile the matter?

At first glance, these two verses appear to contradict each other, but we must understand the writer's intentions and what he is trying to demonstrate to his audience to reconcile the matter.

In chapter 2, Paul is connecting with the Jews who are confident in the law and therefore, he states in verse 13 that only the doers of the law will be justified. This is a true statement. However, he is quick to point out in verses 17 to 24 and elsewhere, that the Jews are falling short in being diligent doers of the law. Paul's conclusion is Romans 3:20: if even the Jews cannot keep the law, then by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in God's sight (no one can do it). Romans 2:13 talks about theory; Romans 3:20 talks about real life. If people obeyed the law, they would be righteous, but they sometimes disobey and fall short of being counted righteous. His argument is leading toward why everyone needs the gospel.

Chapter 4

1. What was it, do you suppose; the Jews thought (to whom Paul writes) credited (qualified) Abraham for righteousness?

¹ Refer also to I Timothy study, chapter 1, question 1.

They thought by keeping the law he was declared righteous. But Paul quotes scripture in Genesis that that is not the case; it was because Abraham believed God. He further expounds circumcision.

2. Describe what Abraham's faith was about in light of verses 18 to 22.

We see in verse 18 that the situation surrounding Abraham was in direct opposition to what he hoped for. This is also common in our situations, but we need to have faith even if all what we hope for is not possible.

He was old, but strengthened (mature) in his belief. This gave glory to God. His faith is described as being fully convinced that God was able to perform as promised. Can we say that some convincing from God was needed in the life of Abraham to have him fully persuaded? Most indeed!

For Abraham's faith, it was imputed to him for righteousness.

3. Now describe your faith in light of what Paul writes in verses 23 to 25. If there is a difference between your descriptions, why is that?

We should not consider ourselves of lower faith than Abraham by default. Watch out for inferiority complexes. Paul says it was written so that our faith will also impute righteousness to us (verses 23, 24).

Chapter 5

1. What are the benefits of being justified (the state we are in) by faith? Describe them.

The first is peace with God. Paul demonstrated as sinners they were enemies of God, and that by faith we are justified. Being justified we are no longer His adversary. This is not a feeling, but a condition.

A second benefit is access (verse 2). Access to another in any relationship must be continuous. The grace in which we stand refers to our continual experience of the redeeming power of Christ. Justification has transferred us to this state and we are to grow in it.

Another benefit is the realization of our standing in God; we know how He uses tribulation to develop patience. With patience comes experience, the experience of Christ working in our lives if we learn from these experiences properly. Proper learning produces an inner joy which springs up hope in those who endure. Refer to the James study, chapter 1.

Hope is also a benefit. Being 'not ashamed' is not being disappointed, because our hope is in the sure foundation that God loves us and has given us His Holy Spirit.

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit is the last benefit we encounter. The Holy Spirit is God's investment in us that we should be led by Him and grow in grace and knowledge.

2. Is it all Adam's fault?

The Bible is full of analogies and typologies. Paul is drawing on the typology that uses Adam to further expand on his letter.

Typologies, analogies and parables are an effective means of communicating to the believers the plan of salvation in a way that tells a story. The stories are often superior to exact expressions communicating the same idea.

With this Paul is helping his readership see the bigger picture. He is not declaring blame on Adam.

Some have suggested that from Adam, a newly born child is born with the original sin. Acceptance of this belief suggests that a newborn is also guilty before God, and an enemy of God. There is nothing to directly support this in the Bible.

3. What does Paul mean 'the law entered' in verse 20?

There is the impression that Paul already knew what his readership is talking about as he does not explain what this is. Given the context, we can only conclude this is the law that was given through Moses at Mount Sinai. Although these laws existed before the time of Moses, they did not come in the form given at Mount Sinai, a clear concise Decalogue. In this clear concise form, any violation of it would be easier to identify, or made known, and, therefore, offenses on these terms would 'abound'. Conversely, where grace is given where offenses abound, how much more then is grace given.

This is a difficult question to answer in terms of Romans only. Refer to the Galatians study, chapter 3, question 3.

4. Why is it that having faith in Jesus Christ imputes righteousness on the believer?

There is no specific scripture that we can point to that doctrinally declares "how through faith God imputes righteousness on the believer" as we find on other processes of salvation (Christ's sacrifice for example).

Therefore, we are left with two ideas. We accept it on faith. We believe that faith in God imputes righteousness on the believer. We hear of it in the Word of God and accept it. We have faith that faith will impute righteousness on us.

Secondly, faith pleases God. Not unlike other man-made deities, it is that which pleases God that makes us acceptable to Him. When God is pleased He discards our transgressions before Him. Our Father has an emotional dimension, and He is not directed by, in a manner of speaking, a made up set of artificial rules. He is Sovereign and God of everyone and everything, but responds positively to faith in Him.

For a related discussion to this question, refer to the Colossian study chapter 3.

5. What is Faith, what is it not? Use your own words and not scripture for this occasion.

- Faith is not foolish
- Faith endures
- Faith is believing and acting on that belief
- Faith does not procrastinate
- Faith does not look for excuses.
- Faith puts the Kingdom first
- Faith brings action from God.
- Faith doesn't doubt

Chapter 6

1. Is sin dead to the Christian? What does it mean that we are freed from sin?

No, sin is not dead to the Christian. It is still possible to live in sin as it still appeals to the Christian. Do not misconstrue the question or answer, the Christian IS dead to sin, and we are no longer to live in it. Paul does write that we are dead to sin. We are freed from sin in that our relationship to sin is over, that we no longer serve sin, but we serve righteousness.

Death ends all claims. Once a person has died, he or she has no more earthly obligations.

2. Who were you baptized with?

We were baptized with Jesus Christ in that we identify with His burial and resurrection; a figurative and literal way of speaking. However, in the eyes of God, our identification with Jesus Christ in His burial and resurrection is counted as the real thing. Refer to the discussion in chapter 3 of the Colossian Bible Study.

3. When you were baptized, what died and what didn't? Or, putting it another way, from what were you freed from and from what were you not?

The old man has died, but the old nature lives on. I am not the same person because sin no longer can dominate me, or is entrenched in me, but I still carry around a sinful human nature. The enticement of sin lives on, but it no longer has dominion over us. We are not slaves to sin anymore.

What does all this mean in reality? Reality is what God sees. He saw us before as slaves to sin. He looked at sin; worse, He couldn't look at us. He could not look at Jesus Christ who took sin on and condemned it in the flesh with His own death and burial. Because we partake in Christ's death and burial, and in His resurrection, we live to righteousness. God no longer looks upon us and sees sin; He sees perfection just as he sees perfection in His Son.

4. In verse 12, what are the 'lusts' or 'passions' Paul is referring to?

These would not only include physical lusts and appetites, but also those desires to have our own way, to possess what others have, the desire to have dominance and preeminence over others.

5. In your own words, what is Grace?

Grace has much meaning, but we will limit our answer in terms it primarily has in Romans.

The word 'Grace' or 'My Grace' is never used by Jesus Christ except when quoted by Paul in Corinthians; it is a word that the New Testament writers have chosen to describe the position in which the Christian now stands in Jesus Christ.

What Grace (*charis*) means has somewhat to do with the context it is used in but generally it is an unmerited gift or favor, place or position. Being in God's favor, a believer is justified before Him.

2. Is Paul's question in verse 15 a repetition of verse 1? If not, what is the difference?

In verse 1 he asked if we should continue in sin, or go on sinning. In verse 15 he asks shall we sin? In the former he was looking at continual sinning, as slaves to sin. In verse 15 he is dealing with specific acts of sin. He is covering a lifestyle and also acts of sin.

Chapter 7

1. What does the wife represent and what does the husband represent in Paul's analogy in verses 2 and 3.

The wife represents the believer and the husband the law.

2. Does Paul mean we should be married to one another verse 4?

Paul does not say we should be married to one another, he, in fact, says that we be married `to another'. The `another', drawing from his previous analogy is Christ. To be married to Christ simply means that we have union with Him.

3. Why would I want to be dead to something (in this case the law, v4) that is holy (v12)?

The law is holy as it comes from God. Its primary purpose is to teach as discussed earlier, and its judicial role is by no means unholy either, even though it is what passes sentence on the sinner, and that by the deeds of the law no one can be justified as Paul stated earlier.

We conclude that we are dead to the judicial role of the law, the role of the law that is against us. This does not take away the righteousness of the judicial role, but the expression `dead to' means we are no longer bound to it, as his prior analogy of husband and wife gives us.

We are both dead to the Law (the judicial part) and dead to Sin. Sin no longer dominates our lives as it did in the past.

4. In verse 6, what does it mean that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter?

This may be best answered in terms of defining our motivation, or our new motivation. The law, and the greatest efforts of one under the law while still in the flesh (under the power of corrupt principles), cannot set the heart right with regard to the love of God. The newness of the Spirit is the defining of our new motivation to keep the laws of God with truth and sincerity.

We think of keeping the Sabbath holy for example. Is your Sabbath observed by a strict definition of dos and don'ts (serving in the letter), or understanding the Sabbath was made for man where we enter into rest with the Lord and draw near to him by abstaining from those things that may distract us where at all possible?

5. What do the verses 7 to 11 tell us in chapter 7? Is there a part of you that desires to break God's laws? Can you reform that part of it? Can you get rid of it? Can you starve that part to death? What is the solution?

In verse 7, Paul expounds that if it were not for the law defining what sin is (that being a transgression of the law), he would not know what sin was, and gives the example of covetousness

Verse 8 tells us something less obvious; as sinful human beings our lustful appetites are so evil they'll use God's good commands to tempt us. Like a rod stirring up dirt that has settled to the bottom of a jar of water, so God's law excites our lust. Forbidden things are more exciting. Women who are off-limits take on a greater appeal. God says don't and our lust says do. God says do and our lust says don't. It would appear from verse 11 that sin takes on a life of its own and takes advantage of this very fact! The result we are deceived, or self deceived and destruction follows.

Then we discover that our problem with lust seems even worse than before; listen to Paul's words, "The very command that was supposed to guide me into life was cleverly used to trip me up, throwing me headlong."

Yet when dealing with our lust, we think we sometimes can reform it. When we do, we deny its evil power.

You may grow as a Christian. You may become more like Christ in your spiritual nature. But in the flesh, in your sinful nature, you're no better than the day you trusted Christ. And because your lust is driven by sin, you can't reform it.

So then, we are compelled to ask, what is the solution to a seemingly helpless situation?

Paul asks the same question in verse 24. Note that he does not ask that the body of death be saved, but asks who will *deliver* him *from* the body of death. The answer is found in verse 25: it is Jesus Christ our Lord, and adds that his new nature in Christ, (the transforming mind) (See chapter 12:2), serves the law of God, but the flesh is left to serve the law of sin (which brings death) because it cannot be reformed (See chapter 8:7). The 'New You', the person you are becoming is only possible by Jesus Christ.

6. What is Paul identifying in verses 13 to 24? Just how difficult is it to deal with (thinking of verse 15)?

Looking at verse 15, Paul admits the sinful human nature is so influential that he approved the very things he despised intellectually. Knowing it is wrong and doing it anyway! The source of sin remains with him, even though the 'I' that he refers to is the new man that hates what he does. He knows what he should do, but does not always do it.

In verses 19 and 20 he repeats the message of verses 15 and 17, bringing to our attention the frustration he felt.

Dealing with sin is indeed complex!

Chapter 8

(Do not consider the break between chapter 7 and 8; follow his train of thought right through.)

1. What is Paul doing in verse 1, and what does he mean by walking according to the spirit and not to the flesh?

Paul is summarizing his words largely found in Chapter 6 and 7 by his use of the word 'therefore'.

Walking according to the Spirit is to have one's mind on the things of the Spirit. Walking according to the flesh is to have one's mind set on the things of the flesh. We see more clearly it's what our highest consciousness sets itself on, (the desires of the flesh and fulfilling its appetites) (see question 4, chapter 6), or on the things of God. Our mind can yield to God and practice His commandments.

2. In verse 2, what 'laws' are Paul referring to?

When Paul uses the word law in 'The law of the Spirit of Life', and the 'law of sin and death', he is using the word 'law' to point out a matter of principle. It should not be confused with the 'Torah'.

3. What is the righteous requirement of the law (verses 3, 4)?

The primary purpose of the law is to teach, and this is the intended righteous role of the law in the lives of men. This is what the law could not do successfully as the flesh was weak (in being able to learn and live according) to what the law taught. God removed that limitation on us through Jesus Christ. Now, we do not walk according to the flesh, that is, we are no longer limited to the flesh's learning and obeying abilities. We are now released from this limitation, and can now walk according to the Spirit. With the Spirit of God leading us and setting our minds on the Spirit, the righteous requirement of the law can be fulfilled in a way it never could before.

4. Consider now this chapter in its entirety. Does Paul outline God's purpose and destiny of mankind? What is our destiny? What is our great hope? What is the difference between what we are now, and what we will be?

Paul identifies that those who live according to the Spirit are the Children of God. This is a present state, not a becoming state. We are NOW the Children of God.

In verse 17 we are told that we will be glorified together with Christ! There is a future glory for the child of God as a spirit being. That is the basic difference between who we are now and what we will be, that is, what our resurrected bodies will be.

5. So is it true that God foreknew us as individuals ` before the foundation of the world' (Eph 1:4) or is it that God foreknew us in general, as in He foreknew by virtue of His will that he would have a Church?

There is no great revelation regarding who may be called, and who is not called in regards to the individual. What Paul is simply saying is God's foreknowledge that (through Abraham) all the families of the earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). This is what Paul refers to in chapter 4, where he also reminds his readers that through Abraham's seed all the families will be blessed. Therefore, the foreknowledge of those predestined is all the families of the earth, both of Israel and the Gentile nations.

Chapter 9

1. What more insight can we get when we look at Paul's words in Acts 13:46 and Acts 18:6 coupled with what he wrote in Romans 9: 1-3, and Romans 10:1?

While reading Luke's account of Paul's words to the Jews (in Acts), we may be mistakenly inclined to believe Paul had no difficulty turning away from the Jews and bringing the Gospel message to the Gentiles. However, we see in the first verses of chapters 9 and 10 that Paul reveals his great and heartfelt desire for Israel to be saved. We can perhaps see why Paul responded the way he did to the Jews. Having felt the rejection of the Jews in the account of Acts, Paul must have taken this personally, and his reaction must have come out of great frustration and possibly anger. The idea of turning away from the Jews must have been with great difficulty.

2. Discuss this statement `what matters is grace, not race' in light of Romans 9.

God is under no obligation to extend grace or blessing on anyone. This is the basis for Paul's argument in defending God's sovereign judgment. Israel was not chosen because of any inherent superiority.

Chapter 10

1. How is Christ the end of the law (verse 4)?

We are not talking about the role of the law as a teacher or as God's moral and ethical standard to which we are to live by. Paul is talking about the judicial role of the law

that is holding its breakers under the penalty of death. The law's penalty of death ends with Jesus Christ for those who believe.

2. What do verses 6 and 7 mean?

Paul's quotation of Deuteronomy 30:12-13 is in harmony with his current message of the epistle. It is vain to trust in their righteousness and not in the righteousness of God. It is wrong of the Israelites to believe their righteousness will be good enough to bring the Messiah down from heaven, and good enough to raise the Messiah from the dead. Paul's message is to accept what God had already done.

3. In regards to verses 9 and 10, clearly that's a onetime deal and all I have to do to be saved. Right?

Wrong. Perhaps it would help to look at verse 8 first, which references Deuteronomy. The text that Paul draws from is found in Deuteronomy 30:14.

" But the word is very near you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it." – Deut. 30:14

When Israel was given these words, they were commanded to keep the commandments of the Lord, that they may do them. The confession of faith and belief from the heart in Jesus Christ is a continual practice.

Chapter 12

1. How do you present yourself as a living sacrifice to God? For the purposes of this study, only use specific scriptures.

There are a number of scriptures in Chapter 12 alone that Paul goes on to explain how to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. They should each be read. Bottom line in modern terminology, GET OVER YOURSELF and contribute at the COST of your own self. Consider the word SACRIFICE... what are you prepared to give up for what you believe is your right to assert or what is yours?

2. Paul `beseches' his readers in verse 1, and uses the word `therefore' implying drawing a conclusion from what he has written. Does that mean we are supposed to do what he says in verse 1, or is there another reason? In any event... consider yourself `beseched'. What is motivating you to respond?

Questions to ask: Respond because Paul says so? Do we just naturally respond because we are Christians and have God's Spirit, or do we have to work at it? Well,

for all that God has done and is prepared to do; it would be our 'reasonable service'. Moreover, we should want to, and we may often have to work at it.

3. The Church of God is said to be a living organism, not an organization. Discuss this statement in light of chapter 12.

The main distinction that we should understand as Christians is that an organization is a man-made structure. The Church of God has a number of organizations, but the organism is designed by God, and is likened to a human body.

In regards to what Paul writes in this chapter, ask yourself this question: Are you or are you not part of the organism? This is your homework. What we learn from Paul is that:

- We are not playing our part properly in the organism if we think more highly of ourselves than we ought.
- We are not playing our part properly in the organism if our judgment of ourselves is not consistent with reality.
- We are not playing our part properly in the organism if our gifts are not bringing blessing to others.
- We are not playing our part properly in the organism if we reserve the right of independence, not dependence.
- We are part of the organism if our role and work in it brings blessings to others.

Be diligent and do this homework... because...verse 11: make sure you are not lagging in diligence.

Remember, salvation doesn't come automatically, and much of what Paul writes about doesn't come automatically. Salvation is for those who OVERCOME.

Chapter 13

1. How can we reconcile verse 1 with Acts 5:29?

Paul is telling his readers to 'submit' to authorities. In Acts, Peter says that we ought to *obey* God and not man. We must align our attitudes to submit ourselves under the authority of those who have authority over us. Where there is a direct conflict between God's commandments of obedience to Him, it is there we must obey Him and not man.

2. How is love the fulfillment of the law? If that is the case, why should I study the law? Did love fulfill the law in the Old Testament? Is there something new here?

In verse 10 Paul states that love does no harm. He concludes that love is the fulfillment of the law.

The word for fulfillment is derived from the Greek *pleroo*, which means to render full, and complete so that that nothing is wanting.

The law makes known to us what is sin. The law teaches, and in doing so we can cultivate the love of God in our lives. It is in this new covenant in Christ that He writes the laws of God on our heart as He is the Teacher. By studying the law, it is written on our hearts that we may learn to see the intent of the law; that no harm should come to ourselves or our neighbor, by action or even by thought.

The only thing new is our ability to love in the capacity necessary to keep the laws of God, namely those Paul reiterates in verse 9. What is new is our relationship to the law. In Christ we look at the law with a different set of lenses that shows an elevated way how to keep the law.

The laws of God are perfect. In them love is perfected. Love promotes obedience to the law. Christ demonstrated more fully this understanding, and how we see ourselves in the Law Mirror.

3. Is Paul essentially mistaken in verse 11 considering here we are over 1900 years later?

He may not be referring to the Lord's return. "This" refers to the duties and diligence he urged earlier in this chapter as well as in chapter 12. The Lord's return is imminent, and the resurrection is imminent, so there is no reason to get involved in the sinful pleasures of this world.

Chapter 14

1. At the beginning of this chapter, what are doubtful things that Paul refers to, and give an example.

The doubtful things that Paul might have had in mind, and those that the Christians in Rome had, are unlikely those we might have to consider today. For our understanding we consider the following possible examples:

- Eating out on the Sabbath
- Birthdays
- Vegetarianism
- Acceptable Church wear (jeans)
- Make-up
- Inter-racial marriage
- Sense of humor

- Gambling

What perhaps becomes evident in this chapter is that things that are doubtful can be considered amoral matters. They are neither moral nor immoral, nor do they involve sin. Those with black and white mentalities have difficulty in recognizing amoral matters largely due to the kind of early exposure they have in the Church or their families, and generally have right or wrong judgments only to offer. Also some actions are right for some but wrong for others.

2. What is the kind of Christian who does eat and what is the kind of Christian who does not eat?

Those who `eat` are those who are stronger in the faith in the way that they have confidence in the liberty they have following Jesus Christ. This does not mean necessarily they have a stronger Christian faith we need in salvation.

Those who do not eat do not have the assurance in themselves to do certain things. Their belief system is not strong in a way to allow themselves to exercise their Christian liberties. Again, this is not a weakness in the Christian faith that Paul talks about in previous chapters (the hope), but lack the confidence that their faith permits them to do certain things.

Paul uses the analogy of one who eats and does not eat for that reason, that it is not the faith of the individual in question. One who does not `eat` in, or identifies with some of the doubtful matters in Question 1 of this Bible study should not be defensive.

3. Verse 3. For God has received him. What does this mean to you?

In other words, God takes no issue with the individual taking the liberties in the amoral matters in the way that he has. This is referring to the individual who is stronger in the faith. We should recognize if God does not have an issue, NEITHER SHOULD WE. Conversely, do not take issue with those who have hesitations that you do not have (in the doubtful matters listed in question 1 above).

God is too busy looking at the heart in regard to the faith of the Christian.

Interjection: it is tempting for us to ask about non-amoral matters in the course of studying this chapter, such as one who eats unclean food, or other areas that have been an item of contention in the Church. These issues are not what Paul is addressing.

4. What does Paul effectively teach us in verses 1 to 4?

It is foolishness to judge your brother in amoral matters. God's grace reserves the possibility for both the weak and the strong to stand by God's authority!

5. Is Paul referring to the Sabbath and Holy Days in verse 5?

No. Sabbath days are not doubtful; they are laid out well in the Law. The Romans (who knew the Law) would not even consider such a possibility.

We ask this question for us to be aware that the secular Christian world, especially those well versed in the Bible, will challenge our beliefs as Sabbath and Holy Day keeping people using verses such as these.

Some scholars would argue that Paul brings up the matters of `days' to deal with the Jewish judgment of the Gentile converts who may not observe the `Mosaic Law'. Again, Paul could never convince a Jew that the Sabbath is a doubtful matter. Furthermore, the vast majority of Gentile converts were well aware of the teaching of the Law. (Refer to the Acts Bible Study)

6. Verses 6, 7 and 8. And the Moral of the story is....?

We should seek to please the Lord in all that we do, EVEN THOUGH AS CHRISTIANS WE MAY HAVE DIFFERING OPINIONS IN WHAT PLEASING THE LORD MEANS IN THESE AMORAL MATTERS.

In reference to verse 7, we are not exercising our liberties (the strong), nor denying ourselves (the weak) to please ourselves, we are to please the Lord.

7. Verses 14, 15. I assume therefore, it is ok to eat pork etc. Agreed?

Again in reference to question 5 above: unclean foods are not in doubt. Paul refers to those foods that are acceptable within the confines of the law. We recall in the book of Acts the question of food that was offered to idols may be the issue here. Today, some Christians may take issue with foods that were made of unclean animal byproducts that are refined or clean food that may have been in contact with unclean foods.

8. Verse 14: What does it mean for something to be unclean in this context? Therefore, if something is unclean to a brother, it would be _____ to him if he partakes in it.

Sin.

9. Verse 15. Relate what is said in this verse to Romans 13:10.

If you are confident in your liberty, but your actions grieve a brother in the faith, then do not continue in it. Do no harm to your brother, even though you need to put aside your rights to exercise them. Do not assert your rights on another. The following example was shared in the Bible study: if a Church congregation decided to eat out on

the Sabbath as a group, but someone is uncomfortable with it, the Church should not act in a way disappointed in them, or feel that those not participating are being uncooperative.

We no longer walk in love when we grieve a brother in exercising our liberties. We may not always be cognizant of our actions and how they affect others, but when we do, we must put the great commandment of loving our brother first.

This should be a sober reminder of the wrongs committed in the Church in the past. They have been over matters that are small, and enlarged by others reactions and those who insisted on their way.

10. Verse 16. In what situation would your good be evil spoken of and how can you prevent it?

If your practice of liberty is grievous to a brother or sister in the Church and causes them to stumble, then your `good` may be spoken of as evil.

11. Verses 22 and 23. This is a strong statement. Do you now understand it? Explain.

Verse 22 is a message to the strong in faith to be happy in their liberties before God.

Verse 23: to do something that is not necessarily wrong, but bothers the conscious of the Christian, then it is sin to him; it is a conscious act of rebellion toward God.

Chapter 15

1. How then should the strong `bear the scruples` of those who are weak i.e. what is the proper attitude and way of doing this?

The strong should take the initiative in resolving tensions. They must be willing to limit their own liberty to reduce tensions. The strong should accept as their own burden the tender scruples of the weak.

2. What is the difference between a people pleaser and a people lover? Remember, stick to the scripture and scriptural examples.

Please others for their own good and edification. We do it to please God, and He is pleased with edification.

Christ's sacrifices in love did not please everyone, but pleased His Father. The Psalm reference shows us a commitment to building God's spiritual house is similar to what David had in mind in building the physical house.

3. United praise of God in a congregation suggests what?

Unity between the strong and the weak. Christians who do not love each other will have difficulty in praising God together.

Chapter 16

Verses 17 to 20 are worthy of note to us.

Divisions are often caused by false teaching, which generally is packaged with some truth and some falsehood, but the result is pure falsehood and contrary to good doctrine. The problem with false doctrines is they are very deceptive in content and delivery so that the simple or unlearned can be deceived.

There appears to be a solution in verse 19 and a final one in verse 20. Their obedience to the apostolic doctrine was praiseworthy to Paul, but he further adds they should be wise in what is good, but simple concerning evil. If they were to be 'wise' concerning evil, this would open the possibility for making place for it. Simple, rude rejection of infectious false doctrine and false teachers should be practiced. All falsehood originates from the devil, and God will ultimately remove him and his lies from the sphere of God's people.

I Corinthians

Some background of the City of Corinth will be helpful when studying this epistle.

Corinth was located at the southern tip of Greece. Because of its strategic location, it handled a large amount of commercial traffic which gave rise to prosperity. Most commercial traffic traveling by land from North to South passed through the city.

It had a large population of Greeks, Jews and Egyptians etc.

Corinth was morally corrupt. Travelers through the city gave rise to partying and debauchery. The name `Corinth' actually became a by-word for evil and immoral living. There were many prostitutes.

The city was an intellectual and cultural center as well.

The account of Paul arriving in Corinth is in Acts 18. He spent 18 months there.

Paul wrote this Epistle for three reasons:

- The Church was a divided Church. To bring back the Church in the spirit of unity.
- To deal with moral laxity in the Church.
- To answer their questions. Apparently they had written Paul concerning marriage, Christian liberty, spiritual gifts and the resurrection.

Chapters 1-4

1. How many times is Jesus Christ mentioned in the first 10 verses of chapter 1? Why so often do you suppose?

Paul mentions the name of Christ ten times in the first ten verses. The high frequency of using the name of the Lord was deliberate.

Being aware of the situation in the Church and the type of questions asked, Paul found it necessary to come out of the gates focusing attention on the One who all must look to and have in their field of vision.

The Church of God, when divided or struggling with doctrinal issues, has a tendency to forget who they serve and how they must serve. This was likely the case in Corinth, and occurs far too often in the Church today.

2. How well does Paul expect the Christians in the Corinthian Church, or any church, to be joined together? Is this a reasonable expectation?

In verse 10 he urges them to be perfectly joined together and without division. That is, joined perfectly in having the same mind and same judgment. This would not exclude the possibility and likelihood of differences in personalities and the way they lived their lives. The highest level of unity he asks them to achieve, and this can only be accomplished with the commonality they have with Jesus Christ. When this occurs, the minor issues become less important and less problematic.

It is, therefore, a reasonable expectation because of the unity they must have in Jesus Christ. In fact, it is essential.

3. Verse 17: What does Paul mean in not preaching the Gospel in Wisdom of Words?

This statement suggests multiple forms of intellectualism and worldly wisdom. The apostle challenges this wisdom and the people who carry forward such wisdom as being made foolish against the preaching of the cross. He likely challenges the world's wisdom to try to solve the Churches' current problems. Love, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, is the only true remedy for the divisions.

The wisdom of words can bring meaning to life. The world is full of many words of wisdom that can make life better, but the Word of the cross is the only way to truth and meaning of life.

4. What are some of Paul's solutions described in these four chapters to correcting divisions in the church?

1. The cross (1:17-25)
See question 3 above.
2. Seeing God's simple and humble people (1:26-31)
Paul demonstrates that they should recognize who they are and any glorying they may feel must be in the Lord, not in themselves.
3. Sound Preaching (2:1-5)
Sound preaching is not excellence or eloquence of speech, nor enticing words of wisdom. Divisions occur over loyalty to the style of preaching one may be enticed by. He tells us their faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (verse 5).
4. God's revealed Wisdom (2:6-13)
Know the source of your wisdom, for what was revealed to us is of God, not of man or by man's instincts.

5. Understanding the spiritual stages of man (2:14-3:4)
We have been given the mind of Christ, and should judge accordingly.
6. Laboring together with God (3:5-9)
In verse 9 we are told by Paul that we labor *together*, and we all labor.
7. Being a wise builder (3:10-17)
The only foundation is Christ, and every man's work must lay on that foundation if it is to pass the test of fire and receive a reward.
8. Renouncing self deception (3:18-23)
Do not be puffed up in your own wisdom, claiming to be wise in this world. See question 6 below.
9. Letting God judge (4:1-5)
Judgment or approval of ministers matters little. Man's judgment of a minister has no bearing at all upon God's position on the minister. They may reject the minister and break his heart, but it has nothing to do with a man's faith or faithfulness.
10. Not comparing or judging God's ministers (4:6-13)
Believers must not elevate their teachers higher than what the scripture says, nor should they judge one minister superior to another. An individual is puffed up believing he can judge ministers of the Lord.
11. Seeing and Understanding the Spirit of God in the ministry (4:14-21)
Recognize and appreciate the spirit of a genuine minister. No minister would fail to warn his child, and the Corinthians were being warned of the destruction their divisions would cause. A true minister has a fatherly spirit, not the spirit of a strict instructor or one who attempts to shame others. These verses are Paul's last appeal to recognize his wisdom on the matter of division.

5. How can we defile the temple of God?

Chapter 3:17 follows verse 16 where the Church is the Temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in it. The seriousness of defiling the Temple invokes a negative response from God, where God will destroy such an individual by some form of discipline. Defiling the Church involves behavior that tears it down from within. This may include sowing discord among the brethren (Proverbs 6:19) regardless of their reasons.

6. What does it mean when Paul writes 'all things are yours' (3:21)?

There is something profound in what Paul is saying, and if we think about it we can derive a message on gratitude.

In verses 21-23, we learn that:

- Preachers belong to believers
- The creation belongs to believers, as we are to inherit it all
- Life – abundant Life is yours – You can have it all
- Death – we conquer death through Christ
- We are heirs to the Kingdom

In reality there is nothing to fight over and there is no need to identify with worldly things. If we can wrap our minds around this understanding, we will find it empowering, as it inspires the spirit of co-operation and acceptance.

Moreover, it is in Christ we have these things. Without Christ we don't have anything more than what the world has: pressure, apprehension and no future.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with moral problems in the Church.

Chapter 5

1. What was the Corinthian Churches' attitude toward the practice of sin described in verse 1? What does puffed up imply?

There was a high level of complacency and tolerance towards immorality in the Church, specifically the one that was openly permitted. There is much of this going on in the Church today, but tolerated by some ministers.

Paul's words suggest this was an ongoing behavior and a situation the Church was tolerating. Paul uses the word 'have' suggesting a present situation and not 'had', as though this occurred in the past and was rectified.

By 'puffed up' he means that the Church was thinking higher of itself than it ought to have. Looking back on chapters 1 to 4 we see divisions in the Church. These divisions find their source in vanity, thinking too highly of themselves and where they fit in instead of looking to Jesus Christ with a humble serving attitude. They mistakenly thought of themselves as 'highly spiritual'. In light of this, and the tolerance of the open and shameful sin in their midst, they should be ashamed of themselves. We find out in 2 Corinthians how the Church reacted to the letter and how sorrowful they felt.

2. What role has the Church in the discipline of the offending person and what role has the Lord? What is the discipline? To what end does the discipline achieve?

It was the Churches' responsibility (while in Paul's absence) to gather together in the Lord's name (i.e. the Lord's authority and blessing) to put this person out of the Church. Outside of the Church is the domain of Satan, which may have been the expression used.

If there was to be any physical or emotional punishment on this individual, it was the Lord's discretion. The 'destruction of the flesh' may not mean actual peril leading to death, but perhaps permitting Satan certain power over him that may bring him to repentance. We think of Job, which is not to make a comparison with Job and the individual in Corinth, but how Satan's painful inflictions brought change in Job.

3. What would happen to the Church if this person was not required to leave?

Paul says a little leaven leavens the whole lump. Continued tolerance of this sin would have negative consequences to the whole Church body as leaven finds its way everywhere. The reputation on the Church would be defiled by a single individual.

4. Why does he say 'keep the feast'? Is he referring to the Feast of Unleavened Bread?

The reference to 'keeping the feast' has likely to do with the fact that the Corinthian Church must clean itself out by putting out the offending individual and at the same time ridding themselves of high minded thinking that may have caused them to tolerate the situation (see question 1). He is not referring to keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread specifically (from which he draws his analogy).

Chapter 6

1. Discuss what Paul means in verses 7 and 8 beyond the issue of legal dispute between brethren. That is, how do we succeed in any dispute?

In the Church of God disputes arise between brethren, and the overwhelming majority of the disputes are not in regard to legal matters. Paul is insisting that instead of fighting, why not be a Christian and suffer the wrong? Did not Christ suffer the wrong for us, yet he was most certainly on the side of righteousness? What is it we hope to gain in this life that is even comparable to our expectations of eternal life in the kingdom? What is it we possess and prize so much that is worth it?

Also from verse 8, our persistent defense in being correct and asserting our rights might actually defraud a brother or sister.

As Christians, we should allow a brother to pass and not to set up a stumbling block, even though, as matters of principle or otherwise, we take issue with the opinions of others.

This lesson lends itself to the simplest teachings of Jesus Christ:

You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whosoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whosoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. – Matt. 38-41

Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. - Luke 17:33

2. What does Paul mean in verse 12?

This statement may have to do with Christian liberty, even the liberty of any man.

What is lawful is that the body needs food, and needs sex. The problem is fulfilling these needs in an unlawful manner. When Paul says he won't be the slave to any, is that he should control how and when these needs are fulfilled.

The body is not designed for the stomach, whereas the stomach is designed to digest food for the body. The body should control the stomach, to prevent over-indulgence.

In regards to sex the Christian should not commit fornication for sexual needs or pleasure.

Chapter 7

1. What does he mean by saying 'it is not good for a man to touch a woman' and why is this the case? Does this have something to do with Christ's words in Matt 19:11, 12?

The phrase 'not to touch a woman' is in fact a euphemism used by the society at the time for sexual intercourse. This would be a general truth as it can be more wholesome and profitable for an individual to abstain from marrying. This would be consistent with Christ's words in Matthew. This statement needs to be qualified, even as Christ found it necessary. Apparently this was the 'spiritual' viewpoint of the Church in Corinth who may be reacting to the promiscuous society with the opposite extreme. Paul is in a sense agreeing with them, but immediately qualifies this statement.

Celibacy may give an individual undistracted service to the Lord, thus removing the possibility of compromise (i.e. obligations to the family, the pull of the heartstrings, etc.). In verse 26 Paul writes of present distress; times when one's faith is put on trial, or times of persecution. For example, a believer may compromise his or her faith to

protect a spouse or family. Paul's concluding advice is if an individual is unable to control their sexual desire, they should marry to avoid fornication.

2. Briefly outline each item of advice Paul has to the married and unmarried.

To the married:

- The body of a spouse belongs to the other. The husband and the wife owe each other, or as Paul puts it, 'due benevolence'. The word 'render' means an ongoing fulfillment to each other, which includes sex, but also applicable to other duties of a husband and wife.
- At times a spouse may withhold sexual intercourse during times of fasting and prayer when necessary, but this should not be the rule.

To the single (unmarried, widowed, and divorced men and women in the congregation):

- The best course of action is to remain single, because of the 'present distress' and to give the Lord their full attention. (see discussion above)

To the mixed believing spouses:

- The believer and the unbeliever should stay together.
Note: the unbeliever is not saved by marriage to a believer. The word sanctified means that God accepts the marriage.
- If an unbelieving spouse wishes to part, then the believer should not feel obligated to God to save the marriage.

God has called us to peace. We are to be at peace in our lives in the state we are in. That is, we should not be anxious regarding our status of being single or married, as a slave or a freeman.

Chapter 8

Paul discusses things offered to idols, but first points out if anyone thinks they have complete mastery over the subject, they can count on the fact they have not. In verse 3 Paul points out that accumulating all the information about God in both a factual and speculative basis will not amount to anything, but those who love God are known by Him, and He reveals Himself in a more intimate and special way. That is: love edifies, but knowledge puffs up.

Apparently those with heightened understanding (that there is no such thing as other gods (idols)), felt that it was within their liberty to eat all things offered to idols or

not. However as Paul points out in verse 7, not all have the same knowledge, or confidence in this knowledge, as they are still having certain issues having been once entrenched in the belief of heathen gods.

Chapter 9

1. Verses 1-15: Is Paul asking for support for himself from the members of the Corinthian Church?

Paul is telling them of his entitlement to receive financial support from them.

Our present day Church with canonized epistles of Paul, have a very high regard for him as a man of God. However, during the time of his ministry he was not very popular to some. They may not have liked his style, his appearance, or his message. This may have lead to a lack of support financially by many of the Church in Corinth. That is likely the background behind this part of the epistle. Therefore, he found the need to assert his authority as an apostle and the power to receive wages. Yet, he is not requesting it of them.

2. Verse 12: How would it be that Paul would hinder the gospel?

Paul suffered quietly by not receiving support from them. As stated above, his ministry was not well received by some. In order to dispel accusations of having wrong motives and being in the ministry for money, he chose not to demand support. Paul felt that even the false suggestion of being in the ministry for the money would hinder the gospel. This is a noteworthy thought for the Church leadership of today.

3. Verse 19: What does he mean when he writes he is free from all men?

He is not obligated to conform to another man's ideas or opinions. He does not report to a superior governing Church authority on what is to be preached. Christ has freed Him, and he was only obligated to be conformed to Christ.

4. Refer to verses 24-27. In one word, what type of person is Paul describing (metaphorically)? What do we know about this type of person?

He speaks of an athlete. The people in Corinth were familiar with competitive sports and perhaps this is why he used this analogy.

We know a number of traits about an athlete:

- He enters to win (verse 24).
- He disciplines and controls his body (verse 25). He monitors his progress and avoids distractions that might sidetrack him from his training.
- He guards against disqualification by not cheating.

Chapter 10

1. What word is repeated in verses 1-4 and why would it be?

The word 'all' is repeated in these verses. They all received the same, but with many God was not well pleased. All had received the same from God, so those overthrown were not as though they lacked anything compared to the other.

2. So what exactly went down as described in Exodus 32:1 to the point where Paul quotes '*... and rose up to play*'? What was the People's issue? Was Paul concerned that the Corinthians would worship other gods? What reason would the Corinthian Church do that, what reason or circumstances would the Church of God today worship another god?

The people were frustrated with Moses, and felt that he delayed coming down, which offended them. Therefore, they decided to create their own form of worship of God. They felt it was acceptable to worship God in a manner they were more accustomed. This is the sin of idolatry; using their own form of worship by creating a golden calf to help them picture God, which, is, in fact, a self-made god created in a person's own mind.

The example of Israel's history was given that we may not fall as they did in the wilderness. These examples were idolatry, fornication, murmuring (a very common problem in today's Church); all testing Christ's patience (v9). Having said this, Paul may have detected there was perhaps a security in themselves (v12), but the only security is in Jesus Christ. Idolatry comes in many forms, and security in the self may be one of them.

The Church of God today may reject the ministry by being offended by it, and thus create for themselves new teachers (having itching ears). This would be the same as building a golden calf.

3. What is the connection with the communion references to the subject?

By taking communion of the blood and bread, we are identifying with Jesus Christ. Israel identified themselves as worshippers of God. A sacrificial offering was partially consumed at the altar, and the rest of the meat was kept and eaten by both the offer-or and the priest. In verse 20, Paul tells them not to identify with idols, for behind every idol is a demon – participation may mean identification.

Chapter 11

General Comments:

“One of the biggest problems in the Corinthian Church was disorder in the public meetings. Some of the women were assuming more freedom than they should have ... The Church had been greatly enriched with spiritual *gifts*, but they were sadly lacking in spiritual *graces*.”⁸

Paul may be responding to specific questions that came about due to problems in the Church. The subject of this chapter deals primarily with two issues concerning public worship. The first being customs concerning men and women in the Church and society at large, and the second being conduct when they assemble together.

From verses 2-16 Paul addresses the subject by expounding on principle more than on the specific problems.

Paul wanted to remind the Corinthians that despite their new found freedom, God made a difference between men and women, that each had a proper place in God's economy. There were appropriate customs that symbolized these relationships. In his discussion in regards to man and woman he is not talking about worth, competence or superiority. He is talking about function and order within an organization or even a society. Every organization must have a head, and it is God that has ordained this.

“Nevertheless, neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.” – 1 Cor. 11:11-12

From verses 17-34 his discussion is about how the brethren treat one another when they get together. Paul's concern is their selfishness and cliques—“You are part of the body of Christ but your behavior does not reflect that. You have demonstrated this by your actions and attitude toward other brethren by treating them badly. God will judge you because you are not treating the body like what it is (Christ's body). You need to examine yourself throughout the year so you can be worthy”. These verses are not specific to events of the Lord's Supper (Passover), he uses the events of the Lord's Supper and what was taught then as a lesson to consider throughout the whole year. Disregard of this lesson is serious and that is why Paul tells them some are ill and some are dead amongst them.

Also refer to Gal. 3:28.

⁸ (Wiersbe), p. 602

1. In these verses what does it mean to prophesy and to have his or her head covered? Is the long and short hair reference cultural, or is it really a matter of universal right or wrong?

What is being addressed here is function and order with an organization. Every organization needs a head for it to function in an orderly manner. When God talks about man being the head of the woman, he is not assigning based on superior worth, he is talking about function. In God's order of things there is a partnership, and every partnership must have a head.

To prophecy is to speak forth the mind and counsel of God. It does not necessarily mean foretelling, but is a declaration of things which cannot be known by natural means, which can include foretelling of the will of God in past, present or future.

Paul is addressing a principle primarily. With regards to having one's head covered or not was a very important custom during that time. By uncovering the head in the case of a woman, demonstrates a spirit of rebellion and non-conformity. Such an attitude is sin, for it is not done in faith.

The important point to remember in this passage of verses is this: both men and women must honor the Lord by respecting the symbols of headship – hair and the head-covering. There is a definite order of headship in the Church: Christ is the head of man, and the man is the head of the women.

Paul's illustrations are intended for his readers to use common sense (verses 13-16). In verse 16 Paul concludes that no one should contend and argue over customs.

2. In 11:18 what divisions is Paul referring to? He says he partly believes it. Is he referring to the divisions he addresses at the beginning of the epistle?

The divisions are social groupings and not divisions over the leaders of the Church as he discussed previously. Some divisions show the behavior between those who approved and those who are not, thus showing a difference. So when actual divisive situations occur, those who are genuine stand out even more during these times.

3. Verse 28: what is the purpose of examining oneself in this situation?

Self examination does not necessarily mean self disqualification. We are all in a sense unworthy, but it is the self examination that is important, even though what we find about ourselves may be unflattering.

4. Verse 31: Would you rather judge yourself or have God judge you.

The consequences of God's Judgment are far more significant. Verse 31 seems to suggest we should want to judge ourselves and make corrections in our lives in the way of repentance and behavioral changes before God judges and disciplines us.

Chapter 12

1. What is the purpose of spiritual gifts?

The purpose of spiritual gifts is to further God's will and not our own. That is for the edification of the body, not oneself.

In verse 7, we profit from a spiritual gift in that it enables us.

They are not given for us to revel in our own sense of self importance or our own gratification.

2. Verse 23, 24: Why (how) would we bestow more honor on what we think less honorable? Draw on Paul's analogy.

The weaker members (brethren) are more necessary. They appear more feeble and weak. With clothing we take great pains to cover up more private areas, therefore they have the more honor.

3. What kind of consideration should comely parts have for the uncomely parts? The less comely for the comely?

Verse 25: The same care. So that means we should have respect for all our brethren regardless of status or money.

Chapter 13

1. In the last verse of chapter 12, Paul tells them to desire the best gifts, and says he will show them a more excellent way. More excellent way than what?

Paul suggests although these gifts are given from God, we have some influence on the bestowal of these gifts. More prominent gifts can come about if the opportunity presents itself. A spiritual gift can come years after conversion.

We are not to disregard these important gifts, but at the same time we should be valuing and cultivating love, which is the more excellent way. This is not putting love against another gift. Love is a spiritual gift that allows, that motivates us in sincerity to use other spiritual gifts to edify the body of Christ.

Paul has dealt with their questions directly. The direct answers are okay, but the GOVERNING answer is love, and has been behind much of his answers. The questions the Corinthians had have been dealt with in part, but the underlying answer to all is found in Chapter 13.

Their behavior was basically destructive to the Church if they did not practice the way of love (agape).

2. What does the word charity (love) mean in the context of 1 Corinthians 13? What is the Greek word it is translated from? What does the Greek word mean?

There are four kinds of love. The English language uses the word 'love' to describe all the affectionate experiences of men, but the Greek language had a different word to describe each kind.

'*eros*' – passionate love between sexes. It arises from inner passion, including love of a nation. This word is not used in the New Testament.

'*storge*' – affectionate love. Love that exists between a parent and a child. Also not used in the New Testament.

'*phileo*'- love that is endearing. Love that exists between a husband and wife, between a brother and a brother or between dearest friends. This is used several times in the New Testament. This is not the love in 1 Corinthians 13.

'*agape*' – selfless love and sacrificial love
- it loves the unlovable

3. Did you have this kind of love before receiving God's Holy Spirit?

This is the love that God possesses. Love is a Spiritual gift from God. Therefore, it is unlikely a person would have this love without having the Holy Spirit. However, it is still a gift that needs to be cultivated, learned and shared. Having the Spirit of God does not mean agape love immediately comes to full fruition.

Let us be further clear:

One who tithes and abstains from unclean foods may or may not love (possess charity). One who possesses charity will not knowingly withhold tithes and eat unclean foods and ignore inconvenient aspects of God's laws, precepts, etc. A Christian, who for one reason or another, is not compelled to tithe or abstain from unclean foods is lacking in agape. This indicates selfishness.

4. What does it mean that love believes all things (verse 7)?

It is not innately suspicious of anyone. It is willing to believe in the best.

5. What connects you between who you are now and eternity, and what doesn't connect you? Does that mean these other things that do not connect you to eternity have no purpose?

Love (*agape*) connects us with eternity as it endures forever. This is contrasted with things that will cease including prophecies, tongues and knowledge.

Although these things will cease and vanish away, they do have a current purpose, but we should be cognizant so as not to connect with them as though our eternity is connected with them also.

6. Why does Paul use a child to a man analogy and what is it a reflection of? I.e., what is Paul illustrating in connection to what he writes?

This is to illustrate maturity, behavior, and thinking. When we recall our childhood days and how we interpreted and responded to the world, we can appreciate as adults the naivety we once had. In the kingdom, we again will look back as we are today and consider the naivety we have even now.

7. What does verse 12 mean?

We know our God only in part, but he knows us fully.

Some comments on `agape`

Verse 1: Without love, the individual himself *becomes* meaningless – useless to God
Sounding brass, or tinkling cymbal – untrained – speech is meaningless

Verse 2: A person is nothing without this kind of love

Verse 3: Although these charitable acts described may pass as charity, if they are not done with love (*agape*), it profits him nothing.

Love Suffers long

- Patient with person, not the circumstances
- Suffers a long time without resentment,
- No matter the evil or injury, or the neglect

Love is kind:

- Courteous, helpful, showing and showering favors
- It reaches out to people
- It reaches out to those who neglect themselves

Love does not Envy

- Does not hold feelings against those who have more
- It does not downplay the abilities of others
- It shares in the rejoicing of the good experience of others

Love does not parade (vaunt) itself

- It does not seek recognition
- It is not boastful
- It does not seek honor
- Phil. 2:3 – esteem each other better than themselves
- It does not seek opportunities to pontificate

Love is not puffed up

- It is not prideful, arrogant, or conceited
- It is modest, humble and recognizes and honors others

Love does not behave itself unseemly (behaves rudely)

- It is orderly and controlled
- It treats all persons with respect
- It is not disorderly

Love does not seek its own – does not insist on its own rights

- 1 Cor. 10:24: Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.
- It seeks to serve
- It does not focus on what one has done
- It does not seek its own rights, but forgoes them so that others may pass through and have opportunity

Love is not provoked

- It does not take offense readily
- Is not quick tempered
- It is not touchy

Love thinks no evil

- It does not hold the evil done to oneself
- It does not consider harm in retribution (revenge)

Love does not rejoice in iniquity – it suffers the evil and moves on – it suffers the wrong

- It does not take pleasure in the sin of others (does not like to see others fall)
- It does not pass along stories of the sins of others or their weaknesses

Love rejoices in the truth

- It seeks truth and that the truth will prevail

- It does not want to see others deceived
- It faces the truth

Love bears all things

- It does not expose the wrong and weakness of others
- It bears up under neglect and abuse
- It bears up under all things

Love hopes all things

- It germinates faith under the most tragic of circumstances

Love endures all things

- It stands up and is not defeated
- It is full of fortitude

Love never fails

- It endures – always comes back after an attack

Chapter 14

1. What does it mean to prophesy?

It means to edify, exhort, and comfort men. From the Lexicon we are told it is to utter forth, or declare a thing which can only be known by divine revelation; to break forth under sudden impulse in lofty discourse or praise of the divine counsels; under like prompting, to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, or comfort others.

In verse 24 and 25 we see when prophesying is used collectively, and an unbeliever or someone coming in to learn more hears it, he can be convinced by all that the Spirit of God is working in them.

They did not have a New Testament to teach from and it is likely copies of the manuscripts of the Old Testament were rare. This gift of prophesy would be a crucial element in the growth and edification of the Church.

2. What is Paul's general advice about speaking in unknown tongues? What are his solutions to unknown tongues?

“Paul, in 1 Corinthians 14, is speaking of languages. Apparently, some were speaking Hebrew or Aramaic (or some other language) to an audience that knew only, say, Greek. It is possible that the tongues-speakers were faking it (perhaps using a form of ecstatic utterance). Paul's solution: Don't speak a foreign language without

an interpreter! (Brilliant!) Or, it is possible that, through the operation of the Spirit, someone had acquired the ability to speak another language (for "sign" purposes), so the person was showing off his ability (what the Spirit had done), but no one was being edified because no one knew what he was saying. Paul's solution: No foreign languages without an interpreter! A third possibility is that someone spoke a language foreign to the congregation and expected the Spirit to enable his hearers to understand. Paul's solution: No foreign languages without an interpreter!"⁹

3. How is speaking tongues a sign to unbelievers (verse 22)? Is this some kind of ecstatic utterances?

Ecstatic utterance (emotion-driven gibberish) was known in the ancient pagan world, so such a thing could not have served as a sign for unbelievers. When the unbelievers of Acts 2 heard the disciples speaking in their own languages, some of them realized God was at work among them---so the "sign" served its purpose. When the Jewish believers who went to Cornelius's house with Peter saw the uncircumcised believers speak in tongues, they were astounded. This was a convincing "sign" for them. Obviously, ecstatic utterances (because of pagan connections) would have had the opposite effect.

Besides, Paul adds, the gift of being able to communicate in a new language was given to convince the unbeliever of the truth of the gospel; its use is limited in the assembly of believers, and it is of no use at all if nobody knows what you're saying.

Concluding notes:

Paul never tells them to abandon speaking in tongues, but their practice of it needed correcting. The conclusion is fitting in that he advises them that all things be done in a decent and orderly fashion.

Chapter 15

Although this chapter brings much to a modern believer, it is not likely Paul would write to us today. As a society that is intrigued about life after death, we are not in doubt about God's power to resurrect us from the dead which is supported by many scriptures outside of Corinthians.

The Corinthian Church – losing sight of the purpose of the resurrection – may have become unclear about the resurrection and started to have doubts.

⁹ (Stinson, Minister, Church of God, International)

1. What do you suppose Paul meant by saying 'unless you believed in vain'?

In this context he is suggesting the possibility they never really believed it, as they believed only in an intellectual level.

2. What are two consequences that come about in relation to sin because of Christ dying for your sins (verse 3)?

Christ died for our sins by paying the penalty of death for us. Secondly, we are no longer to serve sin, as he freed us from our sins. Refer to the questions for chapters 6 and 7 in the Romans Bible Study for further discussion.

3. Name a few of the scriptures Paul is referring to in verses 3 and 4.

There are many scriptures that point to the death and resurrection of the Messiah. Notable scriptures are Isaiah 53:3-12, Zech. 12:10 and Psalms 22.

4. What is the purpose of the first eleven verses of this chapter?

What was preached to them by all the apostles is consistent. The theology he reviews with them in the previous verses is not his own. Also, he reminds them of the reality of Christ's death and resurrection; that it was supported by the scriptures and supported by many witnesses. He was setting the stage for the rest of this chapter

5. What does his rhetorical question mean in verse 30?

He was demonstrating by his own life and by others, what would be the point in enduring such hardships if there was no promise of the resurrection.

6. Explain the seed analogy.

The seed from a plant actually dies when separated but carries with it the genetic information, – when it germinates it produces new life. It does not have life or a new plant (body) on its own. It has the potential of new life, but it must die first.

We also die, but our seed remains with us, and it takes the power of God to resurrect it to new life and a new body. God gives it a new body

7. Explain verses 39, 40, 41.

There are different kinds of bodies and it should not surprise them or us that we can be resurrected with a different nature and body.

There are unlimited differences in earthly and heavenly bodies. Resurrected believers will be glorified in different bodies, maybe even at levels of glory.

Verse 58 is a fitting and promising conclusion as it encourages the reader and gives them hope.

Chapter 16

1. What is this collection for the saints all about? What significance does it have being on the first day of the week?

The collection for the saints is not offerings towards the work or a tithe collection, but a collection for the poor followers of Jesus who lived in Jerusalem. Apparently the Corinthians must have been aware of this need.

Advocates of Sunday observance try to read into this scripture that Sunday keeping was practiced by early Christians and that this is evidence of the practice of observing the Lord's Day. This interpretation is merely an attempt to create from scripture support for what is already erroneously believed. There is no significance to the first day of the week.

2. Should adversarial conditions suggest low or no opportunities?

Adversarial conditions should not necessarily be a sign from God that He is not blessing your efforts or work. We learn something from Paul in verse 9, that these conditions are not lessening his resolve or destabilizing his own convictions.

3. Why would anyone despise Timothy? Would you have?

In Paul's letter to Timothy he advised him not to let anyone despise his youth (2 Tim 4:12). Timothy's abilities of a young individual with a great talent might not be appreciated by older people of the faith.

Yes, there is a possibility we would have despised Timothy. We should not make claims as they did, as we find with Christ's words:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' – Matt 23:29

If you despise or disregard someone today who is still in their youth and perhaps knowledgeable and active in the Church today, then it stands to reason that you would have despised Timothy if you had been a member of the Corinthian Church.

4. Verse 13. Watch what? Is this the same watching Jesus Christ talks about in Matthew 24 and 25?

This is more of an inward watching than an outward watching, whether it is of others or watching the world around you and its condition.

The 'watching' our Lord beseeches us to do is the same watching as mentioned here, it is not a watching of world events as some suppose.

5. What is verse 22 about? What does he mean using the term 'love' the Lord?

This is not the love (*agape*) of Chapter 13, as it is translated from Paul's use of the word *phileo*. This is a kind of endearing love between brother and brother for example. Here, this love of the Lord is no less significant to have as 'agape'.

From Easton's Bible Dictionary we have some commentary:

This word seems to require explanation only in the case of its use by our Lord in his interview with "Simon, the son of Jonas," after his resurrection (John 21:16, 17). When our Lord says, "Lovest thou me?" he uses the Greek word '*agapas*'; and when Simon answers, he uses the Greek word '*philo*', i.e., "I love." This is the usage in the first and second questions put by our Lord; but in the third our Lord uses Simon's word. The distinction between these two Greek words is thus fitly described by Trench: '*Agapan*' has more of judgment and deliberate choice; '*philein*' has more of attachment and peculiar personal affection. Thus the 'Lovest thou' (Gr. *agapas*) on the lips of the Lord seems to Peter at this moment too cold a word, as though his Lord were keeping him at a distance, or at least not inviting him to draw near, as in the passionate yearning of his heart he desired now to do. Therefore he puts this word to the side and substitutes his own stronger 'I love' (Gr. *philo*) in its place. A second time he does the same. And now he has conquered; for when the Lord demands a third time whether he loves him, he does it in the word which alone will satisfy Peter ('Lovest thou,' Gr. *phileis*), which alone claims from him that personal attachment and affection with which indeed he knows that his heart is full."¹⁰

From this concluding remark from Paul, we can believe that an endearing love for Jesus Christ, our Elder Brother, is an essential ingredient to our faith and our relationship to Him.

¹⁰ (Easton)

II Corinthians

The first epistle to the Corinthians did not fully put an end to the problems in the Church. It resolved some, but opposition to Paul continued, and there may have been one man in particular that stirred up that opposition. Paul in chapters 10 to 13 vindicates his apostolic authority and does so in connection to his opposition to false teachers.

Commentaries do not fully agree (as the data is incomplete) about the contacts Paul had with the Church in Corinth. It is proposed that Paul's communication with the Corinthian Church following his first epistle began with Timothy, who after being sent to Corinth returned to report a Church burdened with internal trouble. Paul, after hearing of the confusion in the Corinthian Church left Ephesus to visit. After a brief visit and failing to resolve the conflict, even suffering insult, left and likely returned to Ephesus where he wrote a severe letter and sent it by Titus to the Corinthians. This letter has since been lost.

Titus returned to Macedonia and gave Paul an encouraging report that the second (lost) letter had the desired effect. Apparently some still did not acknowledge Paul's authority.

Paul's concern over the unrepentant minority and being compelled to refute the charges against him for changing travel plans (and to comfort those that repented), are among other reasons for Paul to write this second epistle.

This epistle was likely written around 57 AD, plus or minus a year. It is considered the most personal of his epistles as it opens up his life for all to see. It shows he is human, experiencing joy and pain, victories and setbacks. It stirs the heart of a minister to more earnestly preach the gospel—as much of this epistle highlights the call of the ministry.

Chapter 1

1. Why is the word 'mercy' plural in verse 3?

God just doesn't show mercy once, nor does he try to withhold it. He is written as being the Father of mercies, as this is His nature—being full of compassion toward us.

2. How is it that both affliction and consolation both lead to consolation and salvation (verses 6-7)?

It is important we understand who the `we' refers to in these verses. The `we' is Timothy and Paul as it is contrasted to the word `your' being directed to his readers. Paul talks about a connection he and Timothy had with them. As we find in chapter 4 Question 1, Paul and Timothy are afflicted because they are faithful to the truth and maintaining their ministry (service) to them. Therefore, their endurance is for the Corinthian's consolation and salvation. In addition, when Paul and Timothy are afflicted, it is themselves bearing up under these hardships so that the Corinthians will also bear up because of their example. Paul is dispelling the idea that an apostle is not exempt from the same hardships any brethren might encounter.

When Paul and Timothy are comforted, the Corinthians have a ministry that has received encouragement.

3. God uses suffering to teach us _____.

Trust.

4. What are verses 15 to 17 about?

There is background behind these verses. Paul had communicated plans to pass through Corinth in his journeys.

"Now I will come unto you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia). And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey wherever I go" – 1 Cor. 16:5-6.

Paul did not fulfill his intentions. This may have lead to some of the Corinthian Church members to doubt Paul and his love and commitment to them.

5. Were the Corinthian prayers for Paul and Timothy worthwhile to Paul? If not, why not?

In verse 11, Paul gratefully acknowledges the intercessory prayers of the Corinthians. We should not underestimate the power of intercessory prayer, for indeed, the Corinthian believers had the ear of the Father. We should always feel grateful for the prayers of others. Paul quite often solicited prayers from others on his own behalf.

Note also the co-operative effort alluded to in this verse that is manifested through prayer.

Chapter 2

1. What does he mean in verse 9?

An individual such as the incestuous person referred to in I Corinthians 5:1-8 or the person(s) who were undermining Paul were punished by the Church at the instruction of Paul. The letter Paul mentions in verse 4 may be the first epistle or the harsh letter that had been lost.

The action taken against the offender by the Church demonstrates to Paul that the Corinthians recognizes His apostolic authority. The passing of this test was Paul's proof of their obedience in this and 'all things'.

2. What is the main emphasis of verses 10 and 11?

Although forgiveness is emphasized, the main point is unity, which is an enjoyable thing to have. Forgiving one another should not be underestimated either, for by forgiving one another is a condition for the Father's forgiveness (Mat. 6:14-15).

Paul knew that if he was not in unity with the Church, Satan would use that to create division between him and them.

3. Who is not ignorant of Satan's devices?

The 'we' that Paul refers to is at least Paul and Timothy because through their experience they have learned of Satan's devices designed to negatively influence the brethren. It could also refer to both themselves and their readers. 'We', however should not be assumed to be the Church at large, as Paul has no knowledge of many.

The tracks of Satan can be seen throughout the Church of God in the last several decades with the dismantling of church organizations. This speaks to the ignorance within the Church when it comes to awareness of Satan's devices to mislead and divide.

4. In Paul's time was the ratio of true teachers of Christ to those who were not similar to the ratio of true to false teachers we have today?

Verse 17 tells us there were many corrupting the Word of God. This would be as it is today. There are only a few who speak the Truth in sincerity and truth before Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3

1. What do verses 1 to 6 mean?

Paul opens up defending his apostleship by demonstrating the genuine nature of his service. Letters of commendation were the customary way of demonstrating an individual's ability. Paul says that his ability in the ministry is demonstrated in not mere handwritten letters, but the transformation of the Corinthians' lives (that the

Holy Spirit brought about). That is, what the Holy Spirit had written on their hearts, were to him the real letters of commendation. This spoke more eloquently than any hand written letter could.

The writing of the Laws of God on the hearts, made possible by Jesus Christ, is now contrasted by Paul to the written laws of God that were formerly engraved, not on the heart, but on paper and tablets of stone. The laws are the same but the covenants are different.

Paul says it is not by self sufficiency that both he and Timothy (presumably the other apostles) were able to do the work. The confidence they have comes from God to be ministers of the New Covenant.

2. Briefly describe a few of the differences between the Old and the New Covenants.

The Old Covenant killed, but the New Covenant gives life.

Briefly, the Old Covenant brought blessings if Israel's part of the agreement was observed faithfully, and cursing if they did not. Even so, the Law's role in relationship to man required a penalty when it was broken, and this was the death sentence. The Old Covenant did not have the promise of eternal life.

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

The ministries are different. Moses wore a veil over his face, and even to that time, when the books of the Law were read, a veil is over the hearts of the learners. Paul contrasts this by how the message is conveyed with plainness of speech (v12), and with open face we see the glory of the Lord. The Old Covenant laws were carried down by Moses in the way of stone tablets, where the New Covenant laws are given by the Holy Spirit.

The New Covenant is more glorious than the former. The Old Covenant produced death and proclaimed man's inability to please God fully. The latter brought about righteousness that enabled man to please God and for him to inherit eternal life.

The new is permanent, the former temporary.

Chapter 4

1. What does verse 12 mean and how is this so?

Refer back to chapter 1, Question 2, the more faithful a minister remains to Jesus Christ and carrying out the duties he has been entrusted to do God's Will — the more they are subject to suffering for remaining steadfast. By remaining steadfast, those to whom they minister receive the blessing.

The ministry today, as all brethren, will do well to reflect on this example. If the minister in a local congregation decides he has had enough, or for other reasons decides to remove undue burdens from his shoulders, he can do this by pulling back on his services to God's people. God's people would be negatively affected by such an action.

Chapter 5

1. What is verse 10 about?

We are continually taught that the judgment of God is a process, and this process is conducted during the lifetime of the Christian following baptism. This is a judgment that concerns salvation of the believer; that this judgment leads to the believer being born again into the Kingdom of God.

This verse, however, points toward a future judgment, and this judgment is not toward an outcome of whether a Christian will enter the Kingdom of God. This judgment is to determine the extent of the reward the Christian will receive. We will be rewarded for the good things that were accomplished, and not rewarded for the bad (worthless) things we did. The bad things do not lead to punishment, but limit the reward.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil. — Eccl. 12:13-14

2. What does he mean in verse 16?

To 'regard no one according to the flesh' is to not make judgment upon an individual according to worldly standards, which is, in general by outward appearances. These may be superficial judgments based on race and social status.

To state 'even though we have known Christ according to the flesh', Paul must have concluded (prior to his conversion) that Christ could not have been the Messiah because of his lowly origin and humiliating death. Paul no longer knows Him in this way, for he now knows Him for Who He is and what He has done.

Chapter 6

1. What is Paul stressing in verses 1 and 2? Consider when answering how or why anyone would receive God's grace in vain?

In verse one, Paul likely has in mind the grace of God that the Corinthians received with the work of the gospel ministry. Receiving God's grace in vain would be (in a general sense) not bringing it to fruition as it was intended. In connection with the verses that follow, we see what Paul had in mind.

What Paul effectively says by quoting Isaiah 49:8 is that now is the time to move forward, now is the time to break free, that all that holds back the spread of the gospel, now is the time for the issues they had between each other pertaining to his ministry to end. This can be done with the grace (divine favor) of God. It is a call to stop the nonsense and realize the grace that was given to them and to make it purposeful. We consider this very call today, where we have seen and must recognize the non-purposeful behavior of God's people that can stifle whole congregations.

This idea moves to verse 3, where he feels necessary to put on the table (that they have not in this process offended them) so that the ministry should not be blamed.

2. What is Paul trying to convey (what is his message) in verses 3-10?

Paul enforces what he says in verse 3. He describes several manners of suffering he and Timothy have endured. Then he mentions the manifestations of the grace of God that these sufferings produced in them. He then mentions the weapons of warfare and readiness (left and right hands).

In verse 8, he is describing the way his supporters and critics were seeing him, even as deceivers, but still truthful. In the end, he was preserved.

3. What is Paul's appeal in verses 11 to 13? Was he concerned about them becoming too open hearted?

He is appealing for full reconciliation. Stop straining their affections toward him as he has been unstrained toward them. He calls to them in verse 13 to take a child-like attitude of openness.

He immediately goes on to advise them not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. Perhaps knowing they have a tendency to go too far one way or the other, Paul felt it necessary to retrain the sense of openness he has just asked them to give when it comes to the world at large.

Verse 14 is often cited today as scriptural reason for believer not to marry an unbeliever. But the word '*yoked together*' only would pertain to animals (Deut. 22:10). It is not unusual to find that many religious teachers often use the word

“yoked” to describe a union of two people in the context of marriage or courtship. God does not regard marriage as the yoking of two people together like animals.

The Corinthians were experiencing the great temptation to return to the Festival banqueting of the Imperial Cult/pagan idol worship from which they had come out, possibly under the excuse that their higher spiritual status gave them such freedom. They were, as Paul indicates, lured to continue previous associations by their desires for free meat, free wine, and if so inclined, free women. They were in effect engaging in both the Festivals of God and the Festivals of the Imperial Cult, hence Paul’s use of this unique military term (Unequally yoked together) “*Heterozugeo*” meaning ‘associate discordant’. This associating discordantly was not in respect of marriage. For Paul had set before these Christ-believing Gentiles a terse command, “DO NOT HETEROZUGEO! This is an order to cease and desist.

Chapter 7

1. How can God comfort His servants?

In many regards, by good news. Titus met up with Paul in Macedonia and this was comforting to Paul. Moreover, in verse 7, Paul adds that his coming also brought good tidings (a gospel so to speak) about the Corinthians favorable response to Paul and his previous letter. This must have been on Paul’s mind. We can also add from verse 13 Paul is comforted when others are comforted, and even rejoiced in that fact.

2. Could you handle a harsh letter from your minister? How would you handle it?

A typical immediate response is to put up a defense, we formulate a resistance first. This may be followed by blame of others or circumstances. This may be followed by self pity and resentment. This is the sorrow that produces death (verse 10).

A godly response overcomes the above process and produces a godly sorrow that may persist for a season, but produces repentance. Paul rejoiced that the Corinthians demonstrated godly sorrow.

The heart behind Paul’s ‘harsh’ letter was not to condemn. Paul starts by saying in verse 3 that in effect ‘we are in this together’ and his intention is not to make them feel guilty. We trust that a harsh communication from a minister has behind it the same kind of heart.

3. What is verse 11 about?

By their sincere repentance that followed with the necessary changes, Paul celebrates the things that came out of such repentance. He identifies their desire to make things right. Paul clears them of all blame.

Chapter 8

1. What is Chapter 8 all about?

This is in regards to the collection for the poor brethren in Jerusalem. Paul gives the Corinthian an example in the Churches in Macedonia. For out of their poverty came a wealth of generosity.

Paul also wanted to ensure that no impropriety can be suggested in the handling of these funds, and advises them of this and the practical steps that would be taken.

2. What does verse 12 mean?

We are judged according to what we have, not according to what we gave. We think of the widow tossing in her two mites for example.

3. What does verse 15 mean?

We have a part in carrying out God's will. God ensured the Israelites had sufficiency in the amount of manna they collected. The Corinthians are being told that God can expect them to take part in ensuring that the brethren should not lack also.

Chapter 9

1. Determine two messages from Paul in this chapter.

Paul says he doesn't want his boasting of them to be done in vain, or it would have embarrassing consequences. Essentially he is telling them to get organized and ensure the collections are done in order that both they and he don't lose face.

The Lord loves a cheerful giver. Moreover, the more one gives, the more grace (divine enablement) that person receives from God (verse 8).

Chapter 10

1. How should the brethren evaluate (for the lack of a better term) the ministry, and how should the ministry evaluate their own selves?

The brethren should not evaluate the ministry according to their outward appearance. Paul emphasizes this in verse 8 where he shows that judging outward appearances is vain (as he also is hidden in Christ, just as they are); so what good does an outward appearance do? Or what do outward appearances mean in such a reality? In regards

to appearances then, in verse 11 he seems to be advising them not to underestimate his weak bodily presence. Although his weighty and powerful letters terrify them, he will also no less terrify them if necessary when he does become present amongst them.

We find in verse 12 that a minister should not judge himself against his own standards.

2. Verses 17 and 18 tell us what?

Paul has much to say about boasting. He concludes by driving the point home. If any minister wishes to boast, let him boast only in the Lord. To boast in the Lord is for one to see the blessing the Lord's redemptive work has done through that minister's labors; to see the continuing increase in the fruits of his labors. The one who the Lord commends is the one who boasts in the Lord. Those ministers who seek praise and recognition are not approved of the Lord, regardless of the truth they may preach.

Chapter 11

1. What foolishness is Paul referring to?

He had just stated in 10:18 that not those who are approved are the ones whom receive commendation from the Lord. Those who only receive self commendation are not approved. Now, he is compelled to commend himself to his readers, but for a purpose, and so he asks them to bear with him for awhile at this juncture. Secondly, the Corinthians are aware of the things Paul has done in the ministry.

The foolishness is, in a general sense, the need to boast in order to win those who are persuaded by boasting.

2. Verse 2 is in reference to what in the Old Testament?

It is a reference to the covenant the Lord made with Israel in the way of a marriage proposal. Ezekiel 16 gives this analogy; however, Israel played the harlot and broke the covenant, and had affections for others. Perhaps Paul's concern for the Corinthians was that their affections for Christ can become corrupted by alluring and crafty means that are more attractive than the simplicity in Christ.

3. What identifies a false minister? Does preaching righteousness identify a true minister?

The signs of a false minister include the tendency for self commendation in boasting what they have done, producing a seductive message and drawing attention toward themselves. In verse 20, Paul warns them that false ministers would bring them into

bondage if they put up with them. This bondage can be in the form that requires loyalty to, or dependency on false ministers rather than Jesus Christ.

False ministers may be believers, but for one reason or another become corrupted, and their conduct is self-serving. In verse 15 Paul declares that the end of these false ministers will be according to their works, not according to their doctrine!

In verse 21 and 22 we are introduced to the kind of bold declarations from false apostles that had come amongst the brethren. We learn they had declared their lineage as a sign of their apostleship. The brethren should also be aware that the making of bold or emotive claims does not make for truth. We cite examples of those claiming to be the only ones on TV that are spreading the true gospel, or 'we are a certain church `era', or 'the last two witnesses shall come from my Church'. Many have been lead astray by such claims.

Preaching righteousness does not identify a true minister. Verses 13 and 14 reminds us that these false ministers transform themselves as ministers of righteousness, and it should not surprise us as the Devil has done the same.

“And so it should be with every faithful pastor of Christ’s flock: he should lovingly identify himself with those who have been committed to his care, showing himself deeply anxious for their spiritual well-being, compassionate with them in their frailties and temptations, and resisting and resenting everyone who seeks to entice them away from the purity of their devotion to Christ. This compassion is not of man: it is the divine compassion of Christ Himself, burning in the heart of His servant, and blazing forth in love to reach and to bind to the one Bridegroom the hearts of those to whom he ministers”¹¹

Chapter 12

1. Why does Paul speak in the third person when he does?

Since his prior boasting was probably not enough in Paul’s opinion to convince some of the carnally minded Corinthians, he then spoke of special visions from God. This he did to bolster his reader’s confidence in his apostleship. Otherwise, Paul says in verse 1, he would not find it profitable for any other purpose.

¹¹ (P. E. Hughes), Pg. 418

When referring to visions and revelations from the Lord, Paul was probably reluctant to do so, to minimize the effect of boasting and the potential of a celebrity status amongst the Churches. He would rather boast in his infirmities and God working through him as these could be verified, (unlike proclamations of visions, which could not).

Paul spends little time writing about the experience, but rather turns to the thorn in his flesh to buffet any potential of becoming self impressed.

2. How is the Lord's strength made perfect in weakness?

Christ wants us to depend on him for our sufficiency that comes by His Grace. If we are weak, we turn to Him for strength to bolster us. If we are strong, thoughts of self sufficiency may limit the Lord's ability to direct us.

The thorn in the flesh, although uncomfortable, was not removed despite repeated prayer requests because God wanted to give something better. Paul could do more by the Lord's strength than he could have ever done naturally, therefore, he would rather boast in his infirmities. His infirmities made him more effective.

When looking at ourselves, both our natural weaknesses and supernatural power are always at work in us. Jesus experienced this same thing. We can sense God's power as we sense our weaknesses.

We often ask God to remove or substitute our affliction or circumstances, but God answers with transformation so that what afflicts us will work for us and not against us.

3. Verse 13. What is this 'wrong' that Paul refers to?

Perhaps the wrong he did was not to demand his rights as an apostle, which was coming to the Church with an authority, expecting to be financially supported. It is the burden he refers to. When Paul arrived in Corinth he was a tent maker.

The lesson that an authority in the Church should realize: he should earn the respect of those he serves by works, rather than demanding it as a right because of his position.

4. What is the message of verse 14 and 15?

Parents sacrifice for their children. The parents hope is to receive the children's love in return. It appears to Paul that the more he loved them (in not burdening them financially, as parents would not burden their children financially), the more grief he received.

5. Did Paul trick the Corinthians? How?

Apparently, some had accused Paul of obtaining their money by indirect means through Titus. This is what Paul refers to. His tone seems sarcastic. Titus also did not burden them (verse 18).

Chapter 13**1. Can apparent weakness be a sign of great strength?**

The example Paul draws on is Jesus Christ, whose apparent weakness amongst his persecutors at the time of His crucifixion was actually obedience to His Father's will, (which was done with great strength). Christ had the power to call legions of angels for his protection, but did not. Paul and Timothy are sustained by supernatural power (which would on the surface appear like weakness to some), but enabled them to discipline the Church in Corinth, and spare not if necessary (verse 1).

2. How do we test ourselves, as advised in verse 5?

What changes have you experienced in your life, attitude and outlook?

3. What is verse 7 about?

Paul's own vindication, as important as that was, was not his greatest desire. His desire was for their obedience and godliness and not for his vindication either.

Galatians

The epistle to the Galatians has been considered by many a sketch for the finished product found in the epistle to the Romans. It maintains the fundamental truth that there is no difference between Jew and Gentile before God. There were many Jews amongst the Churches of Galatia, but the majority were Gentile. These Gentile converts were easily persuaded by Jewish influence that taught the necessity of circumcision, (best described as having a mindset to be under the law, and under its tutelage).

The seriousness of their apostasy may be found in some of Paul's early words. Paul omits commendatory words such as 'Beloved of God', or 'saints' that he uses in other epistles. In verse 6 of the first chapter Paul mentions they are removing themselves not only from the Truth, but from Him (the Father), thus indicating a strain in the Father-child relationship.

Of interest to the believer is how Paul received the gospel. He received it directly from Jesus Christ and not by a man, and neither was he taught it, but received it by revelation from Christ.

The location of the Churches of Galatia is not certain.

Chapter 1

1. Why does Paul suddenly go from denunciation of those preaching a different 'gospel', to talking about himself, starting in verse 10?

Those troubling the Galatian Church with a false 'gospel' were claiming that Paul wasn't telling them everything, and that Paul's presentation of the way to the Kingdom was insufficient. This other message the Church was receiving was convincing them that they become proselyte Jews first before they could be saved. Therefore, Paul discusses himself in defending who he was and why he preached what he preached. His accusers said Paul was inconsistent; a rogue preacher of the gospel, and didn't reveal necessary knowledge for salvation.

He recounts that his conversion came about by the direct intervention of Jesus. The gospel he received and preached came directly from Jesus Christ. This begins his strong defense of not only himself, but also of the gospel they had first received. For he says '*... if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed*' (verse 9), even if he preached it.

2. What does he mean in verse 10 and why does he say it?

Verse 10 suggests that Paul's critics accused him of preaching an easier way to believe and receive salvation as a means of earning favor (to those he preached) and to gain converts. Paul claims this is not the case. There are those in the ministry, both in past and present times, which have compromised the truth in order to win converts. Those preaching the necessity of circumcision may have taken this opportunity to persuade the Galatians to disbelieve Paul.

3. Would it make sense to think that those perverting the gospel of Christ advised the Galatians that Paul was not giving them all they needed to know?

In consideration of what is discussed, the answer is 'yes'. The Galatians may have, (in their eagerness to obey God), made the mistake of believing others who could make convincing arguments to accept further requirements for salvation, instead of believing Paul, who preached a gospel of liberation.

Chapter 2

1. What is Paul trying to convey to the Galatians in chapter 2?

In the last half of chapter 1, Paul recounts his conversion history to his readers. He tells them how he excelled in Judaism, that God had mercy on him. After his conversion he immediately, without conferring with others, (including the other apostles), began to preach the gospel.

Paul conveys that although he was independent and having received the gospel separately, his message was consistent with the other apostles.

Paul's accusers suggest Paul is not on the same page as the rest of the apostles. This was in regards to circumcision. Paul, therefore, recounts of Titus (a Greek) who was not compelled to be circumcised, and was not persuaded to do so by false brethren. He recounts also of the respective ministries assigned to the apostles of the gospel to circumcision and un-circumcision. He then tells of the incident where he withstood Peter, furthering his claim of independence and consistency of what he had preached to them.

2. Verse 2: Why in Paul's mind might he run, or had run in vain?

Some believe Paul was unsure of the gospel he preached and wanted to check with others, particularly those of reputation. However, having made claim of receiving the gospel by revelation by Jesus Christ, this would seem doubtful. In light of what we know from Question 1, it appears that Paul's concern that 'he may have run in vain' revolves around the consistency in the message he was delivering to the Gentiles as well as the other apostles. It was unity of the message that was on Paul's mind.

Chapter 3

This epistle was written before Romans. Galatians has been well likened to a sketch for the finished picture, and that finished picture is Romans.

1. With the above statement in mind, find scriptural comparisons in this chapter to the epistle to the Romans and note your scriptural references.

In general this is left to the reader to complete. Try to notice direct correlations such as between Romans 5:20 and Galatians 3:19, between Romans 3:20-22 and Galatians 2:16 and a number of others. Also notice Paul's example of Abraham in both epistles.

2. What is the 'curse of the law'?

Verse 10 highlights the curse of the law. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26. The problem is no one, with the exception of Jesus Christ, has ever continued in all things written in the law, and is, therefore, under the curse proclaimed. The curse is death to the lawbreaker.

Refer also to 1 Cor. 15:56. In that sense, this role of the law is a curse to us.

3. What does verse 19 mean? What is this law that was 'added' that Paul refers to?

To understand what Paul means, we look at his discussion that leads up to this statement. If we begin in chapter 3, Paul points out the folly of the Galatians, (who after faith received the Spirit), now revert back to the law as the means of salvation. He then shows it was by faith that Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness, and so shall it be to those who also walk by faith.

The covenant made to Abraham and his seed came before the law was 'added,' or came to be, at Mount Sinai four hundred and thirty years after, and could not annul the promise that was given. The promise was confirmed by Christ (the Seed). Paul's main point is that the inheritance is based on a promise, not the law that was added later.

Paul must ask what the law served since it could not annul the promise that was made, (and the law did not hold any promise). The law was added because of transgressions until the Seed should come. Paul's words 'because of transgressions' means the law made transgressions known. Refer also to the Romans Bible Study, Chapter 5, Question 3.

4. How is the law a 'schoolmaster'? What does it mean to be no longer under the schoolmaster (verse 25)?

Verses 22 and 23 describe the law as keeping us under guard until faith came. In doing so, Paul concludes the law is a schoolmaster that brought us to Christ by showing us our need for a savior. The role of a custodian or schoolmaster is abolished for those who belong to Christ, as we are under grace and not the law.

Chapter 4

At this point Paul elaborates on his prior conclusion that the Christian is Abraham's seed, and heirs also according to the promise. This time Paul describes the law as a trustee appointed to care for a young heir. Before he has become of age he is under the care of tutors and stewards, and differing nothing from a servant (even though he is appointed a large inheritance). Prior to coming to Christ, the law held us under the same restraint. Our Father in Heaven has released us from under the trustee through Christ and we now await our inheritance.

1. What are these weak and beggarly elements that the Galatians have returned to (verse 9)?

In general these are other things they have put their trust in other than God. It appears that in the given context, they returned to incorporating their prior pagan customs into their lives. These are things they once did service to, but offered nothing to them in the way of salvation, which Paul sees as putting them under bondage.

2. Discuss Paul's messages of verses 15-18. Can you be zealously affected in both a good and bad way? How did Paul become their enemy?

Those who are zealous about their cause are convincing and persuasive, regardless of the merit of the message. Paul knew they were affected in a bad way by the zeal of those who taught them this 'other gospel' of salvation by works of the law. Paul does add, however, that it is good for them to be zealously affected in a positive way, both when he is present and when he is not.

Teachers of this 'other gospel' were attempting to have the Galatians believe Paul was not who he had claimed to be, (that Paul's gospel was faulty), thus making him out to be the enemy. They cornered off the Galatians from Paul's influence. To a degree they were successful, for before they would have given him their own eyes (v15) (it is believed that Paul was missing an eye), and now they regarded Paul with suspicion.

3. What is Paul's purpose in writing about Abraham's two sons?

Paul wants them to consider an analogy contained in the sons of Hagar and Sarah. In this analogy the main parts are as follows:

Hagar is the bond woman	Sarah is the free woman
Ishmael was born naturally	Isaac was born supernaturally
The old Covenant	The new Covenant
The earthly Jerusalem	The heavenly Jerusalem

The purpose of the analogy is to show the opposition between the reliance on the self (child by Hagar) and reliance on God (child by Sarah) and the differing outcomes of both.

Chapter 5

1. Verse 1. What is this liberty Paul speaks of?

This is the opposite of the yoke of bondage. Referring back to chapter 4:3-9, we think of serving the things that do not lead us to an eternal inheritance and sonship with Christ. The liberty Paul speaks of is having our minds released from service of futile things, to looking to the promises of God.

2. What does he mean in verses 5 and 6? Specifically `hope of righteousness by faith' and `faith working through love'?

In these verses Paul mentions hope, faith, and love – the three things he advised the Corinthian believers to abide in. Here he makes a connection between all three.

Notice the connection between the three is through the Spirit. It is the Spirit that makes this possible. In this context, Paul writes to oppose those who feel they must — by the works of the law—make a demonstration (circumcision) of worthiness to enter the Kingdom of God (this is a mindset problem). Our righteousness (worthiness) is imputed or comes about by our faith in God.

Faith working through love is perhaps another way of saying we trust in God because we love Him, and He loves us. This should give us the utmost confidence; for love is the driving force behind our salvation. Any other force may fail, but love never fails.

3. Up to Chapter 5, Paul shows the futility in seeking justification by the law. What does he caution them not to do in this chapter because of this advice? Since both are wrong, what is Paul's answer?

In verse 1 Paul urges them not to be entangled again in the yoke of bondage (justification by the works of the law) and in verse 13 he cautions them on the other extreme, as not to use their liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. The answer is the middle road and that is to be led by the Spirit (verse 16).

Notice in verse 13 that Paul indicates the liberty they now have is an opportunity to serve one another through love, as love fulfills the law.

Verse 17 - regardless of what you want to do—it is in conflict with either the Spirit or the flesh. But in comes verse 18, *‘if you are lead by the Spirit and in conflict with the flesh; you are not under the law.’* And in verse 19-26, *‘we should be able to tell the difference.’*

4. Does having the Spirit of God mean walking in the Spirit?

Verse 25 is an admonishment to go with what you have, and that is the Spirit of God, and that we should walk in the Spirit. What is implied is that having received the Spirit of God in the faith, we should by faith move forward and follow the Spirit’s guidance in our lives.

Chapter 6

This chapter highlights a Christian’s responsibility to others.

1. What do you suppose Paul has in mind by the phrase ‘... the Law of Christ’ (verse 2)?

This is the law, but amplified as Jesus said He came to do:

“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy, but to fulfill”. – Matthew 5:17

2. Looking at verse 3 and 4, what two mistakes can a believer make?

The first is conceit, thinking one is more important than one really is. The second is comparing one’s own work to the works of others.

Our walk in Christ must be lead by the Spirit. We can’t force our way as it would be as successful as pushing a rope uphill.

Ephesians

A study on the epistle to the Ephesians is somewhat of a relief after covering Corinthians and Galatians. Here is the first epistle following the canonized order after Galatians that was not penned primarily to deal with Church problems or heresy.

Paul frequently refers to the Church as a Mystery and his purpose in writing this epistle seems to be sharing a prayer that the Ephesians, and all who read this letter, come to the full revealed understanding of this Mystery. He also writes to promote unity as he demonstrates the oneness of Jewish and Gentile converts in Christ.

This epistle follows the doctrinal instruction of Romans. Romans set forth all the truth concerning the standing of the Christian in Christ, largely ending in the eighth chapter. Ephesians takes up the subject and reveals God's purpose for the Christian; that he is now seated with Christ in the heavenly places. This is the Mystery that Paul wants to show his readers.

This epistle is, for the most part, dealing in doctrine, where one half of it concerns our standing in Him, and the other half as to how this same doctrine must affect our state. This should be a reminder of how sound doctrine is the foundation of right practice.

Chapter 1

1. To whom is this epistle addressed? Who do you think Paul thought would read this epistle?

This epistle was addressed '*...to the saints which are at Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus...*' (verse 1). By this opening we see that not only the Ephesians are addressed, but also anyone of the faithful in the world. Paul may have intended that this be an encyclical letter where it would circulate amongst other Churches as many of the New Testament writings did. There is no personal reference to anyone which would support this possible intention of Paul.

2. From verse 3, describe the spiritual blessings in heaven. What are they as opposed to a physical blessing?

Paul begins in verse 3 stating God is blessed because we are blessed with spiritual blessings. He then writes his prayer that his readers' eyes are opened to grasp the fullness of these spiritual blessings.

We should acknowledge that these blessings are in heavenly places in Christ. We are in a spiritual sense with Christ and the blessings we receive come from heaven, even before creation. Physical Israel's blessings were mainly physical, but the Christian's are mainly spiritual. The suggestion is that we are united with Christ in heaven.

The prayer reveals the blessing Paul wants them to realize. Some of these include that we be holy and without blame in God's presence in love, that we become children (heirs to the greatest riches of the wealthiest Family); that we become accepted in the beloved (one with God), receive redemption and forgiveness of sins, wisdom and prudence, and to know the mystery of His will.

There is no comparison between these spiritual blessings and the physical. Spiritual blessings are eternal, physical are temporal.

3. What is in Paul's prayers for the Ephesians when he refers to making mention of them (the Ephesians) in verse 16?

The answer is found immediately following in verses 17 to 23. Paul prays that God may enlighten them to the understanding of the Mysteries of His will just referred to in verse 9.

Paul is describing the nature of his prayers, and the exact prayers do not contain the phrases he uses here. In various ways he prays for Jesus Christ to reveal greater wisdom and knowledge of the Father, to show them the hope of their calling.

What a prayer model to consider along with the other two prayers in this epistle! So often our prayers for ourselves and each other are focused on our immediate needs, which are often physical and temporal. This is indicative of our complacency based on the belief we already have enough understanding of God, causing us to lose our appetites for enlightenment and to know Him in greater depth. Paul pays no attention to temporal matters, but prays for the spiritual edification of his readers. This is a need to fulfill that is of higher value in the mind of God.

Comment on Pre-destination

In verses 4, 5 and 11 of this chapter, Paul refers to God's foreknowledge of the Church of God and those who are in it. There have been some who suggest that they have been chosen by God for salvation and all else for eternal punishment. Not only is this a terrible misinterpretation of Paul's writings, scripture teaches the exact opposite of such a position (see John 3:16, '*... that whosoever believes in Him should not perish ...*')

Paul refers to God's purpose and intentions for all believers. That is, God had pre-determined what all believers would be. Believers would be holy (verse 4), would be legitimate children (verse 5), and would receive an inheritance (verse 11). This same foreknowledge of God is mentioned in Romans 8:29 (refer to Romans, chapter 8, question 5 for more discussion.)

Chapter 2

1. What are the three stages described in verses 1 to 7?

The three stages is the past, present and future status of believers. Formerly, a believer was dead in trespasses and sins, walked according to a fallen world, and conducted himself by fulfilling the vain lusts of the flesh and the mind, being an enemy of God. The second stage begins with God's mercy toward a believer leading to the present state of grace—being alive again in Christ. The final stage is found in verse 7, where Paul describes the ages to come revealing His exceeding riches and kindness toward all believers. Consider the vast difference between the former and the latter stages!

2. Relate verse 10 to John 15:8 and Matt 5:48. What is the quality of His workmanship? How does this get done?

For convenience, the two verses we are to relate together are here:

By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. – John 15:8

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. – Mat 5:48

From these two verses we are given by our Savior the great expectation God has purposed in us. The first is that by bearing fruit, that is, fruits of the spirit (love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith) we actually glorify God! These attributes come about by the work of His Holy Spirit in us. This is why Paul tells us we are to be a result of His workmanship, and not of our own (verse 9). God's quality of workmanship is perfection, a masterpiece, and it must be perfection that He brings about.

The process to perfection is important for us to grasp in order that we do not stumble knowing of such a high expectation God has for us. Firstly, we are His workmanship, not our own. This simple truth is difficult to realize, for quite often in our zeal for perfection, we try to reform the carnal flesh so that it becomes subject to God, but this is impossible (Romans 8:7). God Himself has no intention of reforming the carnal mind, for it is a new creature in Christ that God is turning into a masterpiece. By seeking to reform ourselves, we can liken this as seeking to be justified by the law, which we have learned in our Romans and Galatians studies to be a hopeless pursuit. Regretfully, some have been driven to suicide after repeated failure in the pursuit of perfection. At the other extreme, some may be tempted to use the new liberty they have in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh (Galatians 5:13). How do we then, find our way to perfection?

The answer is to follow the Spirit's lead. By following the Spirit, the new creature in Christ comes about with all the fruits. It is the Spirit which is the wise enough tool of God to sculpt the masterpiece He has envisioned. It is far easier for the Artist to visualize perfection than we can.

We should also realize that we cannot rush a masterpiece, so do not rush the process. If we try to rush ahead of the Spirit, we may find frustration and disappointment. Our role is to be obedient and put our faith in God. Although in our future battles we may find failure along the way, we have Jesus Christ our ever present and available Redeemer.

Refer to the Galatians Bible Study, Chapter 5, Question 4.

3. What is the full scope of the reconciliation described in verses 11-16? What is the 'one new man' referred to in verse 15?

In these verses, Paul reminds his Gentile readers that they were once aliens cut off from Christ, having no hope and without God in the world. He then describes how the blood of Jesus broke down this separation between Jew and Gentile thereby making as Paul describes it, one new man from the two of them, making peace. It is this one new man that Christ reconciles to God.

4. What is the 'peace' Paul refers to here?

The peace Paul primarily refers to is the peace that Christ brings about between Jew and Gentile.

Verse 15 has been proven difficult, as it causes us to wonder what Paul is referring to in the law of God that separated Jew and Gentile. Perhaps a discussion on this is worthwhile.

It has been generally thought that the "law of commandments" (verse 15) was that portion of the Jewish tradition regulating Jew-Gentile relations. An example of this was the command posted on the "middle wall of separation" (v. 14) that forbade Gentiles from entering the inner portion of the temple, on penalty of death. So Christ, in making Jew and Gentile "one new man" (v. 15), broke down the wall that separated the two groups, and with the wall went the Jewish "law of commandments" regulating Jew-Gentile relations. In isolation, this explanation becomes insufficient, because if it is true, it is only the result of Christ abolishing the enmity (sin, which is occasioned by the law). Christ makes Jews and Gentiles one "new man," or one body, for both groups have received remission of sins and experienced spiritual regeneration through the same means—the redemptive work of Christ. This understanding is consistent with the main message of this chapter, that the Gentiles were dead in their sins (as were the Jews, as Paul reminds us in verse 5), and are brought together in Christ for reconciliation to God, that is peace with God together.

Chapter 3

1. What is the Big Secret?

The scriptural answer is found in verse 6, where the Gentiles should be joint-heirs and partakers of the promise in Christ. In a larger context, the Father has purposed in Himself to bring all together to Himself through Christ (verse 11).

Chapter 4

“The Bible was written to be obeyed, and not simply studied, and this is the reason why the words ‘therefore’ and ‘wherefore’ are repeated so often in the second half of Ephesians (4:1, 17, 25; 5:1, 7, 14, 17, 24). Paul was saying, ‘Here is what Christ has done for you. Now, in light of this, here is what we ought to do for Christ.’”¹²

1. Verse 1: What does Paul view as walking worthy of one’s calling? Be prepared to elaborate your answer.

To have the mind and nature that supports unity between the Gentiles and Jews. This extends today between members of the Church of God. Note this is not unity by mere behavior and conduct, but behavior and conduct that comes from the attitude of the mind toward others.

Lowliness (humility of the mind) - this is meekness, having the ability to assert oneself but choosing to allow others to pass and without a sense of internal pride.

Longsuffering - this is patience for the differences that brethren do have. Many Christians may not measure up to your standards. They may be lazy, incompetent, sassy, arrogant, conceited, but God does not permit rejection or questioning of their calling, or forcing their development. We are to resist our carnal desire to retaliate and to assert our rights.

The mindset above takes years to develop, but will only develop if the Spirit is leading us.

2. How are the gifts given, who are they for and why?

The gifts referred to in verse 8 are according to Christ’s measures. Christ is being described as the military victor and has the right to give gifts to those who identified with Him.

¹² (Wiersbe), 2:39

They are, therefore, given for the edification of the Church, leading to unity in the faith, increased knowledge of the Son of God and perfection (Verses 12, 13).

3. In light of verse 14, what is it that keeps the mature Christian from being easily deceived?

Perhaps a comprehensive answer from what is written in this epistle is worthwhile to answer such an important question. Starting in verse 11, Paul begins to name appointed offices that Christ has chosen to equip the saints for the purpose of edifying (strengthening) the body (its members) to achieve unity (verse 13), increase the knowledge of God to a resulting perfect man. This unity and knowledge of God brought to the high measure Paul speaks of leads to verse 14, where we are described an anchored people of God that should never be swayed by trickery or deceit.

The answer doesn't end there, however. What follows in verse 15 is that those occupying the offices in verse 11 must speak the truth in love. What is being described in verse 16 is that love brings it all together properly, leading to true growth and self edification of the body.

In 3:17, Paul had already presented the understanding that it is love which grounds the Christian. In connection with the above, those grounded in love can recognize in the offices of the ministry those who are speaking the truth in love, and can respond to the Good Shepherd's voice coming through them.

The impression we get from these verses of chapter 4 is the high expectations Jesus Christ, the Victor, places on the offices He fills.

4. Discuss verses 17 to 19 in light of John 1:5, John 3:19, John 12:46.

Walking in the light permits the Christian to see where he is going. In the darkness, the direction becomes meaningless – as a result the mind turns itself over to depravity and the kind of things that are listed in these verses in order to fulfill the emptiness. The presence of God is the only hope in life.

5. What is the difference between how those described in verses 17-19 learn, and how you must learn Christ (verse 20-24)?

Learning of Christ is spiritual, and does not come by natural means. The things that come by natural means resemble verses 17-19.

6. Paul says to 'be renewed in the spirit of your mind'. In its fullest sense, how is a mind renewed?

A mind in the light has the right attitude and sees reality clearly.

7. Paul says to 'put away lying' (verse 25). In its fullest sense, what does lying mean?

Sometimes rendered 'the lie'. It is not just a fib, it is a deception. Deception is both of the self and others, being not who you really are to others. Insincerity is an example.

8. How does one give place to the devil?

Adopting the attitude (mind set) of the devil.

9. What is the proper response of the Christian when he is wronged? Can you manage to pull off such a response?

Verse 31 is the typical reaction when one is wronged. One should think of past wrongs, real or imaginary they have experienced since baptism. Many Christians stumble here, if not all at some point, in their development. Self justification of a response resembling verse 31 is deceiving oneself and not walking in the light. Christ forgave them that did much worse, how much more then we must forgive those who wrong us. To forgive is tough, but you can and will forgive — or not be forgiven — no ifs, ands or buts.

It should be emphasized the years it may take a Christian to overcome and be Christ-like in their responses and thoughts, and what Paul says may take much work. The work is accomplished by God if we look to Him on guidance when the Christian qualities Paul describes are challenged. We want to respond the way verse 31 describes.

God is more interested in how you respond than the nature of the offense itself.

10. Paul says to forgive one another in verse 32. What does it mean to forgive? What if you don't receive an apology or the one who upsets you is un-repentant?

Matthew 18:21-34 tells us being forgiven (by God) puts the obligation on to us to forgive others. As we receive compassion, compassion must be carried forward.

To forgive is to relate to another as though the trespass had never occurred. Putting someone at arm's length after a trespass is not forgiveness.

Chapter 5

1. In reference to verses 15-17, what does it mean to understand what the will of the Lord is?

Are your decisions in harmony with the direction that Jesus Christ wants you to go? Is the mindset that you adapt acceptable to the Lord? Seek out God's Will daily in what you do. Don't be a fool and take a fool's advice.

2. How does one get filled with the Spirit (verse 18)?

When one is full of wine it obviously comes from the consumption of the wine and their behavior becomes under the control of the mind influenced by alcohol. Paul thinks of this when he contrasts that with being filled with the Spirit, where we must take in the Spirit, and be lead by it. The implication is that we are lead by the Spirit so long as we 'consume' (maintain our relationship to) the Spirit.

3. What are some of the indications of a Spirit filled person?

Paul lists some of them, namely the outward signs such as the nature of the communication between God's people. He says singing vocally and inwardly (in your heart) to the Lord.

Gratitude toward God for all He has done and all Whom He is.

Paul discusses submitting to one another. This is the opposite of seeking preeminence or asserting ourselves, including our rights and opinions over others, disrupting unity.

4. Is the quality of your relationship with other brethren indicative of your relationship with Jesus Christ?

When one is following the Spirit, one of the outward signs is our willingness to properly submit to other people, specifically believers as Paul writes in verse 21. He lists some of them in the verses that follow.

The answer is a resounding 'Yes'. For when God is feared and we are lead by the Spirit, we experience harmony in the home and in the workplace. We must be cognizant that our relationship with Jesus Christ is not in a vacuum, that is, our human relationships are not inconsequential, and our walk with Jesus should be reflected in our everyday life.

Chapter 6

1. Does a Christian's obedience to earthly authorities reflect the kind of obedience he/she shows to the Lord?

Verses 5 to 7 Paul uses the identities of slave and master in discussing a slave's service to the Lord; however, the principle applies to any Christian who serves the Lord. Paul's point is that they should serve their masters as though they are serving the Lord Himself, (because in reality a Christian is serving the Lord). His attitude of service must be correct and sincere. Therefore, Christian's attitude to earthly authorities reflects their obedience to the Lord. Earthy authorities include parents, teachers, pastors and employers.

2. Where do we get the armor of God and how do we put it on? Can there be a reason we would not put it on?

The armor of God comes from God and can only be obtained from Him when it is offered. The introduction of this section comes in verse 10, for the Christian to be strong in the Lord in the power of His might—for it is His might and power that is necessary to withstand evil forces far greater in strength that we alone can withstand or even comprehend.

We would not knowingly find reason, not to put on the armor of God. There are various reasons we would unwittingly find reason not to. These reasons include not accepting what he lists thereafter. These are:

Armory Problem	The Issues
Failure to have our belts girded up with Truth	Believing a lie instead (see Chapter 4, Question 7)
Not have the Breastplate of Righteousness	Unrighteous behavior, disobedience
Not having a Shield of Faith	Lacking in faith, courage. Doubting

Failure to do these is often rooted in pride. Satan uses our pride against us and is the biggest chink on our armor. He manipulates the proud soul who will not see himself as he ought to, and that he needs God's armor and not his own.

Failures to admit error or holding on to an offense are other areas that Satan uses to manipulate us, again rooted in pride.

3. What is the 'evil day' Paul refers to in verse 13?

Any evil day. Preparedness is the key and the evil day can come anytime, and when least expected.

4. What is 'truth' in verse 14?

This is the Truth of God, but also we should consider the truth about ourselves. We should not be living a lie, having a clear conscience. A guilty conscience makes us weak. We should see ourselves truthfully so (that when knowing our own weaknesses) we can turn to God for help.

Our loins girt with truth suggest that truth holds it all together, as a belt held the sword and the breastplate in place.

“A man of integrity, with a clear conscience, can face the enemy without fear. The girdle also held the sword. Unless we practice the truth, we cannot use the Word of truth. Once a lie gets into the life of a believer, everything begins to fall apart. For over a year, King David lied about his sin with Bathsheba, and nothing went right. Psalms 32 and 51 tell of the price he paid.”¹³

5. Why does he relate a sword with the word of God in verse 17?

The Greek word *rhema* is used, which refers to the written word, and not *logos* which is the living Word of God. These are divine utterances that would normally be scripture, but also divine inspiration. The Ephesians didn't have a Bible.

6. A major motivation for a soldier is never to let his buddy (fellow soldier) down. How can we relate this to verses 18-20?

Prayer here is still in connection with the Armor of God. A failure to be cognizant of the needs of your fellow soldier will let them down.

¹³ (Wiersbe), 2:58

Philippians

This epistle is considered the most personal of Paul's epistles. Although they spent little time with Paul, they continued to support him after he founded the Church. They sent him gifts and also a fellow worker, Epaphroditus, to minister to his needs while he was in prison.

Paul wrote this epistle for several reasons. Primarily, he wanted to prevent any criticism of Epaphroditus, who was delayed in returning to Philippi.

Other reasons for sending this letter, includes expressing thanks for the Philippians' gift to Paul in prison (4:10-14) and announcing Timothy's approaching visit (2:19). Paul also wanted to explain his desire to revisit his readers (2:24) and to deal with the problem of the two women in the Church who needed to reconcile (4:2). One commentator identified the genre of this epistle as a letter of friendship and moral exhortation.

Chapter 1

1. What is Paul thankful about?

Paul is thankful for their fellowship in the gospel: the term 'fellowship' in verse 5 is more than friends or acquaintances just holding to a common teaching, or some kind of system of beliefs. The gospel is the bond they both share in mutual activity and in benefit. They also share the message of the gospel with other people.

Paul is passionate about the gospel and he finds in the Philippians that same passion, and for this he is grateful. It means more than physical or monetary assistance.

See also verse 7, where Paul describes them as having a full partnership in his activities in the gospel of Christ.

2. What is mentioned about salvation in this chapter that agrees with what we talked about in Ephesians 2?

In the Ephesians Bible Study, we emphasized that we are God's workmanship and not our own. In Philippians 1:5 God has begun a good work in them, and He will complete the work in them that He started.

3. Elaborate on verses 9 and 10.

What Paul has in mind in his prayer, starting in verse 9, is that their love may grow, not with mere sentimentality, but in loving the truth, valuing the things God loves and turning away from what God hates. The growth of their love is mentioned in the way

of knowledge and judgment. This is so that they approve or properly discern matters, between things of lesser and greater value that are most appropriate for the situation. This is a reflection of love with discernment. In verse 10, he expresses his desire that they be sincere, as opposed to those who were spreading the gospel with insincerity.

"There are people who are themselves faultless, but who are so hard and harsh and austere that they drive people away from Christianity. There are people who are good, but they are so critical of others that they repel other people from goodness. The Christian is himself pure, but his love and his gentleness are such that he attracts others to the Christian way and never repels them from it."¹⁴

4. What is Paul's prayer about? How does this prayer compare and contrast what we pray for as a group? Also think about what you pray about and what is prayed for here.

Paul's prayer is that they be sincere and blameless, that they improve discernment, that their love would abound even more, that agape be the motive.

Are we praying for spiritual needs so that we more highly value the things of greatest importance? Often our prayers are for help and not in thanksgiving.

5. Does it matter what the motivation is behind preaching so long as Christ is preached?

In reading verse 18, it would not seem to upset Paul if Christ is preached with pretense (out of envy or strife, v 15). What matters to him is that Christ is, in fact, preached, and he rejoices as such. This should not be confused with Christ being preached falsely, as in a false Christ, or any other gospel which Paul flatly condemns (Gal 1:6-9).

Note verse 14 – they were not taking a lower profile because of Paul's situation, in fact Paul's courage gives them confidence to preach the gospel. This encouraged Paul.

Chapter 2

1. What does verse 3 mean and what would the esteeming of others better than ourselves accomplish?

¹⁴ (Barclay), page 23-24

Esteem is giving preferred honor to another (Romans 12:10). This is about giving more consideration than we give ourselves. We feel that others are worthy of our attention.

This accomplishes unity in the Church, which is what Paul has in focus. If anything is done in vain conceit, it invariably leads to difficulties by the reaction it is looking for in others. An attitude of humility looks for a reaction that is the same, one of like-mindedness. This brings about unity and prosperity in a group of people.

2. What is the difference(s) between a helper and a servant? Itemize things that Paul says in this chapter and come up with some of your own.

A Helper	A Servant
One who helps when it is convenient, or when the mood is acceptable	Serves others when it is inconvenient, even when unappreciated
One who helps people that he or she likes	Serves those he or she has difficulty with
One who helps when it is enjoyable, for how it makes him or her feel	Serves even when he or she dislikes the work, to the point of feeling lousy about it.
Seeks personal satisfaction	Serves even when he or she even receives no personal satisfaction
Has an attitude of assisting another	Serves with an attitude of enabling another. That is, the servant wants to see others succeed.

Some other considerations between a Helper and a Servant:

- A helper is part time, a servant is fulltime
- A helper always maintains the ability to opt out, while a servant has commitments to fill.
- A servant attaches himself to others and their Master, while a helper does not.
- A helper may never realize the difference between the two.
- A servant recognizes whom he serves and why. A Christian recognizes he serves the Lord, and is sincere in doing so (verse 20).
- A servant does ALL things without complaining and disputing (verse 14). A servant recognizes a need and seeks to fill it or arranges for others in taking care of the need.

- A servant is recognized over a helper, especially by God (Verses 13, 15), and it is to His pleasure (verse 13).

We see the above traits discussed in this chapter. Consider Timothy, whom Paul describes as 'having come close to death for the work of Christ not regarding his life, *to supply what was lacking in your service towards me*' (verse 30).

Paul sets himself as an example to the Philippians (verse 17).

Christ is the pinnacle example for us.

3. For what purpose does Paul write what he does about Jesus Christ in verses 7 and 8?

Christ gave up His high position in the Universe, a position He had every right to claim and have the authority to assert it on others, for the purpose of serving His own creation, and in obedience to the Father. He did not waiver from this position of humility His whole life on earth.

4. Verse 12: fear of whom/what? Tremble? What does verse 13 tell us?

We are 'between' a Holy God and a wise and powerful adversary. This is a precarious position in a sense and we must realize our dependence on God for safety and salvation. It is a battle for the mind.

Verse 13 tells us God is at work enabling us and motivating us to carry out doing what is right. He is the One who provides us strength.

5. Is Timothy a rare individual?

Timothy was a rare individual in Paul's circles. Paul says he had no one likeminded as Timothy who would sincerely care for the state of the Philippians, for all others compared to Timothy, are like helpers (verse 21). Timothy served Christ and not himself, or even Paul.

But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees, because he is a hireling, and does not care about the sheep. – John 10:12-13

Chapter 3

1. Why does Paul say the things he writes them are not tedious, and for their sake?

Paul begins saying they should rejoice in the Lord! He is keeping in mind, as we should also, that if the brethren are always being warned and corrected, they will lose heart and perhaps even become resentful. As he is about to warn them (in stern words, such as 'evildoers' and 'dogs') he premises this by saying he is confident that these warnings are not burdensome to them (i.e., not tedious, but safe).

2. Who are the dogs? What is this mutilation?

Christ, himself, called those who may oppose the gospel as dogs (Matt 7:6). Jews referred to the Gentiles as dogs (unclean).

Here there is a reversal, as Paul is calling the Judaizers as dogs. Apparently Paul's ministry was plagued by those who would have Gentile converts believe they had to become Jews (as a prerequisite to justification). This offended Paul greatly as we see in Galatians. He calls this kind of false circumcision as 'mutilation'. It is mutilation for doing it for the wrong reasons, which is, seeking justification by works of the law.

3. Why does Paul talk about his reasons to be confident in the flesh?

He is saying if anyone opposes him on the matter of circumcision on the grounds that he lacked the advantage of being a Jew, better think twice. He then says, (as he writes about his heritage and background), if there is anyone who should be confident in the flesh, it is him. He furthers his point when he calls that worthless compared to righteousness by faith. What a tremendous argument against the Judaizers!

4. *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven* – Mat. 5:20. Relate these words of Christ to what Paul writes in verses 4-9.

Perhaps what Christ really referred to is the righteousness the Pharisees had by virtue in the law (verse 5). Paul, a Pharisee, claimed he was blameless (verse 5), and we are to exceed even that righteousness according to Christ. How can we exceed such righteousness? Answer in the next question.

5. The Lord says our righteousness is like filthy rags to him. Does this include both mentions of righteousness in verse 9?

We allude to Isaiah:

But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. – Isa. 64:6

So Paul's righteousness in the law is but filthy rags. Paul contrasts the righteousness that is in the law (filthy rags), to the righteousness which is from God by faith. Notice: righteousness *from* God, by faith. It comes from God, and cannot be filthy.

This is how we can exceed the Pharisees' righteousness, by faith in God; the righteousness that pleases God is imputed on to us. What a difference!

6. What is Paul expressing in verse 10?

In verse 8 Paul talks about his great passion for Christ, to know Him by putting to death all earthly ties, having His righteousness in him, ` so that he may know Him, and the power of His resurrection (the glory of it in Himself), being conformed to His death'.

7. Verses 15 and 16. If some of your brethren are mature in the faith, yet not as mature as you, what do you suppose you should expect?

Paul is confident (expecting) that God will reveal the things that they may think otherwise. Those of maturity should have confidence that God will show those who are not as mature (the things they need to know), and not grumble about it as there is a temptation to do so. We should be of the same mind moving forward and not waiting to attain some level of maturity before we do anything.

Chapter 4

1. What is this peace of God Paul refers to in verse 7 and how does it come about?

The peace of God referred to is not the peace we now have with God after being formerly enemies of God. This is a peace that comes from God that sustains us in our lives. This peace is a feeling of tranquil existence even in the midst of harsh circumstances.

This peace surpasses our understanding (verse 7). Though we can discuss this manner of peace that comes from God, it is something we cannot fully explain once we have it.

The heart and mind of the believer is protected through Jesus Christ by the peace of God. The state of the heart and mind describes the inner being of the believer. The believer's emotions, thoughts, and the choices he makes depend on the state of the heart and mind. These areas are vulnerable to attack by the enemy, and the peace of God is set to protect them.

2. In holding your references to this chapter, discuss Paul's spiritual maturity. I.e. how did it come about? How would you describe it? How will your spiritual maturity come about?

Contentment is the key word. His contentment did not come through his own will power or the power of positive thinking. Jesus Christ enabled him to be content.

His dependency on Christ gave him the independence.

Paul learned it from experiencing Christ.

Colossians

The epistle written to the believers in Colossae is helpful to us today when dealing with false conceptions of the work and life of Jesus Christ in true believers. Based on the allusions Paul makes in this epistle, false teachers were not giving the work and person of Jesus Christ proper interpretation and emphasis. These teachers emphasized that there is a higher order of understanding that must be achieved before fully realizing spiritual maturity.

Studying this epistle helps us understand the supremacy and self sufficiency we have in Jesus Christ, which is Paul's ultimate purpose in writing this letter. In this study, the questions and discussions are primarily directed to us as modern day believers to recognize the potential that one can be misdirected and head in a direction that seeks deeper knowledge; (a kind that appeals to the intellect) which diverts us from growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Once a person has their mind opened to the truth of God, this now fertile, but vulnerable mind can be exposed and taken in by deceptive teachings. These teachings are alluring for those who do not make proper roots in Jesus Christ, which comes by not hearing and responding to proper teaching and not maintaining a sense of appreciation for what they have in Jesus Christ. When this happens, and has been witnessed to happen, the believer finds fulfillment in intellectual pursuits leading them to being beguiled and unfruitful. The believer finds himself dissecting the Truth of God, debating doctrinal points and asserting various points of view that are not edifying.

We learn in this epistle that we are complete in Christ and do not need to find sources outside of Him to find acceptance, greater wisdom or understanding.

Chapter 1

“The false teachers in Colossae attracted people through their offer of “spiritual knowledge,” but they did not relate this knowledge to life. In the Christian life, knowledge and obedience go together. There is no separation between learning and living. ... In my pastoral ministry, I have met people who have become intoxicated with “studying the deeper truths of the Bible.” Usually they have been given a book or introduced to some teacher's tapes. Before long, they get so smart they become dumb! The “deeper truths” they discover only detour them from practical Christian living. Instead of getting burning hearts of devotion to Christ (Luke 24:32), they get big heads and start creating problems in their homes and Churches. All Bible truths are practical, not theoretical. If we are

growing in knowledge, we should also be growing in grace (2 Peter 3:18).”¹⁵

1. What did Paul pray about regarding the Colossians and why?

Starting in verse 9, Paul reveals the content of his prayers. The first thing mentioned is that they be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and understanding. This brings into account the whole scope of life, which is how God’s will fills us up, that it permeates our very being. Our thoughts and actions are completely under the guidance of His perfect Will. Being filled with the knowledge of God’s Will leads to wisdom and understanding.

The second request (in his prayers) is that they walk worthy of the Lord in a way that is pleasing. This should naturally follow being filled with the knowledge of God’s Will. It is not enough to possess understanding, but rather the ability to apply it and how. A prime example is the competition of our own carnal will against God’s. That is, our own emotional and reactionary response would feel most appropriate as we learned it all our lives to be the right way, but as discussed above, if God’s will is first, we will walk according to divine understanding and wisdom. We are to walk as our Lord Jesus walked, which is a walk worthy of the Lord. We set our lives as He did.

A third is that they be fruitful in their works. This is doing what God says, and as the verse says, this is pleasing to Him. A half completed job is displeasing.

Perhaps he reveals why he prayed for them in verse 9. He writes ‘For this reason’, is in verse 4; their faith and love, which is bearing fruit (verse 6). For this, Paul expresses gratitude toward the Father for their salvation in verse 3.

2. What things does Paul mention that are pleasing to God?

A definition of ‘please’ or ‘pleasing’ as it relates to what is pleasing God would certainly be appropriate here. It is a desire to please. In pleasing God we must have the attitude of one that strives to please Him, even to the point of drawing out an emotional response from God.

The first is being fruitful in every good work. That is, fruitful in the Christ-like character we are to ultimately aspire to as we are led by His Holy Spirit. It implies that our character grows and shows in our conduct of service toward the Lord in alignment with His Will.

Another is increasing in the knowledge of God. This would be in an overall sense, a strengthening of our relationship with Him. God is getting to know us, and we are getting to know Him. As we get to know someone we learn of their character, their

¹⁵ (Wiersbe), p. 2:111

passions and their purpose. As we get to know God we increase our trust in Him as He becomes more real. Our confidence increases. An ever closer relationship with His children is most pleasing to Him.

A third is our growing ability to channel His power in our lives. This power gives us endurance to finish the race despite difficulties (to the point of counting it a joy to be overcoming) in that capacity. We think of Isaiah:

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. – Isaiah 53:10

We are to be partakers in His suffering and by doing so AND enduring it, we are perfected and will, (on account of this), reign with Him in the Kingdom of God.

The fourth is expressing gratitude toward God. Don't you feel pleased when someone acknowledges your efforts for someone? How much more from someone who did not deserve your efforts? This individual understands where he came from and what he has now in Christ. We do not want to take this for granted.

It has happened in the Church of God that some no longer have the gratitude for what they received from God and how they received it. This ingratitude manifests itself in the change in attitude toward other brethren and sound doctrine. See Chapter 2 Question 1 for more discussion.

Pleasing is not appeasing. Appeasing is going through the motions. We think of sacrifices to pagan gods to soften their anger, but appeasement by an individual or group of individuals is found in the Churches by going through motions, hoping God will take notice.

In summary we please God by:

- Being fruitful in every good work
- Increasing in the knowledge of God
- Gaining strength of endurance
- Expressions of gratitude to God.

3. What have we received from the Father that we should be thankful for?

- He has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance (v12)
- He has delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us to the kingdom of God
- We have redemption, forgiveness of sins

4. Are you joyful in your patience and longsuffering? Is there something we need to be able to feel joyful in these things?

"There is a kind of patience that 'endures but does not enjoy.' Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians might experience joyful patience and longsuffering."¹⁶

The only way we can experience joy in our patience and longsuffering is by the power of God (verse 11). By having God's power we are able to stand up and face the trials of life, and as we conquer them we are given an inner joy, for we know that God is using them to teach us. We are to, therefore, be active, not passive.

We should consider what we pray about. Are we asking for removal of a trial or God to give us the divine enablement (power) to overcome it?

It is impossible to be joyful in longsuffering and patience under our own power. We need the Lord's strength. See Psalm 27 verse 1.

Chapter 2

1. What is Paul saying in verses 1-15 and how is he doing it? In preparing your answer, think about:

- **Why does he write the things in verses 2 and 3?**
- **What protects the Christian from deceitful philosophy?**
- **What is being said in verse 10?**
- **The use of the small words 'in' and 'with' in verses 9, 10, 12 and 13.**

What Paul is trying to do, is convey that God has revealed in Christ all that a person needs to know to establish a relationship with God. Thinking that the source of true or higher spiritual wisdom is found somewhere other than in Christ is a great deception, and ultimately brings disorder to the Christian life.

Why Paul writes what he does in verses 2 and 3 is answered in verse 4. He writes 'And this I say...' He writes these things to warn them in the event someone should try and beguile them with enticing words.

Verses 2 and 3 are important. The 'Mystery of God' is a Mystery to those who do not know God, but this Mystery is no longer a secret. The True believer should be in on the Secret. Once we know the secret we have greater assurance of knowing what we believe is true. It gives us stronger hearts.

In verse 3, Paul writes about treasures of wisdom and knowledge that are available through Christ. Wisdom means the ability to use the truth once the truth is known. This wisdom is not a stagnant vain philosophy!

¹⁶ (Wiersbe), p. 2:113

Notice it says these things are hid in Christ in verse 3, but they are not hid from us! They are hidden FOR us. Since Christ created all things for Himself, there is nothing lacking for us inside of Him.

What protects us from Deceitful Philosophy? We find that in verse 7:

1. Rooted in Him
2. Established in the faith – the building is being built on a good foundation
3. Sound teaching
4. Thanksgiving. – Ingratitude opens the door seeking other things to satisfy.

This epistle has been referred to as the 'Thankful Epistle', for thankfulness is mentioned five times in the four chapters. We must be careful not to develop an attitude that dissects the Christian faith and analyzes the truth we receive in Christ. It has happened, for example, questioning the need of attending the Feast of Tabernacles, suggesting it is not necessary for salvation. This thinking is deceitful as it is an attitude of ingratitude, where the thankfulness has become a point of contention.

It is not a question of whether Feast observances are necessary for salvation at all, but demonstrating our gratitude to God for having revealed to us their significance—and how they point us to the plan of salvation.

Verse 10 says we are COMPLETE in Him. We lack nothing that we need for salvation; we need not look elsewhere for completeness. Notice verse 9: For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily – and we are in HIM!

This is all possible as we are in Christ, sanctified to Him! We are not outside looking in, we are on the inside.

2. What are you lacking in Christ then?

We are lacking nothing in Christ our Savior. Our standing is already complete and perfect in Christ. We are not advised to grow in standing, because our standing is confirmed, but we may grow in the knowledge and experience we have in Him so long as we remain steadfast. All that we need will come to us if we remain faithful.

3. What exactly was nailed to the cross (stake)?

This question is in reference to verse 14. That which was nailed to the stake was contrary to us. What then was contrary to us? This is mentioned in the previous verses, and that was the sentence of death (the handwriting of the ordinances) that the law required for sin. The penalty! (See the Romans Bible Study).

God's laws teach us to have better lives and to get to know God, and these teachings are not against us. God's Sabbath and Holy days are not against us. So he could not be referring to these things. See the discussion below.

Comment on chapter 2:16, 17

Confusion sets in verse 16 where Paul, it would seem, suggests that the Sabbath and annual Sabbaths are no longer commanded observances, but are nailed to the cross¹⁷. There are those who assert that the annual holy days and the Sabbath day are not part of the new covenant in Christ based on these very scriptures. Careful reading of the text and the context of these verses does not support such a claim.

Jesus Christ plainly states that the Sabbath was created for man (Mark 2:27). It is for his welfare and a day to rest and fellowship with God. It is a day to keep holy and set apart from all other days. Why would Christ—the one who established the Sabbath for mankind's sake and made it holy—subsequently 'do away' with it by taking it with Him to death? Extending the argument further to the annual holy days, why would He put to death anything He named after Himself, even those festivals the people of Israel were commanded to rejoice in?

What Christ was dealing with in addressing the Pharisees in the account of Mark was very much the same as what Paul was addressing; that certain men were teaching further regulations that were deemed necessary for proper observance of the Sabbaths. Such teachings were contrary to the purpose of the Sabbath, and caused a distraction and burden to those who believed them. Paul, therefore, argues that let no one judge them, that is, set rules on them, for proper observance. Proper observance of God's holy days are Christ-centered and liberating to the believer.

Let's examine the text in more detail. First of all it says '...let no man judge you.' In other words, don't let any man upset you, point a finger at you, judge you and say you are in error. What was it that no man was allowed to judge them about? 'In meat or in drink'...the margin shows the meaning of the Greek to be 'in eating and drinking.' Thus the judging against them had to do with something they were doing. It would be 'eating and drinking.' But was it to be the normal daily eating and drinking? Let us notice it was 'in respect of' particular days. These days elsewhere in the Bible are identified as 'feast' days. See Lev. 23:1-2. The margin shows that phrase 'in respect of

¹⁷ 'nailed to the cross' has become an expression that is been equated to destroyed or removed from existence. Paul may not necessarily mean that here with this expression. Hebrews 10:20 is perhaps a good interpretive scripture for us. The annual holy days, for example, called for Israel to prepare sacrifices so that they may be clean in the presence of the Lord. We are clean because of Christ's sacrifice, through his flesh and blood. All matters of the law in regards to these observances must now be seen (interpreted) through His flesh that was 'nailed to the cross.'

means 'part', or in other words, they were told to not let any man judge them for that part of the Holy Day festivities regarding eating and drinking.

Why were Christians told to not be troubled while they observed the loving festivities of a feast of Jesus Christ? The answer is they may have been troubled by those who would point a finger at the manner in which those days were being observed. Paul points to the purpose of these feast days, so that they can get the bigger picture and rise above the legalism of others that clouds their meaning. He says those days '... are shadows of things to come.' These Holy Days were not memorials of past events, but shadows looking forward to the future, things to come. Then he reminds that the body of Christ, the Church of God, is to observe them to the glory of Christ.

What Paul was addressing here and subsequent verses is what he says in verse 8 of this chapter, that they should not be spoiled by philosophy, vain deceit, man-made traditions and all rudimentary things that distract us from Christ-centered observance.

These issues are not much different than what we are seeing today in both the Church of God and the Christian professing world. These are various forms of Legalism, Gnosticism, Mysticism and Asceticism. A few definitions should help:

Legalism- the observance of laws to win God's love and favor.

Gnosticism – There is no fully agreeable definition to this term, but essentially it is based on a 'higher' knowledge of understanding that is reserved for the select few by experience: salvation by knowledge, but knowledge developed by the inferences of man. This kind of knowledge produces systems of thought that are essentially heresy. Some Gnostic Heresies:

1. Gnosticism taught there were other intermediaries between God and man. It teaches an intimate relationship with Him is far off and not a right to claim.
2. Gnosticism taught that the human body was evil. Gnosticism taught that new born babies have sin.
3. Gnosticism said that the way to God was by learning a certain amount of knowledge which opens up spiritual insight. The emphasis was on intellect and learning and self improvement through self effort in winning acceptance with God.

Mysticism – the belief that beings other than Christ must mediate between people and God (see verse 18).

Asceticism – the practice of abstaining from things to earn merit with God (see verse 21).

Chapter 3

At the beginning of this chapter there are verses that describe the basis of the believer's new life and are worth exploring if we wish to appreciate their full meaning.

What is written can best be described if we look at them coming from God's point of view. In verse 3, Paul writes 'For you died...', that is, as far as God is concerned, we did die, for when we were baptized we were buried with Jesus Christ, and the old man died, and, therefore, no longer lives. From God's reckoning, He identifies the believer with Christ in His death, and therefore, also been raised with Him in His resurrection. God considers the person as having died and risen with Christ.

Let's remind ourselves that God loves His Son and loves Him with an eternal and perfect love. Christ is the only life that God sees as living, and Christ is your life in the eyes of God. In verse 4, Paul reminds his readers that 'Christ is our life ...'. With Christ as our life and Christ having the love of the Father, we also receive such a great love from God. It is our faith in His Son that God honors and takes as the real thing. Consider that God sent, in effect, His whole life, His Son, (all that He had), to conquer sin and death so that all who believe in His Son can be saved and live eternally with Him. If we set our faith in His Son, setting our faith in God's whole life and all that He loved for our salvation, God cannot help responding to us emotionally and to love us and give us eternal life with blessings. Are we not taught by Christ that it is His Father's pleasure to give us the kingdom?

The result of being raised with Christ has wonderful implications to the believer that he/she must realize. One of these is the subject of these first few verses and that is: that since we are now raised with Christ who now sits at heavenly places, we must also set our mind on heavenly things and not on earthly things. Setting our mind on the things above is a deliberate choice we make in our daily lives as we walk our walk with God.

This is not necessarily a natural thing for us to do. In fact much of what gives us woe or what gives us entertainment here on earth may be taking up too much of our attention. This may be reflected in our requests for prayers in regards to physical and emotional healing, finding a spouse, finding a better job or the difficulties we may be experiencing. Although prayer on these matters is warranted, these are not the things above that Paul is referring to here.

It has been asked as to what are the things above that we should set our mind on. It would be helpful to refer to the Ephesians Bible Study, Chapter 1, Questions 2 and 3 for some more thoughts on this question. What is discussed there is God wishes to reveal more of Himself to you the believer, the knowledge of God, so that your relationship grows and grows. Not Paul or any teacher can step in and simply hand over this knowledge; it is God giving personal revelation to the believer. Paul, in

Ephesians, simply expresses his earnest hope in prayer that the knowledge of God will come to them.

And this is eternal life, that they might know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent. - John 17:3

In Christ's forever abiding words recorded by John we see what life eternal is. Eternal life is the very purpose we have in it; that we forever learn more and more about the Most High Eternal Being and His magnificent Son as He opens His life to us in a relationship where we are loved and are one in God. Our minds cannot grasp such wonder, because for us it is the infinite and beyond. For God's Kingdom will have no end

We, the believers, are simply being exhorted to match our reality with God's reality. With our feet on the earth and our minds in the heavenly places where we are blessed (Ephesians 1:3), our lives will also realize these blessings and will make our lives more effective. It will keep us focused on His Will and the Kingdom of God.

1. Is there a connection between Christ's words in Luke 11:9-13 and what Paul writes at the beginning of this chapter? What are the connections? What about James 4:3?

At the beginning of this chapter we are told to set our minds on the things above and set our hopes in them. When we learn to do this, we learn to ask of God and communicate our needs appropriately. In Luke 11, Jesus tells us plainly that whatever we ask for we shall receive, and what we receive is expressed in terms of the Holy Spirit, which brings us the divine enabling power to carry out our lives on this earth according to His will and pleasure. Remember Christ's words from the Sermon on the Mount:

But seek first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. - Mat. 6:33

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it upon your pleasures. - James 4:3

Be careful in your prayers and be watchful of yourself what you are asking God to do. Selfish desires are often hidden even from ourselves. We must do as Paul advises and that is to set our hearts on the things above. Paul learned this lesson when he asked the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh. Once he realized God's purpose in having this ailment remain with him, he was able to turn from what he felt he needed, to transforming the ailment in making him more effective in serving the Lord.

2. What things get in the way of what Paul tells us to do in verses 1 and 2? What do you suppose comes more naturally to us: the things that get in the way

or what we should do? What are some of the things that nurture our ability to do what Paul tells us? Why do you suppose they nurture this?

The very things Paul mentions in verses 5 to 9 get in the way of a heavenly focus. These include fornication, covetousness, anger and blasphemy to name a few. It takes effort to get these things out of our lives, for Paul tells us in verse 5 to mortify, put to death, these things that have their roots in the carnal mind that is enmity towards God.

Verses 10 to 24 describe the behavior and mindset that nurture our ability to have a heavenly outlook. We are renewed in Jesus Christ if we pursue these things (verse 10), and by doing so we strengthen our relationship with God.

3. Can we see the connection between verses 3 and 4 (and chapter 2:3) with some of the parables in Matthew 13?

Notice in these verses what is hidden in Jesus Christ. For we ourselves are hidden in Him, where our appearing will be in glory at His return.

Virtually all the parables in Matthew 13 express or allude to the hidden-ness of the Kingdom. Read them carefully and try to make the connection with what is taught in this epistle.

4. What is considered a `wrong' in verse 25? Consider the context. Can you relate one of Christ's parables?

This verse is similar to 2 Corinthians 5:10 and further study can be found in the Corinthian Bible Study Question 1 Chapter 5.

In the context in Colossians, Paul is in the discussion of servants obeying their masters. He then makes the connection between that and the Christians serving their true Lord and Master.

Paul's advice is that in whatever we do, we should do it `heartily' (out of the heart, soul or from the inner part) (verse 23). This suggests the full scope of the Christian's life of service, whether it be at one's profession or stewardship in the Church of God.

The wrongs include slothfulness, irresponsibility, indifferences, cheating, dishonesty etc. The Lord believes in productive work and uses a number of parables that use the analogy of workers receiving their just reward from their masters. There is the parable of the talents, for example, (Matthew 25).

Notice also that Paul refers to those who are doing wrong. All of us have done wrong at one time or another and in many ways. There may be no escaping the reality that we reap what we sow (Gal 6:7), but the opportunity is for us to realize our wrong and instead follow a path of righteousness rather than continuing in doing wrong, which is what Paul has in focus here.

Chapter 4

1. Let's elaborate on verse 2. What does it mean to continue? What does it mean to watch, and watch for what? Does Matt 26:40-41 have any relation to this verse? What about thanksgiving?

To continue in prayer means to be devoted to prayer. When we are devoted we are steadfast, unwearied, and undistracted. This is a developed discipline we need to attain, especially in modern times. Prayer is a conversation with God, and continued conversation keeps us in tune with God and wary of all that seeks to ensnare us. If we do not pray, we are in effect showing an independence from God. A Christian, who has put the old person to death and now lives in Christ, cannot survive well in a life of infrequent prayer.

We are to watch in prayer. We should be diligent in our prayers so that we pray appropriately, not asking amiss and avoiding wandering thoughts. We are in a sense watching ourselves, knowing our weaknesses.

Jesus Christ tells us also to watch:

Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak. – Mat. 26:41

Here we see the struggle between the spirit and the flesh. We watch so that we are not tempted to succumb to fatigue, that we do not entertain our weariness (in our thoughts) so that we have a sober prayer life. It is interesting that Jesus took his closest disciples, his friends as He called them, as he became sorrowful and confessed this fact to them. He asked them to watch with Him. Christ simply wanted the company of His friends in His time of greatest trial and need, and by watching with Him, he did not feel so alone.

Watch therefore, and pray always, that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man. – Luke 21:36

What we are asked to watch is not how the world is unfolding, but to watch ourselves so when trouble comes we will be accounted worthy to escape the snare that comes upon the whole earth and appear before God blameless.

I Thessalonians

It appears evident that the overriding purpose of Paul's letters to the Thessalonians is for their encouragement and support. He encouraged them to stand fast in the face of persecution, and to believe in the great hope of the resurrection. Apparently there were those that were concerned over what would happen to those brethren who had died before the Lord's return. There were some who forsook some of their responsibilities because they felt that the imminent return of Christ negated their importance.

Paul encourages them in several ways. He commends them for their strong faith, love, and hope. He expresses his deep and heartfelt connection to them. He expresses how encouraged he is by them. He encourages them to stand fast and not be shaken in persecution and told them that those who trouble them are storing up for themselves the wrath of God.

Perhaps what encouraged the Thessalonians the most is that Paul laid his heart and soul out to them and demonstrated his commitment. He must have had a warm heart. He compares himself to a gentle nurse (I Thess. 2:7), a firm father (2:11). Paul confronts his readers with gentleness in strength, caring in his exhortations and guilelessness in his motives.

Chapter 1

Paul does not mention his apostleship as he does in most other epistles. His personal connection did not require him to do so.

1. Verse 5. How does one receive the gospel? Can it be in word only, or word and power? What power is Paul referring to?

The power Paul refers to is translated from the Greek word *dunamis*. What Paul probably has sensed from his experience with them is that not only did they believe in the Word, but that it also came with the power (*dunamis*) of the Holy Spirit, (which has the ability to affect and to change). The gospel is not just an idea or a concept or philosophy; it is something that leads a hardened and deceived heart to conviction and real change. This takes power, and this power was evident in the Thessalonians.

2. Verse 5. What manner of men were Paul and Silas and Timothy? What does Paul mean by 'for your sake'?

They were men of conviction, and conviction is contagious. The manner of these men encompassed many things, but the totality of their conviction or passion in the gospel inspired those who learned from them. Consider those you look to for your teaching today. Are they men of conviction or are they cold and hot? Is your

conviction affected by their conviction? If not, you may be spiritually removing yourself.

Let us face the fact that Christians and non-Christians are always watching. They can recognize in those that deliver a message that they themselves follow. Paul, Silas, and Timothy all were examples to them. This exemplary behavior is for the brethren's sake in Thessalonica, although not to be considered the sole reason.

Yes, we can be inspired by the faithfulness of other brethren that the Lord sends to us. The Thessalonians have received a letter from all three of their elders that had begotten them, Paul, Silas and Timothy. This was meaningful to the Church in Thessalonica.

All of this has a reciprocal effect on the ministry. Paul writes that he remembers without ceasing (v3) their works of faith, labor of love and patience. He even hears of them from others in various parts of the world (v9), and bolsters up his, Silas's and Timothy's ministry (v9).

Reputation does matter in this work. Failure of the ministry to conduct themselves properly and failure to deliver their message with conviction brings negative results.

Paul's goal is to empower the brethren, not just the leaders or only a select few. We know this because this epistle was written to the Church of the Thessalonians, not just to a leader. This is a point worth elaborating on, for a weak Church builds itself on only a few leaders. When it does so, it ignores the needs of some of its members and fails to recognize and use the gifts that can be found amongst the brethren. This can be a recipe for failure, as has been experienced in the Church of God in recent history.

Chapter 2

1. What did Silas (Silvanus) give the brethren of Thessalonica? What does this tell us about the kind of minister he was?

We read in verse 8 that all three; Paul, Silas, and Timothy, imparted not only the Gospel of God to them, but also gave them their own souls. The latter of these two tells us much of these three men.

"A gospel messenger who stands detached from his audience has not yet been touched by the very gospel he proclaims."¹⁸

In the beginning of this chapter we find many of the traits of a minister:

- fruitful – not vain or fruitless
- preaches boldly

¹⁸ (Martin), p. 81

- pure gospel, does not deceive people
- preaches to please God, not men (v4)
- does not preach to see what he can get out of it (v5)
- does not preach for prestige
- preaches with affection
- labors willingly
- leads a clean life
- has a fatherly approach
- preaches with a goal in mind, edification that leads to their glory in the kingdom
- preaches for their reward

In verse 4, Paul mentions they were not entrusted to the gospel by God only to turn around and please men. What he may be referring to in part is the use of flattery to forward the gospel. The message of the gospel, using the language of the Bible, would appear to get one somewhere, but does not get you anywhere with God.

Verse 5-6: they did not use their authority to burden them, which in this case would be to have them believe simply because of their apostolic authority. They were rather gentle (verse 7), motherly, in fact. They were not trying to disguise a self-seeking attitude.

2. In light of what is said in this chapter, how does one truly measure his own and other's sincerity?

It can be measured by your level of emotional attachment to others. If you're detached, you're likely insincere. The example of Paul, Silas and Timothy are given for us to consider. Your sincerity is really a measure of your concern for others.

Chapter 3

1. Why did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonians?

Paul's deep personal connection with the Thessalonians is clearly expressed in a number of verses in the preceding chapter. Therefore, knowing the prolonged persecution the Church was enduring, Paul could no longer endure being absent from them and sent Timothy to reinforce their faith and to comfort them, with the desired affect that none would be moved under persecution.

2. In relation to verses 3-5, how might a believer be shaken? In what ways might a believer who is shaken be tempted?

One who is shaken under persecution or distress is one who reconsiders the path he or she has taken. Timothy was sent to remind them that they were appointed unto this.

Believers old and new may interpret difficulty incorrectly and be tempted to believe it is a sign to change something that is not for them to change. What Paul had in mind was they would be tempted to change something, which would render them fruitless. What he specifically had in mind is not clear, but this brings to mind temptations we experience today.

One temptation is to harden our hearts as a means of protection. This should be of great concern for us (in perhaps the latter days) where we learn the love of many will grow cold amidst persecution, distress, and Church pressures (Matt 24:12). Although the belief in God may persist in the offended believer, the hardened heart will become fruitless before God.

Another temptation is to back off and lie low under the radar. That is, one would compromise their faith in exchange for comfort. The end result is the same as a hardened heart, a believer becoming fruitless before God.

3. Faith is mentioned five times in these first 10 verses of this chapter. What describes a strong faith? And what does a strong faith do?

Limiting our answer to the verses of this chapter, we find a few indications of a strong faith.

- A strong faith is not moved by afflictions (verses 3-5).
- A strong faith gives forth an excellent testimony (verse 6).
- A strong faith stirs the hearts of its pastor and fellow believers (verse 7-10).

Chapter 4

1. Verse 1, 10. Abound/Increase more and more: How? What? Where? Why?

Paul wants them to continue in the walk that pleases God; this opens the door for continued growth. The growth itself is likely in grace (divine enablement) and in knowledge (knowledge of God - knowing Him more personally). This growth comes directly from God.

Paul reminds them in verse 2 that this growth comes from the commandment they have received from Jesus Christ and was given to the Church. He names at least two commandments. The first is that they abstain from sexual immorality for their sanctification, for they have been set apart to God. He also reminds them that none of God's children should defraud one another. Paul concludes that if anyone should despise their own earthly vessels (sexual impurity) or despise a brother or sister in Christ, we are not so much as despising these, but we actually despise God, which is a chilling thought (verse 8).

The increase in verse 10 is in their charitable deeds to the needy in the Church in Macedonia. Paul immediately connects this outward love of the brethren to more areas that show love of others. By applying ourselves to our work and dealing only with our personal affairs we are kept from meddling in the affairs of others. When we follow this practice we can hope for a quieter mind and more peace around us and for others.

Chapter 5

1. What does it mean to sleep? How can one be spiritually asleep?

Paul associates the "sleep" of verse 6 with being "of the night" and "of darkness" and, in this context, speaks of the danger of being overtaken by the Day of the Lord (verse 4), which would result in being subjected to wrath rather than salvation (verse 9). "You are all sons of light," he said, and are "not of the night nor of darkness" (verse 5). Since the "sleep" he speaks of means being "of the night" and "of darkness" and puts one in danger of becoming the recipient of wrath in the Day of the Lord, and since Paul affirms that all the Thessalonians are sons of light, not of the night, it seems most probable that the "sleep" he speaks of in verse 10 is something different. The "let us not sleep" of verse 6 is an admonition. He "condemns" this kind of "sleeping" in the sense that he disapproves of it, or warns against it. The lack of watchfulness was not a failure to watch world events (which is nowhere required of Christ's followers), but a failure to be vigilant in continuing faithfully in Christ's teachings.

II Thessalonians

Chapter 1

1. Verse 5. Is suffering a requirement for salvation? If yes, then why? If no, then why not?

In verse 5, Paul makes the concluding statement that because of their faithful endurance through persecutions and tribulations they may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. This does not mean this will make them worthy, it means they will be *counted worthy*; it is the recognition of worthiness. A believer is not saved because he remains faithful through the sufferings of this life; he is saved because he believes in Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord. However, when he endures through the suffering, he doesn't disappoint God, and is counted worthy of God's kingdom.

If we were to ask if suffering is a requirement for salvation, we could best answer that the endurance of suffering by trusting in Jesus Christ is a requirement for salvation. Paul reminds them that this is the righteous judgment of God, for persecution shows to the believer and God who he really is, and his true level of commitment to Jesus Christ.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 has been the subject of much speculation, particularly surrounding the 'man of sin' where there are a number of divergent opinions to the future identity of this individual; even whether this is a human being at all. Before studying this chapter, perhaps we should consider what Paul mentions in verse 5.

Paul reminds them that his subject was already discussed when he was with them on a prior occasion. No doubt, considering the nature of the topic and the interest the Thessalonians have in it, there was more than one discussion. Paul does not find it particularly meaningful to recap the details. We are tempted to fill in the details, but this is not necessary or warranted, and we will avoid that here.

1. Why were the Thessalonians thinking that the Day of the Lord was upon them? What is the Day of the Lord?

First, the Day of the Lord is not a single day in history. The word 'day' is used in a forceful sense, like men do when they speak of 'the great day of our nation', or 'the great day of space exploration'. The Day of the Lord covers a long period of time and a number of events. It is a time of God's judgment, when the wrath of God comes upon unrepentant mankind. The Day of the Lord is not a day believers should fear, however.

The Thessalonians had somehow received a word or special revelation (verse 2) that the day of the Lord had begun. Add to this the persecutions they were experiencing, and they became shaken in mind—troubled that the day was upon them.

2. What is this ‘falling away’ that Paul refers to in verse 3? Who is this ‘man of sin’, and should we care?

The falling away has often been referred to as an apostasy within the Church of God; that believers would, in significant number, leave the Church or rebel in the form of lawless behavior. This view is not supported by the context of this verse or the letters to the Thessalonians as a whole. While apostasy, or falling away, can refer to leaving the true faith, it is not at all restricted to that meaning.

Paul does not specifically mention the Church either. Paul’s intent is to comfort his readers (1 Thess. 4:18, 2 Thess. 2:17). To promise them future loss of brethren (before the hope of Christ’s return) would be contrary to his intentions. This is a worldwide retreat from moral and ethical standards, perhaps anarchy. Moral and ethical standards still exists in the consciousness of the majority of mankind despite common observations to the contrary. What Paul describes to Timothy in II Timothy 3, a self seeking world: proud, disobedient to authority, unthankful, without self control, brutal, and despisers of good. Admittedly, this is already manifest in today’s society, but the suggestion we get from verse 7 and 8 is that there is a restraining influence against this mystery of lawlessness that is clearly already at work.

It is unclear as to what is being said in verse 6 to 8. Clearly there is a restraining influence that exists, either by the Lord the Restrainer or one whom He appoints. What is unclear is the nature of the revealing of this man of sin. One possibility is at some point the apostasy will become uncontrolled when the restraining influence is taken out of the way, and the man of sin will be revealed, who elevates himself as described in chapter 4. Another is the revealing of the *man of sin* where his works and character are seen openly, no longer disguised but unveiled in all his corrupt deformity to the shame of the world. This latter possibility would be consistent with history. Brutal dictatorships often appear on the scene by being the deceptive solution to a current problem that faces a nation. In fear and needing protection, democratic societies will give up their freedoms and hand power over to a single charismatic individual who promises to take care of them. Adolf Hitler’s rise to power is a classic example. It is not until it is too late before the true nature and intentions of a ruler are revealed, and if history teaches us anything, so will it be with this man of sin.

The apostasy will be fueled by the deceptive signs and lying wonders of this man of sin. Those who are deceived by this cult of personality which turns God, or rather God’s character, into the enemy, now have a new counterfeit god. This individual does not lack authority, but he attacks all religions, as he exalts himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped, claiming that he is God (verse 4). The Church of

God will be a target of this rebellion because they are the people of the true God and represent God's will on earth, which is extremely unpopular for the climate of this time. Matthew 24: 9 -13 describes a Church persecuted; brethren betraying one another and the love of many brethren growing cold. The apostasy will negatively affect the people of God.

The scriptures speak of end time conditions with a world largely under the sway of the man of sin, but it is not a world without God's call to repent. Verse 10 suggests that the truth of God will be made available, as many other scriptures in the Bible, but not received by many that they may be saved. God will pour out His Spirit in the last days (Joel 2:28), but despite this, many will reject His salvation as described in verses 11 and 12.

Should we care about the identity of this man of sin? By no means is the salvation of an individual attached to the correct identification of the man of sin, or understanding end time prophecy in general. We also see Paul did not hold the whereabouts or identity of the man of sin in high importance. Paul states that this individual will be revealed 'in his own time' (verse 6) so we are not to concern ourselves with speculations of his identity or timing. Paul's conclusion is also notable; he does not seem to complete his discussion on the matter, but diverts his readers away from the topic and expresses gratitude for the Church in Thessalonica (verse 13). One can sense his reluctance to concern his brethren with the subject, so neither should we. Nevertheless, we are aware of this eventual occurrence as God does not leave his servants completely unaware of what will unfold (Revelation 1:1)

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 begins with Paul's request for prayer that the gospel be furthered and that Paul, Timothy, and Silvanus be delivered from unreasonable and deranged men. This request by Paul, among others in his epistles, gives rise to at least one question and one important observation.

Why is it necessary for Paul to make such a request for others to petition the Lord for deliverance of His disciples and that His own gospel may run swiftly and glorified? Does not the Lord already have that full intention, and does He not have the self sufficiency and will power to carry it out anyway? One could not doubt that God has the power to remove any and all obstacles to the gospel anytime He chooses; however, this view falls short of knowing and understanding His true passions in sharing truth and life. God is looking and hoping for others to share in His passion to bring mankind to Him! Sharing is a delight to God.

One observation is Paul the Apostle is not one to demonstrate a 'no need' from others for what they can offer:

"There is something deeply moving in the thought of this giant among men asking for the prayers of the Thessalonians who so well recognized their own weakness. Nowhere is Paul's humility more clear to see. And the fact that he, as it were, threw himself on their hearts, must have done much to bind even his opponents to him, because it is very difficult to dislike a man who asks you to pray for him."¹⁹

Not only did Paul request the prayers of the Thessalonians, he also made request of the prayers of the Corinthians, who we may be tempted to consider an unlikely choice for Paul to petition.

Let us also notice that Paul's request for prayers is for furtherance of the gospel, not a prayer request for personal comfort, healing, or for God to meet his personal needs.

1. In what manner of authority does Paul address the subject of disorderly conduct? Why this manner? What does it mean to walk disorderly?

In verse 3 Paul commands them '... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Paul has the apostolic authority to express the command as though it came from Christ Himself. Paul holds the office of an apostle, which means 'one sent', and speaks on behalf of the One who sent him and with the same authority. Therefore this command is to be obeyed.

Apparently it became necessary to use more stern measures as his previous letter addressed the problem (1 Thess. 5:14), where he first makes mention of disorderly conduct. It did not have the intended effect, as this problem needed to be dealt with for one or more reasons.

One such reason is that just as exemplary conduct is contagious (as Paul expresses in verses 3-9), so may also conduct to the contrary. The disorderly conduct Paul mentions are those brethren who became unwilling to commit to work, and are alternatively spending their time involving themselves in the affairs of others (verse 11). Moreover, those who did not obey Paul's letter should be made note of and company with them should be avoided (verse 14). The intent of this increased ostracism would, hopefully, compel the offender to change his or her ways.

It appears evident that the reason some in the Thessalonian Church were not working was because their belief of an imminent return of Christ meant work was no longer necessary. This unwillingness to work expresses indifference to the needs of the Church and shows a lack of caring.

Our modern Churches may not have the same societal structure as the first century Church. The community of believers lived in much closer proximity and communed

¹⁹ (Barclay), p. 250

more often with one another than we do today. Today, the thought of some brethren becoming unwilling to work with the thought that the end was near would not go far with the brethren.

I Timothy

To begin the study on the epistles to Timothy, a discussion on Timothy's background may be a good place to start. We can perhaps see the direction Paul is going in his letters to him, and the message Paul wants Timothy to recognize.

In 2 Timothy 3:14-17 we see that Timothy was well versed in the scriptures from childhood. He was well acquainted with the law and was well beyond in understanding than most.

Paul must have had many informal conversations with Timothy, yet these letters are formal. The reasons are perhaps two fold. The first being, Paul had expected this letter would be read by others. Secondly, Paul is, within this first letter, charging Timothy formally with its content, which would be unlikely in a personalized memo style.

As mentioned in Acts 16, Timothy was a great find for Paul.²⁰ Timothy was also well respected in the surrounding districts.

Timothy's understanding and observance of the law, as well as his developed character, posed a danger to him also. Timothy may have had a kind of 'Pharisee Potential', where he would have judged other's standing in Christ according to the works of the law. As we go through the first two chapters, this becomes more evident as the underlying message Paul has for Timothy.

Chapter 1

1. Explain your understanding of verses 5 to 11. In doing so consider the following questions:

- a. Verse 5, the commandment is what? Where have we discussed this purpose of the commandment before?**

The word translated *commandment* is from the Greek word *paraggelia*, meaning charge. The same word is translated *charge* in 1:18. This is not necessarily in direct reference to the precepts of the law (Greek: *entole*). What Paul is referring to is the overall charge, the law of using the laws. The context appears to be not only what is taught and shared, but on how it is done also. The charge, when obeyed, fulfills its purpose; that is, love which can come only comes from a pure heart. This appears to be in relation to Romans 13:8-10 that love is the fulfillment of the law.²¹

²⁰ See Acts Bible Study Chapter 16, Question 1.

²¹ See also Romans Bible Study, Chapter 13, Question 2.

Paul seems to indicate that the motivation of the individual is in view as he moves forward to making his point. In verse 6, those who have strayed from the purpose of the Lord's charge concerning His commandments would rather resort to idle talk, which is indifference to applied knowledge, throwing the laws and information around without regard to how they may be confusing or hurting people, causing division and hurt. They become dogmatic, with great confidence in what they say (verse 7). They probably got the letter of the law, but not its intent.

The carnal mind loves legalism, as it makes one appear and feel righteous. This is easier than coming to terms with a change in heart, and that may be the underlining motivation to stray from the purpose of the commandment.

Make no mistake; this continues to be a problem in our modern times.

b. How does one use the law lawfully, and how does one use it unlawfully?

It is used lawfully to teach, to keep us from erring. This function of the law is as relevant today as it ever was.

An unlawful use of the law is to teach that we are justified by keeping the law, that our standing in Christ is obtained or secured. Refer to Galatians 2:16.

It is also unlawful to use the law as a hammer to control people. As mentioned above, it is the motivation in using the law that is important. If the motivation comes from a pure heart, it looks to help people, and is expressed appropriately through verbal and non-verbal means. It requires wisdom in timing, and having understanding of the pressures that are on other people.

c. How is the law not made for a righteous person?

Paul has now to come to the point he wishes to make.

In applying the law to begin with get this: The law is not made for stumbling, trying Christians who are making a sincere effort. If we stick to the New Testament definition, a righteous person is one who has been buried with Christ and raised with Him, and God therefore considers justified in the life of Christ. By having faith in Christ we are justified in this manner.

In the Church, it happens that some do become dogmatic and hyper-critical with the law, causing others to stumble and resent the Church. We must consider and meditate on our motivations so that we use the law wisely.

2. For what purpose was Hymenaeus and Alexander delivered to Satan (verse 20)?

Hymenaeus and Alexander were delivered to Satan so they would experience the grief of being in Satan's realm and repent of their transgression concerning the faith in Christ.

Hymenaeus and Alexander were almost certainly two of whom Paul mentions in verse 7; teaching justification by works of the law. For in verse 5, we see false teachers described as not having a good conscience, or sincere faith. Alexander and Hymenaeus were described the same way in verse 19.

Paul to Timothy: *"You must use the law wisely or you too will suffer shipwreck, and also potentially be dealt with as I have already dealt with Hymenaeus and Alexander"*.

Chapter 2

1. Is there a connection between verses 1 through 8 with what Paul writes about in the previous chapter? What is the connection?

In verse 1, the word 'therefore' clues us in to the fact Paul connects what he says in the way of conclusion, with what he had previously written. Otherwise, we may be left to believe he is starting a new subject.

There is a definite connection between these 8 verses and the previous chapter. Paul knows the kind of man he was (1:13-15), and it is because of this, knowing the mercy he received from God, the undeserved pardon and grace, that he makes it a priority (... *first of all...*) for prayer that all men may receive the mercy. He hopes that others will receive what he received. He also gives thanks for all men who are in authority that they do not persecute in ignorance the people of the Way as he did.

1:13-15 - Paul to Timothy: *"You may admire me now, but know where I came from. I was an abuser of the law, and persecuted the Saints using the law as a hammer! A chief sinner!"*

2:3-5 - Paul to Timothy: “*Judge other men through the eyes of the Lord. Judge as God judges. Do not exclude anyone. Do not withhold the truth based on prior prejudices*”.

2:5 - Paul to Timothy: “*You are not the Mediator, Jesus Christ is. Do all, not to get in the way of the salvation of others who God may be calling*”.

2:8 - Paul to Timothy: “*Do not pray when you are angry with unbelievers. Do not pray with doubt, that is do not pray with a preconceived notion of who is called and who is not*”.

Then God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?” And he said, “It is right for me to be angry, even to death!” But the LORD said, “You have had pity on the plant, for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left – and much livestock?” – Jonah 4:9-11.

2. Why does Paul use ‘first of all’ in verse 1?

“*First of all*” is given in exhortation. It is an encouragement and charge. This is given supreme importance. Before all else! Why? The answer is for reasons above, and because it is directly connected to God’s desire for mankind.

Note there are at least three kinds of prayer mentioned in verse 1:

- Supplication: focus on special needs. A plead for God’s intervention.
- Intercessory: standing before God on behalf of another.
- Thanksgiving: expression of gratitude for all that He has done and is doing.

3. What is Paul’s underlying message to Timothy (the evangelist) in verses 1 to 7?

The message is to embrace the core values in the mind and heart of an evangelist. The basis of these verses is the call to pray for others, and this as an evangelist such as Timothy must learn to do. By praying for others we get to know God, for God is outward looking (inclusive) and desires to draw all men to himself through His Son (verse 4). Therefore, we, too, should find it in our hearts to be of the same mind as we put on His character and pray for God’s truth to be extended to those outside of the flock.

Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’ – Ezek. 33:11

4. Can a woman teach a man? Must she always remain silent? Can she be saved through childbearing (verse 15)?

To answer this question, we need to study verses 8 to 15 in its entirety to gain a good understanding of Paul's communication to Timothy and anyone who reads this epistle.

In verse 8, Paul addresses the men in their role in the Assembly of God's people; as implied by the words 'in every place (everywhere)'. He indicates that men are to take the lead in prayer. There is also an inward look at the men of the Church, that they should conduct themselves in such headship without wrath or doubting which proves disruptive to the assembly.

Having dealt with the disruptive behavior of men, Paul turns his attention to disruptive women. '... in like manner also...' (verse 9) connects his appeal to women when in the assembly of God, but his words likely have a broader view and can apply (in general) to their lifestyle. Verse 9 addresses their outward appearance, although he has their attitude in mind. Women should dress and conduct themselves in a manner that does not bring attention to them, but rather reflect their submission to God.

Verses 10 and 11 emphasize that a woman learn in silence. The term 'silence' does not explicitly mean that women are not permitted to open their mouth and vocalize, but is in reference to their submission to the teaching authority, which is given to men. A woman may teach, as she may have an experience or revelation to share, however, the teaching authority must remain with a man, be he an elder or husband. Paul re-enforces his position noting that Adam was formed first and it was God's intention that the man lead the woman. It is not to say man is superior to woman, but it is the role and function of the man and woman that is in view. They are to complement each other, as Adam was to take responsibility for his wife. This role was made permanent, whereby the failure of Adam to lead the woman resulted in her deception. Eve was deceived, not Adam. Adam was disobedient. Paul's point is that this role reversal, which caused such disruption, must not be repeated in the Church.

Verse 15 is one of those hard sayings of Paul. Paul's discussion of women in these verses refers to married women. Childbearing covers a great deal more than producing babies, but it is the maternal duties that are in view. Paul mentions good works (verse 10), and some women, through the concentration on this function in the family, will find a place God has ordained for them. Doing what God has ordained is fruitful and rewarding, and brings peace of mind. This faithful contribution of mothers is likely what the apostle has in mind when he mentions they will be 'saved in childbearing'.

To summarize, the apostle simply states that God will judge and reward a woman according to her growth as a Christian within her appointed sphere of influence: her

family. God Himself has drawn the lines between the sexes, and we should do our best to fulfill our roles with excellence, not rebellion or complaint.

A closer look at 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14

The role of women (particularly their participation when the Church is assembled) is a current matter of controversy and is a hot button in many Church circles. It will be made clear that the congregation that took part in the live conduct of these studies encouraged the participation of women. Had the participation been limited to men the fruits of these studies would have been limited. The congregation had participation of women during services, which included scripture readings, song leading and personal testimonies.

The passages in 1 Timothy 2, and 1 Corinthians 14 are often referenced to make the case opposing women's participation. Depending on the cultural make up, elder's interpretation, or prior accepted teaching of these verses, these seem to primarily dictate the level of participation women may have in the Church. One reported extreme is that women are not to hold any conversation whatsoever during any Church assembly, and even in the kitchens they were told be silent. In some cases women are not to participate in any Bible discussions, including Bible study, or quote scripture. Divergence from all or any one of the above are actually considered offensive to some men and women. It is certain, however, that this matter of women participation comes under the interpretation of the scriptures and cultural influences.

Opinions that are in opposition to women participation in services vary. They include that a woman will likely participate for vain reasons, that if a woman were to speak in Church it would bring about the genesis of a Church apostasy, typically having Isaiah 3:12 in mind—where sinful conditions become such that women rule over them. Other objections include that jealousy between the women of the congregation will ensue, that we must error on the side of the heaviest weight of scripture, including the weight of examples of male authority in group setting in the Bible. Therefore, in defending male leadership for the reasons above, the elders tow the company line no matter how unpopular or how many hurt feelings come about because of it.

The positions listed above only confuse what the instructions are as given in the Bible in regards to women teaching or Church participation. *What, then, is the guideline that God has for His Church?*

The Law is our gold standard to which we must adhere, including Paul or any other elder regardless of their backgrounds, or prior biases.

It is ordained by God that the man should lead the family. The familial structure of God's Church follows this same construct. For a congregation to avoid confusion and maintain cohesion, this can only continue under male leadership, and this is the

understanding Paul maintains in both the first Corinthian epistle and the Pastoral epistle to Timothy.

Scripture readings, testimonies and participation in Bible studies are not in violation of the Law or God's Word. The intent and application of the Law is to maintain order and harmony in the family and the family Church. In both 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy it is the headship of the man in view. In 1 Corinthians 14, to avoid confusion, the women were to leave the oration, or open questions to her husband who asks and speaks for both. As with many other scriptures, we understand the scripture better (in its context) when we place ourselves in the place of the original receiver. The Church of God today does not have the kind of issues experienced in the Corinthian Church when assembled. The issues at hand were speaking in tongues, and standing up and sharing revelations from God (they did not have the New Testament). In such a climate, let the leader of the household participate to limit the confusion. To emphasize the point to the Corinthians, the shame Paul refers to is not a universal transgression of the law, but it is disrespect for their husband headship, which is a transgression of the law as given in Genesis 2.

In 1 Timothy 2, the context is given in regards to a woman having the teaching authority. The present tense in the Greek text for 'teach' and 'exercise authority' are consistent with the context. What Paul is forbidding is a continuing ministry, and not an occasion here or there where a women wishes to offer an instruction or question. Paul refers to the law as he did in 1 Corinthians to substantiate his point, but this time he makes specific reference to Genesis 2.

Paul in both cases shows the proper application of the law. It is an example for us today to apply the law appropriately to the situation. The harder interpretations of 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 that do not take into account the circumstance and situation leads to problems. It can act as a barrier for those who may be new to the Church or who are newly exposed to God's calling. To some women, who are on the receiving end of stricter interpretation of these scriptures, life in the Church of God has been reportedly difficult, and creates an environment that is difficult to learn within. Those who choose to maintain more restrictive participation of women (based on these scriptures) may risk various difficulties in their congregations and hampered membership growth.

Chapter 3

After discussing the behavior of men and women in the Assembly of God, Paul turns his attention to qualified leadership in the Church to impress on Timothy the kind of men that he should look for to fulfill such responsibilities.

Notice the familial and not the institutional authoritative structure described in these positions. There is not a forced structure in Paul's mind to deal with problems or heresy. The management of God's household is not how one manages an institution.

Although sound business and managerial practices may prove effective in the corporate world, they are destined to failure in what God has intended to function as a family.

1. What is the difference in the qualifications of an overseer and a deacon?

Essentially: teaching capability. This is the only duty listed for the office of an overseer, and there does not appear to be a duty listed for deacons. The duties of a deacon are perhaps more varied in their assistance to elders, but may not exclude teaching. Much in every other way similar qualities are listed for both offices.

2. Why are these qualifications of an overseer and deacon important? What is actually emphasized about the offices of an overseer and a deacon?

In verse 1, Paul writes those who seek the office of an overseer (elder) desire a good work. It is the *work* that is emphasized, and not the office. Secondly, the character of the individual is important. The reward of fulfilling such an office is not emphasized either.

The example they must give, being more visible and respected, demonstrates the importance of the roles of an elder and deacon. They must not be compromised in their service to God's people and to God (verse 9).

3. What is the underlying, or not so underlying, message to Timothy 3?

Paul wrote to impress on Timothy the reality of God's Church on earth. The Church is God's prized possession. This is the Church of God. It is His and belongs to no other, and those who are in it also belong to Him. As one scholar described it, the Church is God's base of operation on earth. By use of the word Pillar in verse 15, Paul stresses God's presence on earth, the monument of victory that the Church represents. It suggests an aura of stateliness.

What a calling! And this is being impressed on Timothy. In verse 15, Paul writes these things that Timothy may know how to conduct himself, and the callings of the overseer and deacon are for Timothy to consider with himself in view. Timothy was to be a leader, overseer of the Church, and Paul wanted him to consider both the qualities of an overseer and the reasons for these qualities. The reasons are expressed in Paul's description of the Church. If the leadership fails, the whole Church is affected. What Paul may be envisioning is that the leadership form (an integral part of that pillar) holds (upholds) the truth.

In verse 16, Paul glorifies what he had just written of the Church. The mystery of godliness is the fact that it comes about in those who accept, practice and bear fruit that glorify God. That is a great miracle! To bear fruits glorifies the Father (John 15:8). Paul, knowing the perversion and lost state of mankind, is astounded by such a reality.

Paul also ties the physical with the heavenly in verse 16. The Church is a prized possession of Heaven, and it is the life and revelation of Jesus Christ that has brought this together.

Chapter 4

1. Where have we discussed the concern that Paul addresses in this chapter with Timothy before? What is the concern?

Paul instructs Timothy in regards to false teachers and their false doctrines, namely a form of Gnosticism that must have been present at the Church in Ephesus. In our study of Colossians we focused our attention on Gnosticism and related belief systems such as asceticism that taught acceptance by God must come by additional means outside of Christ. Paul names a couple of the heresies here. One is they were forbidding marriage. This teaching says they can be closer to God by remaining single and devoting their lives solely to Christ in this way. Although this is in part true, marriage is not forbidden in the Bible.²² The second heresy is abstaining from all meats, and promoting a vegetarian diet.

There is a disturbing point to all this. Ascetic and Gnostic teachings divert the attention of the believer away from sound doctrine, which detracts from realizing the experience of Christ in their lives. There may be no other way of describing it.

Those who have had their attention diverted to any Gnostic teaching in effort to find a form of righteousness before God and man will not lead to a fruit bearing life. This is a life outside of Christ, and we cannot bear fruit outside of Him. The other extreme is elevating the body to concentrate on health, which is a way to overcome evil and find a better home for God's Holy Spirit.

The end result for either camp of Gnostic or ascetic believers is that each gives attention to their spirit and worship only as they wish, only as much as they feel necessary to keep their spirit in tune with God. This would be in opposition to giving attention to God as He desires.

See Mark 7:18, 19 regarding this discussion.

2. Do verses 3 to 5 tell us it is okay to eat what was declared unclean by the law?

No. Note that in verse 5, Paul assumes it is sanctified by the word of God. Unclean meats are NOT sanctified by the word, they are prohibited.

²² See also 1 Corinthian Bible Study, Chapter 7

3. Where do false teachers get their ideas?

We find the answer in verse 1. These are doctrines of demons. They twist the words of God and present deceptive ideas to those who can be deceived by them.

Chapter 5

This chapter is about interpersonal relationships and the pastor's role in managing the affairs of the household of God he has been charged to look after.

One of the greatest failings of people involved in pastoral work is their inability to relate to and work with others effectively.

This failure is often traceable to the pastor's attitude toward others and how he views them. Paul had advised Timothy in chapter 4 not to let anyone despise his youth (verse 12), that he command and teach the sound doctrine he had received (verse 11), and that he gives himself wholly over to them. Paul did not want Timothy to consider these admonishes as reason to resort to harsh or overbearing action when dealing with others. Timothy's high standing (that Paul gives him) amongst the brethren by no means grant him license to resort to abusive tactics. Therefore, Paul feels it necessary to discuss Timothy's relationships with respect to other brethren.

Throughout his epistles, Paul urged his readers to adopt certain attitudes toward God (to think of Him as Father, Lord, Savior, etc.) and themselves (as saints, ambassadors, sons of God, etc.). These attitudes were crucial for them to hold so they might live properly. ***The way we think determines how we behave.*** Here (vv. 1-2) he taught a particular view toward others in the local Church that is essential to success in interpersonal relationships especially as pastors.²³

5:1 Respect the older man. The proper approach when having issue with older men must be taken. As difficult as it is for an older man to receive instruction from someone who is younger, how much more difficult would it be if it came in the form of rebuke?

Likewise, younger men have difficulty receiving instruction from men who are older, as well as of their own age group. Therefore, younger men should not have their spirit broken by rebuke. Paul's instruction to Timothy is to exhort younger men on a horizontal plane as brothers.

²³ (Constable), p. 54

5:2 Special considerations should be given to older women of the congregation in a way he would treat his own mother. Elderly women have much to offer and someone in Timothy's position may not stop to recognize that.

Treatment of younger women should be as though they were his sisters. Paul added 'with all purity' to emphasize that Timothy, who is young, should not cross any barriers that may be considered inappropriate.

Notice the familial relationships Paul uses as the basis of a pastor's interpersonal relationships with the congregation. How one views himself, as a son or a brother in this case, also governs our behavior and treatment of others.

5:3 Widows who are without are truly widows. They do not have family to look after them.

5:4 A widow with a family who is capable of supporting her should first be helped by that family. Although the Church may be of help to widows with family, in God's eyes is that the children care for their parents and grandparents.

5:5-6 True widows can be spiritual powerhouses, in prayer and visitations to those who are need. A true widow is 'left alone', meaning she does not have family support and may rely on the congregation for a portion of her sustenance.

Those widows described as 'dead' in verse 6 are those who give themselves over to overindulgence in the pleasures of this world. Widows who do not take on godliness complain about others, gossip, and seek attention.

5:7 Families must look after their own and widows must not seek a life of pleasure. Paul tells Timothy to command these things, not control them; it is for their protection so that they may be found blameless. One should not get the impression Paul believes in an attitude that scrutinizes and judges women to keep them 'in their place'.

5:8 Even unbelievers care for their own. For a Christian not to do so, this makes him worse than an unbeliever in Paul's eyes.

5:11-14 It was not wise to place younger widows on this list. Men and women are called to live a life that is steady and consistent. A younger widow may initially be inclined to dedicate her life to the Lord. Over time the stronger sensual desires of younger widows make it hard for them to remain committed to serving Christ wholeheartedly (being a single

woman). They may grow wanton against Christ, and renege on their commitment, bringing on themselves a kind of condemnation; not from God, but from their consciousness, or Church family. Further, they may become overly involved in others' affairs, not having household affairs of their own to take care of. Paul's solution is to encourage them to find another mate and bear children. (see chapter 2:15)

5:15 Again, Paul's ultimate concern is that of the welfare of women in the Church. In 2 Timothy 3:6 we also learn of the susceptibility of some women to false teachers, which is likely what Paul has in mind.

5:16 In summary, men and women should look after widows so that the Church not be unnecessarily burdened by the real widows of the congregation.

At "The Conference on Student Development in Theological Education" in June 1985, Dr. David Schuller of the Association of Theological Schools made the following comments.

Of those ministers involuntarily terminated by churches in recent years only 6-13 percent failed due to professional incompetence. However 46 percent were unsatisfactory due to interpersonal incompetence. Of this second group half were too autocratic and half were too passive.

Schuller gave nine signs of interpersonal incompetence.

1. They did not understand the situation, especially what they personally had done to make the matter worse. (This may identify a failure to listen and observe.)
2. They blamed others instead of accepting personal responsibility.
3. They did not delegate appropriately.
4. They were unable to develop common loyalties with people.
5. They were unable to make clear and direct statements or to behave consistently with statements they did make.
6. They needed emotional support and approval all the time from everybody.
7. They were unable to interpret the present in terms of reality.
8. They treated "differentness" as a threat.
9. They did not support others emotionally while disagreeing intellectually.

Source – Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on 1 Timothy, 2005 Edition²⁴

Instructions regarding elders

5:19,20 Accusation and criticism of the ministry is a popular spectator sport. The evidence of two or three witnesses is often overlooked. The `where

²⁴ (Constable), p. 54-55

there is smoke there is fire' slogan is a more prevalent practice, particularly in today's Church. Paul makes clear the necessity of correction of elders (when necessary). Those who are sinning (present tense) must be rebuked to set an example to others.

- 5:21 This is Paul's second explicit charge to Timothy. In dealing with an erring elder, he must not show favoritism or overlook the matter and deal with all fairly.
- 5:22: You are also responsible for the sins of those you ordain.
- 5:23 Timothy may have been taking some commandments too far with regard to not drinking wine, which is perhaps a hard interpretation of the abstaining from wine such as in Numbers 6:3,4. This may indicate a bit of Timothy's nature.
- 5:24,25 Paul's point is that one should get to know pastoral candidates before laying hands on them. This is to know their character and how they will handle specific situations. This helps prevent future unwanted surprises

Chapter 6

1. How can we apply verses 1 and 2 regarding masters and slaves to our lives today?

This chapter begins with reference to bondservants (slaves) who are under the yoke of the circumstance they live in. The treatment they receive from their masters is likely less than ideal, and Paul is aware of the temptation to despise or disrespect one's master. In modern times, we may be tempted to feel this way about our employers.

If we despise our employers, or those who have authority over us, it will show despite our best efforts to hide it. Paul's not concerned whether the treatment of a bondservant is fair or not, but addresses the fact that the name of God and the sound teaching from God does not get blasphemed. He emphasizes that this especially applies to those who have believing masters. They should realize they are serving Christ. (Eph 6:5-8, and Col 3:22-25)

Timothy is to teach these things.

Paul in verses 3 to 5 turns his attention to those who teach otherwise, specifically how servants are to respect and regard their masters (but does not necessarily limit the subject to this). Those who instruct others differently are those who are of a contentious sort in the Church. Unfortunately, those who are contentious are still around today.

We have probably heard this: 'I love a scriptural debate'. This should set off warning signals of anyone who truly follows Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not come to be debated over.

2. Verse 4: 'knowing nothing'. How is it a believer cannot know anything?

To know nothing, is knowing nothing worthwhile that leads to correction and enriching the experience of Jesus Christ in one's life and in the life of others. It is not knowing what is edifying. Sound doctrine brings about correction, amplifying our experience in Christ.

3. How can one suppose gain is godliness (verse 5)? How would you know if verse 4 is about you or not? Why is godliness with contentment great gain (verse 6)?

Since there is nothing wrong with godliness, it must be the false perception of godliness that some come to believe is a means of gain. This false perception gives birth to the contentious types who take assertive positions on scriptures to promote their own ideas and themselves amongst the brethren. In an environment that is populated by even one of the contentious type, the entire scene is one that Paul describes as strife. To these, gain is found in a form of godliness that is self-centered, which is a 'gain' to them. Those who are argumentative and are angered in theological discussions are actually in opposition to the gospel according to these scriptures.

"Conceit leads to a love for controversy. Those who think well of their opinions like to argue them with others. Where a spirit of controversy seizes a family, office, or institution, all sense of community and unity disappears."²⁵

Another class of false perception of godliness is the 'self help' religion. The self-help ministries preach good works in the name of God claiming to make man and this world better. This can be described as humanism, which is a doctrine (or way of life) centered on the human interests or values. This all sounds good, but it is a selfish self-preserving way of life. Those who are a part of self-help ministries preach a kind of humanism under the guise of Christianity.

Yet another possibility is offered by George W. Knight III in his commentary on the pastoral epistles:

"The indictment of the false teachers is thus multifaceted and comprehensive. It begins with their heterodoxy (v. 3), which is correlated with their conceit and lack of real understanding (v. 4a)

²⁵ (Lea and Griffin), p. 170.

and their sick interest in mere controversy (v. 4b), turns to the maliciousness of life that flows from these characteristics (v. 4c), roots all this in spiritual blindness (v. 5a), and ends with their materialistic motivation (v. 5b). It is given to warn the church against such people."²⁶

As you grow in Christ (gaining an eternal perspective), detachment from the world's standards of success and of material belongings becomes greater. A healthier relationship to worldly goods and worldly success begins to transpire. This leads to godliness with contentment – a feeling of completeness, but it is found in Christ, not in what the world offers.

4. Refer to verses 6 to 10. Is wealth a problem?

These verses describe those who do not have or have not found godliness with contentment. The lack of contentment, or fulfillment in Christ, can cause one to find self-actualization in other areas of life. For the Christian, this is a destructive misdirection that gives way to temptation. The temptation is to not so much as 'sin', but to relate one's self worth in terms of how one is judged by worldly standards. This not only includes money, but prestige, popularity, etc. and whatever appeals to the sense of vanity. This leads to a life of misery (verse 9).

5. What does it really mean to `... lay hold of eternal life(verse 12 and verse 19)'?

Verse 12 implies that Paul sees Timothy as one who is in conflict with the world and the spiritual wickedness that rules it. He is told to fight, and the fight may very well be described as a fight to lay hold—with determination—what God has for the believer, which is eternal life and the reward that accompanies it. This verse pictures the tenaciousness needed of Timothy (and all believers) in his faith and obedience to the Lord.

Verses 17 to 19 can be read together. Here, laying hold of eternal life is broadened to all believers. For them to lay hold of eternal life, the fight requires building a proper foundation that can withstand evil in the times to come.

". . . growth is not automatic; it is conditioned upon our responses. Only by the exercise of spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, obedience, faith, study of the scriptures, and proper responses to trials, does our intimacy with Christ increase. Only by continuing in doing good does that spiritual life imparted at regeneration grow to maturity and earn a reward."²⁷

²⁶ (Knight), p.252-253.

²⁷ (Dillow), p. 136.

II Timothy

Chapter 1

1. In verse 4, what tears is Paul mindful of? What would fill Paul with joy?

Paul was imprisoned at the time of writing this epistle. He greatly desired to see Timothy and was compelled to do so by Timothy's tears, knowing that Timothy longed to be with his brother and mentor. A reunion would bring joy to Paul as he knows Timothy and the faith that is in him.

This verse reveals the tender heart that both of these men had.

2. Why would Timothy be ashamed of the Gospel (verse 8)? Why would he be ashamed of Paul?

In verses 6 and 7 Paul encourages Timothy and reminds him that the gift he has is one that can stand up to intimidation, and that he should not be timid under any circumstances. Timidity can be the root of embarrassment, as it does not call upon the divine power that enables Timothy to minister. Timothy would be ashamed if he realized that he did not exercise the divine enablement that has been made available to him.

Perhaps Paul does not want Timothy to misinterpret Paul's imprisonment as something that has occurred because of some failure on Paul's part, or even the Lord's. Paul reminds him in verse 8 that it was Christ who has put him there.

3. What is Paul encouraging Timothy to be and how is he doing it?

Paul encourages Timothy to be faithful to him. Paul cites examples of the many that turned away from him, namely Phygellus and Hermogenes. Paul is facing a capital charge, and therefore it was dangerous to be associated with him. As a means of self preservation, they distanced themselves from him and deserted him altogether.

This does not mean they abandoned the gospel, but self-preservation amidst persecution is a failure in the eyes of God.²⁸ The call for Christians is to not be intimidated by this world, but to find strength in the Lord.

Paul cites the faithful example of Onesiphorus, who sought out Paul zealously and was not ashamed about being associated with Paul (verse 16, 17).

²⁸ See I Thessalonians Bible Study, Chapter 3, Question 2.

Chapter 2

Note Paul's opening words to Timothy in this chapter, that he must be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ. None of Paul's charges to Timothy can be carried out by Timothy's own human strength. Timothy, as all of us, must trust the sufficiency of Christ, not our own strength, and not the strength of others. These chapters should be read with this fact in mind.

1. What are the things that Timothy heard of Paul? That is, what has Paul done to illustrate to Timothy the kind of preacher he was?

In verse 2, we see that Timothy heard of Paul's ministry among many witnesses. The things the witnesses said are summed up in the following verses. The first is that Paul endured hardship, and to endure is the picture of a soldier who loses focus because of lesser goals and activities. These lesser goals and activities are fine so long as they do not distract Timothy from his calling. A soldier seeks to please his master.

The second is the picture of an athlete. An athlete is disciplined. Discipline of the body is required to become an athlete. Paul reminds Timothy that an athlete must compete according to the rules. The rules God places on a minister is proper motives, purity, and acts according to God's approval.

The third picture is that of a farmer. There is toil in farming so the farmer may reap the crops of the field. The minister in Christ must plant and nourish the seed so that he reaps the fruit of the Gospel in those he ministers.

Perhaps these illustrations reflect the testimonies of Paul's ministry and the kind of minister he was. Paul wants Timothy to teach this kind of ministry to other faithful men.

2. We will discuss verses 14-26. Prepare by finding the theme of this passage. Think about: What does verse 20 mean? Contrast verse 21 and 26.

Believers must make the choice between two masters. There are those who serve God and (because of their dedication) honor God and are useful for the work. These are those who are the gold and silver (verse 20).

There are those, however, who have either a misguided commitment to God or do not have the commitment that honors God, yet seek to be instruments of God's service. Their service comes in the form of false teachings, and they have agendas that seek to forward their ideals, (all in the name of God's service). This latter group serves a different master.

Satan has servants in the Church of God. These are unwittingly being used by Satan to forward his agenda in the Assemblies of God; to cause divisions and mistrust. To

escape the snare of the devil is not easy, and requires an external hand of God that may grant them repentance.

We see the difference between the camp of believers in verse 21 and verse 26. The first group (21) are vessels of honor serving God, and the second group bring dishonor, unwittingly serving the enemy.

Chapter 3

1. In verses 1-4, does Paul have in view those who were converted but had gone astray?

This is a possibility; for in verse 5 he describes them as having a form of godliness (they are religious). Inwardly, however, they have a self-loving heart, which appears to be the source of their behaviors described in verses 1 to 4. His words appear not to be limited to the Church of God as he uses the general term 'men', suggesting the society at large develops a self-serving attitude that is disguised (as described in verse 5).

2. How does one have a form of godliness, but deny its power? Do we understand this power?

True spiritual power is the understanding of God's Word that subsequently produces change. It takes power to change, to break down strongholds and overcome the wickedness in high places. Christ, Himself, points out in the parable of the sower that the seed that fell on fertile ground are those who receive the word, understand it, and produce fruit. Our fruits show in our attitudes and manner of conduct—as the product of change comes about by true spiritual power. This is godliness that acknowledges (by its results) the power of God's Word. A form of godliness that is void of understanding does not have the power, or denies the power of God's Word, for the word of God can have its spiritual power best described this way:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. – Heb. 4:12

We only understand this power if it has provoked us to change and we have produced fruits to show for it. The closer we move to godliness, the more experience we have with this power, and the more we can tap into it to further advance ourselves and others. In verse 10, Paul clearly indicates the results of this power in himself.

3. Verse 7. What does this verse mean? That is, what can one keep learning and not learn the truth? Are converted Christians in view here?

Perhaps this can best be described as misdirected learning. There is no doubt that the Word of God can be used by false teachers for the purpose of enticing people to put others, (and particularly vulnerable people, or vulnerable women in this case), under their control. Paul does not mean that women in general are childish or always easily manipulated, but has a particular situation in mind at Ephesus. Misdirected learning can go on almost indefinitely for the truth appears close, but is remains elusive. Those who are misdirected in their learning always operate from a deficit (lack security and significance) and their teachers use this to their advantage.

Chapter 4

1. What does it mean “in season” and “out of season” in regards to preaching the word in verse 2. What does longsuffering have to do with preaching?

“In season” and “out of season” is another way of saying when conditions are convenient and favorable, and inconvenient and unfavorable. This is an emphatic way Paul’s furthers his instruction to Timothy in verse 1. It takes diligence and alertness to share the gospel in the convenient and inconvenient times. We are apt to make excuses. Instead we should be making opportunities.

The word “*preach*” means to proclaim like a herald. This is a commission to be a messenger with a proclamation (Matt 10:7, 27). It is not a commission to negotiate. In doing so, Paul breaks it down with several imperatives:

Reprove: to convict, refute, suggesting shame of the person convicted by exposing wrong thinking and behavior. This is translated also as convince, and it often takes exposure (not meaning public) and inward shame to convince someone of wrong doing.

Rebuke: sharper than reprove it seems, to censure sharply (harsh criticism).

Exhort with longsuffering: pushback is inevitable; there is not always immediate results or acceptance. Where there is conviction, there should also be a showing of a remedy and consolation, and that should be made available continually. Preachers are not to add to the brethren’s burdens. However, elders are not to encourage or enable behavior that should be rebuked.

Notice it is with “all” refers to teaching (doctrine) as well. He is not to focus on few subjects that are favorites or just the ones that arouse curiosity.

All this being said, the preacher must not deviate or compromise on his message to appease or entreat those who resist.

2. In verses 3 and 4 Paul tells Timothy that there will be a time they will not endure sound doctrine, and turn aside to fables. Who are “they” and why would they do this?

It appears that “they” (from the context given) are believers, or at least Timothy’s hearers. The time would come for Timothy that they will no longer endure sound doctrine, and it repeatedly comes to the Church now. Therefore, “they” is “us”. Any reader of this study in the Church of God is in potential view here. A sobering thought.

The word *endure* is important. It means to hold oneself up against, put up with, forbear or suffer. The Greek word occurs in at least 16 other cases in the New Testament. It is often translated as *suffer*. In one case it is in reference to persecution and tribulation (1 Thess. 1:4). In Hebrews 13:22 it is written “... suffer the word of exhortation.”

This word *endure* (used in respect to sound doctrine) suggests its teaching requires a significant effort to hear, incorporate or measure up to. We are to face sound doctrine, even as it exposes the discomforting truth about ourselves. Sound doctrine tears down before it builds up, it won’t build upon what is wrong. It calls for submission and obedience.

“In other words, they have made themselves the measure of who should teach them and what teaching is acceptable.”²⁹

Men don’t want to be honest. They want the right to live the way they want and do their own thing. They want to be secure in themselves, and will appreciate teachers who “tickle their ears” and assure them.

Why would they no longer endure sound doctrine and turn aside to fables? First of all, Paul is not saying that they no longer decide to “believe” in God, but wish to have a substitute god. The Israelites created the golden calf of a god more familiar to them, believing it was the same God that delivered them. Many remain within the Church culture, but listen to a more acceptable message. It is our desire to look for re-affirmation that says “I am okay, I am acceptable this way”, or “I have come this far, that should amount to something.”

We are inclined to want to hear novelties such as fascination about the end times. Many in the Church have been persuaded of Church eras and Church Government theology. Some are fascinated by all things Jewish.

What is healthy doesn’t often go down easy. All of us have different buttons to push, for some it is tithing, others elements that relate to the Sabbath, marriage, or just

²⁹ (Knight), Page 455.

pride. For whatever reason, the human carnal mind resists God. In the end, God is looking for perfection, and it will be on His terms.

3. Verse 5. What afflictions does Paul have in mind that Timothy must endure?

Timothy's adversaries were that of the religious crowd, within and without the Church. He is to preach unapologetically. The tense of Paul's words are not to cast Timothy in a heroic mold.

The religious crowd will gainsay and attempt to discredit Timothy. They will attempt to make him an outcast, and there will be intimidation. In doing so he needed to be sober in all things. There is the potential of being blindsided.

4. What regrets can we detect from Paul?

Verses 7 and 8 sum up Paul's thoughts on looking back. He may have known times of unpopularity and times of discomfort, but he remained faithful at the end of the day, and that is what counted. Therefore, what regrets could he have?

The lesson for us, perhaps, is to not evaluate our successes and failures based on the results of our witness. Have we remained faithful?

Titus

Titus was another protégé of Paul but we are not as familiar with him as we are with Timothy. He was a Greek Gentile (Gal 2:3). There is no mention of him in Acts, but he was with Paul and Barnabas on their mission to Jerusalem (Gal 2:1; Acts 11:27-30). Titus was also Paul's representative to the Corinthian Church as recorded in 2 Corinthians.

The theme of this epistle is the motivation to do good works as well as the qualifications and conduct of leaders in the Church.

Chapters 1 and 2

1. What does it mean that a bishop must not be self-willed?

A bishop must not be arrogant or overbearing, not insisting on having his own way. He must know it is God's household, not his own he is looking after.

2. What are verses 14-16 about? What is Paul referring to in regards to purity in verse 15?

The Jewish fables Paul refers to fascinated false teachers. False teachers were likely believers at some point. False teachers are also fascinated by both men and their teachings. Cults of personality, even in the Church, can attract and fascinate many. Believers who follow them and their commandments will quickly turn from the truth.

The pure folk in the Way are not consumed whatsoever in ascetic beliefs, such as certain dietary restrictions that are conjured up and imposed on others. They are not offended by foods offered to idols because they know that these idols aren't real anyway. Today, how foods are cooked, what kind of farm they come from, etc. are not of any consequence as far as salvation is concerned. One may choose to eliminate or cook foods differently for health reasons, but we cannot claim that these practices improve standing in Christ, nor can these beliefs be imposed on others.

The defiled and unbelieving may be one or two groups of people. If we keep our focus on the Church, those who are defiled believe and teach the commandments of men that make claim that righteousness before God comes by such observances. This is all done under the guise of Christianity. Believers must beware of not falling for such teaching, for Paul calls them unbelievers. A believer looks only to Christ for salvation and nowhere else, for to look anywhere else is disbelief.³⁰

³⁰ See the Colossian Bible Study for more on Ascetic beliefs

This disbelief is no longer looking to the power of Jesus Christ to change. This is the power that invokes real, lasting change to good works that pleases God. Those who practice such things claim they know God, have on the surface a kind of righteousness, but are not changing (and proceed to practice what they do, which is rejected by God).

3. In reference to chapter 2, what is doctrine? What is sound doctrine?

'Sound' means free from any mixture of error. Any mixture of error must be amended by correct teaching and rebuke if necessary.

Notice what doctrine is. It is not set up as a statement of beliefs, but a statement of how to walk in the Way. Verse 10 states that it is the doctrine of God, not of men, nor of the apostles, but that it originates from God.

In verse 11, Paul says the word 'for' which introduces his full theological reason for the conduct he has just laid out. The reasoning is this: the proper response to God's grace is walking in these teachings, which lead the believer in the path of salvation, and away from worldly behaviors.

The hope of redemption in the Lord's return should spur the believer to live in godliness. It is a motivator the believer has and something that should keep him ready.

Paul tells him to teach these things with all authority and reject opposition.

Chapter 3

1. What are verses 1 to 7 about? How do verses 1 and 2 connect to verses 3 to 7?

Verses 1 and 2 present the behavioral expectations of believers, particularly in regards to speaking evil of no man, and kindness to all men. Notice that it is of no man that elders may speak evil of, and that they are to show kindness and meekness to all men. This may be tough to contemplate, but so also is it to contemplate what Jesus Christ did for us. Paul reminds us in subsequent verses. He feels it necessary for this reminder, for we also had ungodly minds that were no better than those we may be tempted to condemn.

2. Why would a believer get caught up in the things listed in verse 9?

Stepping back a little, the impression we have of Paul is that he is someone who contended for was sound doctrine. Refer back to 1 Timothy 1:3-7, 6:4 and 2 Timothy 2:23. These verses in 1 and 2 Timothy give us a good summary of what he contended for in the way of sound teaching. However, this sound doctrine may not be

as captivating to some. What we have seen in recent history are the more captivating issues to the carnal thinking believer. These include the things Paul refers to in verse 9, and they are irrelevant questions, issues of heritage and strivings about the law. A list of modern examples include:

- Church Eras
- Church Government
- Church Generations
- Church History
- Works of the Law – when and exactly how to observe Passover and Pentecost etc.

All these things have proven contentious, which tells us they are not teachings that come from God, but from men. All these things detract us from good works. Note in verse 8 that we should be careful to maintain good works—this implies it is possible to be a converted Christian and then be detracted from good works, sound doctrine, a genuine faith and then from a pure heart. Sufficient distraction leads to shipwreck (for the believer) if he falls under the spell of the kinds of things listed in verse 9.

Divisive men (heretics): watch out for divisive sermons that get into the us/them syndrome: ‘They are Laodicean and we are Philadelphia.’ Pushing organization or person ahead of Christ will inevitably lead to division.

The Greek word translated heretic means to take for oneself, or to choose for oneself. Many take what they like and make a righteous statement of it for and about themselves.

Jesus Christ did not come to be argued over. He came to reach out and build up his Church. We are to have the same mindset of reaching out (Titus 1:10, 14).

Philemon

1. Who is Philemon and who is Onesimus?

Philemon was likely a relatively wealthy man of Colossae who owned slaves, which was common for the rich in his day. He evidently came to believe in Christ because of Paul's evangelistic efforts.

Onesimus was one of Philemon's slaves. Evidently, for reasons unknown, he ran away from his master and made his way to Rome. As it was, he came into contact with Paul and became a Christian.

It was a serious matter for a slave to wrong his master as Onesimus did by running away. Although Paul desired to keep Onesimus he felt a greater responsibility to return him to his master for Onesimus to make things right. Paul intended this letter would secure the slave's forgiveness and acceptance.

2. What is the letter to Philemon all about and what lessons can be learned from the letter from Paul to Philemon? What does Paul appeal to, or, what is the basis of Paul's appeal?

In areas where we are wronged by another, and God has covered it, so shall we also cover the wrong for those brothers and sinners. It is not for us to further require that retribution be made for our injuries. Here Philemon has a legal right to Onesimus, but is asked to see things from a Godly perspective.

We must be sure to also cover what God has covered. Who are we to bring them up again?

Paul based the appeal on love, not on the authority he may have had. Paul did not state an early claim in the letter as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

One of the messages we find in Paul's appeal is this: remember who you are and where you came from. A person in a position of authority, such as Philemon, ought to remember the debt that was paid by Jesus Christ on his behalf that freed him from slavery to sin. Paul reminds him that he was instrumental in this as well.

Paul tells Philemon that, in effect, how you receive Onesimus is how you are receiving me. Paul in verse 12 tells him that Onesimus is very dear to his heart, so in effect he is sending a part of his own heart to Philemon in Onesimus. Don't trample on my heart!

Perhaps Christ intercession for us is similar. We are hidden in Christ, and that is where life is. The Father recognizes this and does not hold the transgression against the believer.

"This is the one-time self-righteous Pharisee, the heir of Jewish exclusiveness, and he is speaking of a Gentile, and a Gentile slave at that, from the very dregs of Roman society—yet he can refer to him as a *son*. So his statement (Col. iii. 11) that 'there is neither Greek nor Jew . . . bond or free' [Gal. 3:28] is no empty formula but reflects the attitude of heart to which he himself had been brought by God."³¹

³¹ (Carson), p. 108

Hebrews

As we study this book, it may be helpful to put yourself in the position of Jew who lived in apostolic times. The author recognized the situation and dilemma these converts from Judaism to Christianity were facing.

These converts faced the tension of deviating from years of ancestral indoctrination of their Jewish faith, steeped in ritualism and formalism. They also found themselves estranged from the national and religious identity they had of being a Jew, which was in the eyes of many, an act of treason. They found themselves identifying more with other believing Gentiles and trying to overcome generations of bitter hatred between the two. The situation may have been unbearable to Jewish converts, having alienated unbelieving family members and friends.

In order to bolster their faith, the writer had to demonstrate one essential truth: that God was fulfilling the old covenant and prophecy by giving all men a new and vastly superior covenant. He also needed to give exhortation and warning. Any study of this epistle should see all these develop. All Christians today can benefit greatly from this epistle even though certain references seem outdated.

Chapter 1

1. **What are the differences between how God spoke to mankind in the past and is speaking to us now? Why is the way He speaks to mankind today better than He has in the past?**

There are significant differences between how God speaks to man in the past and is speaking to us in these last days. They are significant to the believer and should be appreciated. Perhaps the table below can help contrast the differences.

In Times Past	These Last Days
Mankind received partial revelation	Mankind can receive full revelation of God
God spoke to mankind and gave revelation by men (namely the prophets)	We now receive revelation of God by His Son
Mankind received revelation different times and different ways	Now revelation is given by One source continually

The way in which God speaks to man is clearly superior to times past. There is more however.

The writer demonstrates the reality of the One who speaks and reveals God to us in verse 2 and 3. He is the Son Of God, He is the exact expression of His (the Father's) nature, and He is the One who upholds all things by the word of His power. One could not be more qualified than Jesus Christ to reveal God to the believer, for He also purged our sins and now sits at the right hand of God.

2. Why are angels brought into the discussion?

Today, we may not see angels as the Jews did so we may not see the reason to compare them to the exalted Christ, or to have reason to argue His superiority over them as intermediary. Angels were very significant to the Jews, however. Thousands of them assisted God in giving the Law at Mount Sinai (Deut. 33:2). In actual fact, Angels are exalted and magnificent beings. They acted as intermediaries between men and God. It is the writer's purpose to demonstrate Christ's superiority as mediator, and as the only mediator (so there is no confusion), for angels still exist and function, but should not be exalted. They should be kept in the right framework of our minds as ministering spirits to serve those who are being saved (verse 14).

Already, we see the author demonstrating the superior new covenant they have over the old.

Chapter 2

1. What are verses 9 to 14 about? Why does he write them?

These verses express the great unity and kinship Jesus Christ has with the believer. Verse 11 states explicitly that believers are one with He who sanctified them, and He is not ashamed to call us brethren. The writer uses scripture to support his claim.

Those who identify with their leaders and feel that their leaders identify with them are the most likely to continue to follow their leadership—and, this does not escape the writer's attention in this passage.

2. Verse 10. How is it that the future glory and perfection come through sufferings?

Jesus Christ through sufferings (taking on the sins of mankind), resisted all temptation carrying out His Father's will, was awarded the high honored position at the right hand of God as High Priest. Jesus Christ is not the only One Whom God wishes to glorify, for if we identify with Jesus Christ in his sufferings, we too shall be exalted.

Also read Phil. 3:8-10. We must be willing participants as we identify with the whole of His sacrifice. As we suffer, we are putting to death earthly ties.

3. Verse 15. How is it that those who fear death are under bondage?

Christ freed and liberated believers by taking their sins, guilt and judgment upon Himself, and dying for them. He did this by coming in the flesh, and taking on mankind's limitations in the flesh, as He "... *condemned sin in the flesh* ..." (Rom. 8:3). By identifying with Jesus Christ through baptism (burial) believers have already died, so there should be no more fear of it. The believer can come to terms with his new life in Jesus Christ where he is protected and secure. As a natural consequence, Satan's former power of influence over him is gone.

Satan uses the fear of death to control and enslave mankind. The fear of death goes beyond the obvious fear of the cessation of physical life. The enslavement, or bondage the writer refers to, is the fear of death which causes one to behave in a way that pleases the devil. This would include all self preserving and selfish behavior, whether it is conscious or unconscious. The world is full of intimidation and falsehood that makes mankind feel threatened and insecure. In response, human carnal instincts are invoked and begin to act at the expense of others.

The believer is freed from this bondage and has the choice of serving Christ instead of the devil and his unsuitable carnal wishes. It takes time for the believer to learn his new choice. The realization of the choice and freedom to serve Christ must become a conscious matter to the believer and in doing so he will recognize the former power the devil once had. If the believer fails to recognize his new found liberty in Christ, he may very well hand the power back over to the devil. The devil cannot take it; it is our failure to trust in Jesus Christ that hands power to the devil.

4. Jesus Christ is presented as our High Priest in verse 17, and then in verse 18 the writer makes a connection with Jesus suffering temptation. What principle temptation is he talking about? What is a priest's (minister's) chief function therefore?

The principle temptation is to depart from God's Will. Jesus was tempted to do so, but did not succumb to the temptation. This is likely the temptation the writer has in view because priesthood is the subject. Note that these were "... in things pertaining to God..." The minister must not give in to apostasy. The High Priest helps us through the pitfalls that can cause us to stray.

Chapter 3

- 1. What is the true nature of belief and unbelief? In your answer, consider what is said in verse 10 and in verse 14. Also consider 1 Corinthians 10, question 2.**

A believer recognizes and acts upon knowing that Christ has liberated the begotten child of God from serving sin and from bondage through the fear of death.

A believer makes it his living reality and responds with this reality that Christ has defeated all enemies and has overcome the world.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” - John 16:33

Notice that our peace is connected with Christ overcoming the world. Our peace comes by knowing that Christ has defeated our enemies. Although our enemies will try to intimidate us, we need not be intimidated, but only if we act and recognize that we are liberated from our former captors. If we don't believe in Christ, our captors will control us and take our peace from us. Refer back to Chapter 3, Question 2.

The Israelites who died in the wilderness did not believe that the Lord had defeated and would defeat their enemies. They did not have confidence in the Lord. Therefore, consider what is written in verse 14, that our *confidence* must be steadfast to the end.

The believer, today, may have full confidence in the way of intellectual ascent to the truth, and that Christ will return, but does not have confidence when trials and difficulties come and that Christ will pull him through it. It is also not just a matter of prayer and knowledge; it is a matter of faith. One can pray about a difficulty, but respond to that difficulty in an ungodly manner by reverting back to the old ways of dealing with problems. The unbeliever's security is in the old ways, not in the ways of the Lord (verse 10). In 1 Corinthians 10 we studied how Israel, already liberated from the Egyptians, decided to relieve their anxieties by building the golden calf. Although they still 'believed' in the God that liberated them, they reverted to Egyptian ways of worship that were familiar to them. Oftentimes the same behavior manifests itself today with God's people. God is put aside, or morphed into a god that suits a believer's past understanding, when unfavorable circumstances arise.

2. What is the deceitfulness of sin? How is a heart hardened?

A hardened heart is not necessarily an angry heart, but a heart no longer sensitive to the consequences of sin. Continued practice of sin leads one to believe that sin is inconsequential in life, or one's relationship to God. This is the deceitfulness of sin that leads to a hardened state. When this warning is given, a helpful treatment is prescribed in verse 13, and that is to exhort each other in a daily way. Mutual exhortation is what the doctor ordered. Encouragement is needed, and those who have received encouragement know its true value, and there is no better time than the present.

"The grand and terrible lesson of Israel's history is that *it is possible to begin well and end poorly*. In fact, this tragic human tendency dominates much human spiritual experience."³²

Chapter 4

1. What is the nature of 'His rest' in verse 1? How would one seem to come short of it?

Works of faith are wrought with anxious moments, lack of appreciation and all kinds of discouragement. Believers still fight against their carnal selves in a hostile world. This internal and external environment does not exist in the Kingdom of God. Once freed from these unfavorable environmental conditions, it is only then the believer can experience true rest. We will be completely free from anything that offends, or harms, or bring tears to our eyes (loneliness, rejection, failures etc.).

Psalm 23 illustrates the rest of God's people. A life of faith brings, for the believer, a precursor to the rest that has been promised. Where faith in God exists, it frees the believer from his enemy's control that seeks to take it away.

We must take to heart this promise of rest. The promise is the Father's will for His people and all of creation.

"... Let us fear..." – is this the fear of God, or the fear of neglecting our conscience? We hear the gospel, but is it mixed with faith or not? We fear perhaps that we have a wayward faith that arouses His wrath (verse 3). (See 12:15). Falling short in the grace of God suggests not growing in that grace. We must be careful to pick up even on the gradual things that cause us to stumble. These gradual things are caught by carefulness and this is most likely the fear the author alludes to.

2. Verse 10. What works is the writer referring to?

These are likely works of faith. Once we are in the kingdom, a life of faith will have ended, for what we hoped for has been realized and we now experience. The works of faith are not being compared to the creative work of God, but it is the cessation of work that is being illustrated. That is, it is not the work that is being discussed, but the cessation of work, whatever kind it is.

The promise of rulership and priesthood is for those who enter the kingdom. The work of the forever expanding kingdom will be given to His Children, so it is not a complete cessation from work itself. This work is not exhausting; for a spirit being does not get exhausted.

³² (Hughes), 1:98

3. Verse 11. What is the diligence of the disciple?

The diligence is to continue in the examples set before us by men and women of God in faithful works. Diligence implies that we be watchful not to digress by temptation or other means of trying God's patience.

Diligence means ensuring that the will of God is always in view. The will of God is that we grow in grace and knowledge. Therefore, we must ensure that our attendance in Church and our studies are given a high standing (priority) in our life. We must ensure life circumstances do not dictate or intimidate our beliefs, or cause us to harden our hearts. We must continue to listen to the Shepherd and his under-shepherds.

Diligence also teaches us to use sufferings and trials to our advantage. When we come through them we should recognize what they have shown us, which should also strengthen our resolve.

4. Make a connection between verses 11-13 with verses 14 to 16.

The words given from verses 14 to 16 are not an afterthought. We are warned not to fall under the same example of unbelief, but immediately we are exhorted to use the available assistance all believers have in Jesus Christ our High Priest, so that we do not fail. The Word of God is not given as a sword to condemn, but to convict. By conviction we see ourselves as we truly are, and this is the best help we can receive!

His work and the piercing of His word are effective when we walk a life of faith. For as the Psalmist wrote, it is "IF" we hear His voice (verse 7), and we would be hearing it for a reason.

Remember, Jesus Christ did not come to condemn, but save. This purpose He continues to have as He extends every opportunity to believers who have problems with human weaknesses, and so we all do.

Psalm 95 is quoted twice in chapter 3 and three times in chapter 4. Let's take a look at this Psalm also. Consider the transition in verse 7 of this Psalm.

Verse 7 tells us we are the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand. The sudden transition is to the voice of the Shepherd. Recall Jesus words:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father's hand. – John 10:27-29

Notice that the Shepherd sees His sheep in His hand.

The early verses in Psalm 95 give praise and thanksgiving and a call to worship the Lord, and do not appear to be heading in the direction for a call not to harden our hearts. The transition is found when we are likened to sheep in His Pasture. Once there, it is as though the writer points to the Lord Himself, Who interjects with what He wants the least, from those who praise Him the most.

Getting our attention is the theme. It is the Shepherd in view that wants His sheep's attention.

Verse 13 advises not trying to hide anything from the One who can help you. Verse 14 introduces the High Priest who is sympathetic to our weaknesses. The call to go boldly is to not fear retribution, but the opposite. It is the throne of Grace, not the judgment seat.

Chapter 5

1. What is the order of Melchizedek? Was Aaron of this order?

Melchizedek was the king and priest of Salem. He is described as the priest of the God Most High (Genesis 14:18). The order of Melchizedek has a significant position of being a king and a priest in one. In Israel, the royalty and priestly offices were split. The priesthood in Israel came by the lineage of Levi, as did Aaron. Therefore, the high priest of Israel was not of the same order of Melchizedek.

In the Kingdom of God, priesthood and royalty are restored. In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter describes God's people as a royal priesthood. (See also Revelation 5:10.)

2. What were Christ's cries and tears about? That is, what was the nature of His supplications toward God?

Gethsemane may be part of what the writer has in view as this is the only recorded case of Christ's supplications described in this way. There is, however, the mention in verse 7 that His supplications were in regards to saving Him from death. In Gethsemane, this was not the case as we know. Therefore, we are left to believe that these supplications were prayers to the Father to save Him from failing and the fate of eternal death. Jesus Christ probably offered up prayers with tears throughout His life. If we consider the weight on His shoulders, He needed divine help to carry out this task. If He were to falter and sin, we would be without a savior, and He would have also become lost. Perish the thought!

3. What is the reason that the writer's audience has not matured? We will spend extra time on this question.

The common interpretation of the passage of scripture from verse 11 to 14 is that the writer's audience failed to gain the knowledge that would enable them to teach others.

This interpretation does not fit the entire passage of scripture from verses 5:11 to 6:3. What fits a more probable interpretation of what the writer had in view was that they had been fed sufficient knowledge that qualified them to be teachers, but because of sluggishness or a laziness of mind they failed to become responsible with it, and shied away from going to the next level. The next step was to face the fear of actually becoming responsible for what they had learned; stepping into the forefront and going through the transition from the easy task of listener, to the more difficult task of teaching. Teaching requires prior experience and usage of what has been taught. A sluggish believer sidesteps the responsibility to face the fears of change and uncomfortable experience. Over time, the dullness of hearing, the writer alludes to, is that the listener can't equate what he has been taught with experience. Without experience there is no real learning, and the ears become dull, or desensitized. The Word becomes just more information.

The word 'dull' is *nothroi* in Greek. It means sluggish, slow, lazy and forgetful.

The Bible is difficult to understand. A person must study, meditate and experience the Word of God in order to comprehend it. Therefore, we must exert energy in order to understand it. It requires pondering and concentration. It takes diligent attendance at Church. This applies also to the teachers, who must also exert tremendous energy to explain the message of the Bible. This often takes new approaches, new thought, and a willingness to also discover new knowledge.

For us all it is quick easy learning in the beginning prior and after conversion. After the quick learning of the milk of God's Word, things appear to come slower and require more diligence on toward maturity. Babies are fed by crying for more, but adults must seek out their own food and prepare it themselves.

The Word that is preached to us is not 'FYI', it is FYE (For Your Edification). Opportunity in the faith must be embraced.

Chapter 6

1. What is the connection between verses 4 to 8 and verses 1 to 3? How do we reconcile these tough words and the 'impossibility' that the writer speaks of, with many other verses in the Bible that show repentance is still available for the prodigal son types as in Luke 15?

In verses 4 and 5 we have a description of those, who, if they fall away, cannot be renewed to repentance. There are five items given to us. They are:

- Enlightened
- Tasted the heavenly gift
- Received the Holy Spirit
- Tasted the good Word of God
- Tasted the powers of the world to come

All Christians have received the Holy Spirit, and have a degree of enlightenment sufficient to accept Christ as Savior, but what about the rest? The rest of the above are not tasted upon conversion and baptism. The word 'tasted' is translated from the Greek *geusamenous*. It means to come to know and to take in. It is the experience of having consciously taken part of. The same word is used for Christ when it was said he "tasted death", which He did consciously experience. Those who have taken in, with fullness, the Christ in their lives are perhaps those who have tasted the powers of the world to come. It was Paul's prayer for the Ephesians 1:17-22 that Paul appears to allude to such things.

The writer's point in this section of verses is that those who are enlightened and experienced in Christ cannot be renewed to repentance without bringing shame to Jesus Christ. There is no room for repentance for such a transgression, and perhaps no wish to repent either. Therefore, God will not permit (verse 3) putting anyone at risk who are not committed and discerning, such as those with dull ears or as babes, to experience the fullness of Christ.

The common perception of these verses is that the writer's audience was at risk of losing their salvation. In reality, Jesus Christ is portrayed as protecting them from being at risk of losing their salvation.

The Prodigal Son is not one who has experienced the power of Christ in his life. He is one who has not fully experienced his father's love, fallen away and is on the road back to repentance which is still available to him.

2. Verse 9: Why is the writer confident of better things concerning them?

He is confident in them realizing the dreadful consequences of neglecting the truth and he believes that they are, in fact, genuine, desiring to make progress, as he speaks dearly to them.

The writer must encourage them, for they may feel trodden down after his strong words in verse 8. He encourages them with great confidence that they should have in God who has every avenue open for them to new understandings and experiences.

He begins by reminding his readers of two immutable things (verse 18) that God has done: a promise and an oath. Therefore, they should have strong consolation and be anchored in the soul by such things if they are discouraged. This means they have hope, and should not despair due to their shortcomings. God desires their experience of Christ in their lives to reach its fullest.

The writer returns to the priesthood by the order of Melchizedek where he provides them more solid food to mature with.

Chapter 7

1. Why is the priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek superior to the Levitical priesthood? Do these reasons matter to us?

There are five reasons that the priesthood according to Melchizedek is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

The first is that Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek. To the writer and his readers, the descendants, including the tribe of Levi paid tithes to him. Melchizedek received tithes because of His greatness out of Abraham's thankfulness to the Lord as a form of worship.

The second is that He had a special right to the priesthood. The law appointed that only Levites can be appointed into the priesthood. They held the position legally, and received tithes according to the law. Melchizedek, however, came after the power of an endless life (verse 16).

The third is that He was able to bless Abraham. The writer makes it clear – that the greater blesses the lesser. The readers of the epistle saw Abraham as great, but cannot argue against the fact that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, for the first book of the law makes that clear.

The fourth is that Melchizedek was not mortal, nor did he have an ancestry, or at least as far as scripture is concerned. The absence of any mention of genealogy or death of Melchizedek is significant and supersedes the reality that He did have a mortal's life. What is pictured is an eternal priest.

With an eternal immortal priest, He did not have a mortal's main shortcoming, interruption and discontinuance by death. Jesus Christ as High Priest is able to see His work through to the end and bring salvation to its full realization, which is the perfection of those He ministers and intercedes for.

We also receive greater blessings. The One who is greater can offer the greater blessings. These blessings are greater than the blessing given to Abraham. Even our tithes are magnified, for they have greater purpose in the new covenant.

2. A two part question:

a. Was the commandment annulled (verse 18)? Why or why not? Was there something wrong with the law? How do we reconcile this verse with Romans 7:12?

God will accept nothing less than perfection. He will accept nothing less than perfection to come into His presence. The writer makes clear the law made nothing perfect (verse 19), nothing, not the Levitical priesthood, or

anyone. Because the law made nothing perfect, it did not serve God's will to have perfect offspring.

The law is perfect in and of itself (Romans 7:12), as it teaches and corrects and makes for a better life. But in the end, since no one can keep it perfectly, it pronounces death on the transgressor. If that is the case, what then has God achieved? The answer is that He has not achieved His desire and will for offspring in anyone.

With the above in mind, the writer declares the commandment disannulled, or no longer the complete solution in achieving the God's ultimate purpose.

This is not an imperfection in the law. The problem is mankind's failure to adhere to its requirements.

b. What has changed about the law? Why was this change necessary? What then did the law do (think back to our studies in Galatians 3, and Romans 5).

The priesthood and the sacrifices were imperfect and mortal, and everything that a Levitical priest does is imperfect. The law did not make them perfect. This does not make man acceptable to God, for men received intercession and ministry through them. The Levitical priesthood was an integral and major part of the old covenant. Therefore, we are explained that with a change in the priesthood there requires a change of the law.

3. Was Christ appointed High Priest by the law? If not by the law, what might that mean to us? What does it mean by 'to the uttermost' (verse 25)?

Christ was made high priest by an oath (Psalm 110:4). An oath by God is infallible and cannot be undone. Since an oath is greater than the law, and an oath has brought in the new Priesthood, what we have in Christ points the need to a new covenant. What was against us (the law's sentence on sinners, the imperfection of the intercession of the Levitical Priesthood) is now superseded. What we have now is a means to perfect acceptance.

He saves us to the uttermost. This means completely and utterly, finally and for all eternity.

The concluding remarks of this chapter is for the reader to overwhelmingly conclude (without question) the superiority of the new order over the old order.

The realization of the great superiority of our High Priest is the beginning of where we begin to know what it may be to taste of the things discussed in chapter 6—the enlightenment and the power of Christ in our lives. This will happen if we embrace

and accept Christ as High Priest. With Christ as High Priest, there opens greater possibilities for the Christian, and the writer begins to expound on this new reality.

There is power in the priesthood of Christ. We can gather this as the epistle continues. The Hebrew readers were used to and still practiced the animal sacrifices according to the requirements of the old covenant, and are now exposed to their limitations and their total lack of power to save.

Chapters 8 and 9

Those entrenched in the ordinances and the service of the Levitical priesthood would have various questions that needed answering if there is an acceptance of a new priesthood, (even if that priesthood is superior). When presented with something new, we often relate it to what is familiar before we accept it.

These next few chapters can be summarized in this way. Jesus Christ is a superior Priest, and nothing can minimize this superiority. A superior Priest requires a superior covenant making the old covenant obsolete (chapter 8). The superior High Priest serves in a better sanctuary as the earthly is copy of the heavenly and true sanctuary (chapter 9). The reason for the superiority with the superior High Priest is because of a superior once-for-all sacrifice (chapter 10).

Modern believers may not appreciate the old covenant, with its sacrifices and the services of the Levitical priesthood, in light of what we now have in Jesus Christ. To Israel, however, and even the audience of this epistle, the ordinances of the old covenant were extremely important. In fact, the Lord proposed the covenant and did not take its elements lightly. The writer reminds his readers that Moses was given detailed and carefully prescribed instructions in making the tabernacle (8:5), and in it there were divine services (9:1). Therefore, we must recognize how the Jews looked at the Levitical priesthood. They were the mediators between them and God. Only the High Priest came into God's presence to make the offering for the sins of the people. Their lives depended on the service of the priesthood. When the high priest completed his work on the Day of Atonement, it was followed by celebration immediately afterwards.

The new covenant was established on better promises (8:6), which includes the promise of eternal life. This is not to say there was something wrong with the first covenant, but fault was found with Israel in their failure to keep it (8:7-8).

In summary, comparing the old and new priesthoods:

Old Covenant	New Covenant
Repeated Sacrifices	One sacrifice
The Blood of others	His Own blood

Covering sin	Putting away sin
For Israel only	For all sinners
Left the Holy of Holies	Remained seated at the throne
Came out to bless people	Will appear a second time for eternal salvation for many (9:28)

Some thoughts on the new intercession of Jesus Christ:

- His intercession is more than just cleaning the slate every time (as in the old covenant)
- His intercession should be an experience – a power to make change!
- His intercession is a way to experience God in their lives, laws written in the heart, not stone

Chapter 10

1. Consider verses 2 to 4. Then consider verse 22. Let's discuss what has changed, and what that means.

We are again exposed to the advantages of the new covenant. It is the consciousness of sins that is contrasted in these verses. In the old covenant there is a reminder year after year of sin. In the new covenant, we are forgiven of our sins by a perfect sacrifice acceptable to God and mediated by a perfected High Priest, and now even our conscience cleansed so that we may approach God with a pure heart.

Confidence is the in view here. The old covenant lacked confidence. The new covenant has the full assurance of faith.

2. Verse 19: Why should we be bold entering the Holiest? When should we enter?

The presence of God is in the Holy of Holies. It is His desire that we be in His presence for eternity and there is no better time than the present to enter. There is no other place we should want to be.

Formerly it was the high priest in Israel who alone could enter through the veil into the Holy of Holies, and he did so without confidence under certain conditions and only once a year on the Day of Atonement. The high priest was not even welcome and could only stay a short period of time.

The writer has made the case that through a superior, new and living way we have been cleansed of our sins and may enter into the presence of God by an open invitation. We are invited to dwell there in the presence of God, so in a sense we may enter anytime.

Chapters 11 and 12

1. 11:6: What will God reward a believer?

It is important to understand what we need the most when we think of God; when we think of a reward. The kinds of reward God has in mind for the believer are:

- A renewed mind
- A clear conscience
- Divine enablement - Power
- Peace of mind

2. Faith to do what? What does God want us to achieve by faith?

Faith is what compels us to go beyond what we are capable of on our own terms, and strength to endure the race set before us being convinced of greater things ahead. God wants us to look forward and not be satisfied with what is now, and we must be convinced of something greater.

Faith is not needed in the Kingdom. The only thing we take with us is love.

1. What does it mean exactly that Jesus is the Author and Finisher of faith? How is it he despised the shame (verse 2) and what does that have to do with you?

In verse 2 we are told to look to Jesus, so we are effectively to look away from the throng of witnesses of chapter 11. These faith heroes are given as a build-up to the true example of faith. Not only an example, but the pinnacle example, and is the author and finisher of it. His life of faith exceeded all others, and by succeeding as He did, He was crowned by sitting at the Right hand of God.

Despising the shame tells us He thought little or nothing of the shame he was subject to. Although He had glory in heaven, He came to suffer on earth as though a criminal, and treated shamefully by creation and all mockers (human and spiritual). Even then, He thought little or nothing of it. Why? Because of the joy that was set before Him.

Further, in His life He endured the gainsaying and opposition of many. He was repeatedly dealing with those who would discredit Him.

Verse 3 and 4 tells us how the above has to do with us. We are told to consider the life of Christ when we ourselves face shame, contradiction, and also consider the joy set before us, too.

2. Do the first 4 verses describe an active or passive life of a Christian?

Faith is not for spectators. The race that is set before us is not as spectators, but as full and willing participants. Therefore, there is no room for passiveness for the Christian as he is told to lay hold of eternal life (1 Timothy 6:19, and Hebrews 6:18)

3. Verse 11: What is the peaceable fruit of righteousness and how does it come about by chastening?

The intended outcome of God's chastening is to re-direct a mistaken mind. A mistaken mind (and the life of a person is what his/her thoughts are made of), cannot find security and true meaning in what it seeks. God's correction is to direct the Christian mind away from meaningless things (sin, or other wasteful pursuits), and towards meaningful pursuits that are beneficial to the believer, not the least of which is finding security in God.

A mind that finds security in Christ finds meaning and purpose there. The believer develops new values in life, and this leads to the 'peaceable fruit of righteousness'. The mature believer, after suffering repeated grievous correction, (exercised thereby) realizes his security in Christ, and further appreciates the path God has directed him.

4. Verses 12 and 13: What would cause hands to hang down and feeble knees? What does it mean '... lest that which is lame be turned out of the way ...'?

Those with hands that hang down (slumped shoulders) and with feeble knees are the physical picture of those who are not willing to properly endure, or face the reality behind the chastening of God, or the contradictions of those who oppose them. It can be likened to the leader's call to the soldier who is at war or in training. Face it! Deal with it! The message is to stop moaning and suffering needlessly with an anxious mind and know that Christ is in charge and security rests with Him. The 'Make it Go Away' prayer does not seem to have a place here.

Chapter 13

1. Consider the message of verses 9 to 15, and what this message means to us today.

Jesus' death outside Jerusalem fulfilled the Day of Atonement ritual in that the high priest burned the remains of the sacrificial animals outside the camp. It symbolized His rejection by the Jewish authorities.

Jerusalem is the greatest city in the world to the Jews. The writer makes it evident that they needed to sever their emotional and religious ties to Judaism, and realize Jerusalem was no longer their special city.

The world is no longer a special place to the believer, and the emotional and secular ties to this world are no longer what they were. Instead, the believer must face the cross and accept the abuse of it and go forth to meet Him who awaits us in the heavenly city that is permanent and forever.

James

The epistle of James has been considered to be one of the least theological New Testament Books. Some believe the lack of direct references to Jesus Christ questions the validity of the letter.

If we give careful attention to the words of James, we will see that the epistle is vital for the Christian, as it is intended to help him understand and experience the theology that is laid out in the Pauline epistles and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Paul's writings set forth the truth concerning the standing of the Christian in Christ. Paul wrote of salvation by faith in God and not of works, and being a new creature in Christ being held in Him by the grace of God.

James writes of the same theology from a point of view designed to encourage the believer to know the full realization, (understanding and experiential awareness) of his standing in Christ. For example, we are familiar with James' lesson on faith and works, but he emphasizes that we are saved by faith *for* good works (Chapter 3). He states that we must not try to separate works and faith, *for faith is made perfect by works* (3:22). That is to say, our faith is realized and enhanced by works, and James wishes this to be fully recognized by his readers. By understanding and applying this to our way of thinking, we can enhance our lives in Christ and be of greater service to Him.

Chapter 1

James has a special message for those who struggle in trials. If we embrace his message, we can live truly effective lives that are pleasing and useful to God, bring clarity to our minds in times of confusion, and have a deeper realization of what our standing in Christ really has to offer, which is a life of fullness.

"My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials ..." 1:2

James begins his message following a brief greeting with this difficult exhortation. When under a trial, and in a particularly difficult one, the thought of finding a sense of joy is remote. In an attempt to reconcile this scripture with our experiences there is a common belief that once a trial has passed and is successfully overcome, it is then we may show our gratitude for God's hand of help through it, and for what it may have achieved. Although this retrospective understanding is important, this is not what James has in mind. He calls for his readers to count it all joy when we *fall* into various trials.

For a trial to be a trial at all it must be grievous at some level. For without a level of mental or emotional discomfort or even physical distress can such an experience be a trial at all? If the trial is grievous, where then do we find "*all joy*" during the experience?

To develop an appreciation for these words of James, let us first develop a background for why he would make such a request of the brethren, explore the context closely, and touch on a few elements of the human condition for help in understanding.

We must make ourselves open to the possibility that the trials James speaks of may not be all inclusive. The trials are those that try our faith (verse 3). In the human experience there are grievous times that none can escape, and Christians are not immune. Tragedy and loss may not always test our faith. Christians are not promised immunity from what is common to man. James does not say “all trials”; he rather states “various trials.” In James’ view, these various trials are trials of faith.

The nature of these trials is the temptation to compromise, or deviate from the will of God. This would include the temptation to sin, to compromise one’s faith in exchange for comfort, to resist the work of the Holy Spirit and to reconsider the path that one has taken and deal with life in a way fashioned by the carnal mind.

One temptation is to harden our hearts as a means of protection. This sin is deceitful as a hardened heart feels so justified. Becoming angry with people or organizations that have let us down or do not seem to respond as they should does not excuse wrong behavior and attitudes. This should be of great concern for us in perhaps the latter days where we learn the love of many will grow cold amidst persecution, personal distress (family, work, and health issues), and church pressures (Matt. 24:12). Some begin to focus their attention on other sources to find meaningful inspiration in their lives. Although the belief in God may persist in the offended believer, the hardened heart will become fruitless before God.

In following Christ, strong earthly ties invoke their will on the believer, and when they are in conflict with the requirements of discipleship, then the believer must turn from them to follow God (Luke 14:25-33). This is not a call for a believer to disregard family relationships; however the walk that is obedient to Christ may be at times in direct opposition to a believer’s connections to life in the world. Our own preservation instinct to conduct life on our own terms is also a common culprit (Luke 17:33). However, the repeated theme throughout the Bible is that God’s will is supreme. Conflict will occur when either our will or the will of others is pressed upon us in direct opposition to God’s will. Trials test the steadfastness of a believer and expose dependencies on carnal values and ways of thinking that we erroneously and unknowingly believe makes life worthwhile.

The carnal self-will can be very strong. Our own will is often self-serving and self-preserving and is often overlooked during trials, and an underestimated factor in what brings us difficulty. The will of man is so often, in our own assessment, reasonable and worthy, but often has its roots in selfish motivation, and in seemingly innocent ways.

“... knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” 1:3

The product of our trials must be patience. When frustration overcomes patience during a trial, there is a temptation to retreat. This retreat often comes in a way that brings temporary relief from a faith that does not seem to be working and seems to have its promises failing. Although often not altogether abandoning the faith in terms of a doctrine or in church attendance, the individual seeks to get resolution from alternative strategies that do not include the consult of God and His wisdom. The believer may resolve instead to put on a set of defenses that includes a guarded approach to the faith and the word of God, and perhaps distance themselves from other brethren. When we compromise our faith to seek a resolution to problems we are relying on our own carnal instincts, which is succumbing to temptation. James reminds the believer of the reward for those who endure temptation by not deviating from the will of God:

“Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” 1:12

Many brethren become confused and bewildered when life takes a turn for the worse, often unable to identify a particular cause. We begin to wonder if God is displeased and there is something wrong with our faith. We should remember that no saint in the Bible was ever immune to trials of this nature. Even these trials are considered beneficial by James. The reader should take to heart the lesson of Psalm 44.

The Psalmist begins by acknowledging all the former experiences of God’s power and goodness to the fathers, the victories they have and will have in God’s name. They have not forgotten or forsaken the Lord: *“In God we boast all day long, and praise Your name forever.” – 44:8.*

“... BUT ...”

“... You have cast us off and put us to shame, and You do not go out with our armies” – 44:9

One should carefully study Psalm 44 and notice that there is no indication that God was displeased or handing down punishment. Even for no apparent reason at all, the believer must have times of temptation and discouragement.

“Yet for your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” – 44:22

Despite affliction, the Psalmist remains patient, and does not forsake the commandment:

“All this has come upon us; but we have not forgotten You, nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.” – 44:17

We should take special consideration in the *knowledge* that the testing of our faith produces patience. This is the “*knowing*” James writes of in verse 3. *Knowing* is the key. Knowing comes from experience and from sound teaching that focuses on the tools of overcoming, and what Christian overcoming achieves. We need to *know* the purpose of trials as James would have us understand.

“But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” 1:4

Patience has a perfect work that unravels misconceptions and wrong assumptions about the life God wants us to have and how abundant life truly is. The perfect work of patience seeks to disconnect us with what we erroneously seek and believe provides us with security and significance.

Both security and significance are required by human beings to live life as whole and real persons. When we speak of significance we are talking about purpose, relevance, and adequacy. When we speak of security, we are talking about unconditional and consistently expressed love; a permanent acceptance.

These needs are not too difficult to understand when we consider the needs of children. The child that is hurt or upset will run to a parent for safety. Children also seek parental approval. As children grow older, they will seek security and significance to find purpose in life by other means.

The need to feel wanted and desired, significant and purposeful is the psychological target of much of the feel good marketers and is often used for exploitation. The feel-good, or health and wealth marketing industries, conducted in the name of Christ or the name of the Dream, has in the basis of their promotional plans a promise for fulfillment of mankind’s need to find acceptance and adequacy. These strategies are never truly successful. The chronic need to fill the bottomless pit causes psychological problems when barriers are encountered.

Security and Significance in Christ

Adam and Eve were both significant and secure from the time they were created. The fulfillment of these needs was likely not given a second thought as they had a relationship with God that was unhindered. When sin entered, the relationship was broken and they hid themselves from God. They feared rejection, rationalized their behavior by blame of another, and were sent out from the garden. Adam had dominion over the world, now he must toil in it. He now had threatened security and significance which he must labor to fulfill.

Mankind has since sought out various means and strategies in finding purpose, meaning and sustenance. Although various strategies, too numerous to mention, have

been invoked, refined, having followings generation after generation, all ultimately fail to truly satisfy these needs in the capacity experienced by Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve, before they transgressed the Lord's commandment, were in need of nothing.

The Christian also has experienced and believed much of these same strategies to fulfill these needs, but must come to terms that even the most noble of alternative strategies have limited value when compared to God's means and wishes to fulfill them. Letting go of earthly securities often comes through trials of faith in the way James asks us to understand by experience: *that true, everlasting significance and security only comes by Jesus Christ.*

This defines the perfect work of patience. It breaks down the barriers we unknowingly, and are not ready to admit, we hold onto to make us feel worthwhile, adequate and accepted. Holding on to other securities outside of Christ limit our intimate relationship with Him and our potential in being a more effective instrument in doing His will.

So awesome is the perfect work of patience that the *joy* of Christian living starts to come into focus. The end result is that we are perfect and entire, in want of nothing. This pictures a person that has fully realized the security and significance he has in God. He has come to the full knowledge that Jesus Christ has freed him from living life in a deficit condition, a condition he was not even aware of.

To be in a continual state of want is a miserable place to be. Those outside Christ will continually seek security, significance and meaning in what the world offers: temporary fulfillment of needs. The cycle of need begins again when the means by which needs are being met are threatened. This is operating from a deficit condition; a situation in which liabilities always exceed assets.

Therefore, the experience of trials shows a way for the believer to adopt God's view of life. When God's perspective comes into view of the believer, the challenges we face, no matter how difficult, come into proper perspective. The believer has a foundation to overcome the trials before him. Despite everything the world wants us to believe, our security and significance comes from our continual abiding in Jesus Christ.

Most often discussions regarding these early verses of James focus on building Christian character. Character is defined as the makeup of mental and ethical traits that prevail in the mind of an individual. The perfect work of patience through trial will indeed bring about a transformation in the believer's character. This process, however, should be best understood in the larger context that has been presented thus far in James when he says *perfect and complete, lacking nothing.*

Development of Christian character begins as the believer understands his security and significance in Jesus Christ. Once a Christian believes that he is worthwhile, and operating from fullness, and that nothing can rob him from these things as he believes

in Christ, a right way of thinking emerges. Knowing his needs are met in Christ, the selfish motivation to fulfill these needs will diminish.

In terms of building Christ-like character, the experiences of this world in isolation do nothing to teach us in the way of building character. Character is not a direct product of suffering a trial, but rather *by experiencing Christ through trial*. It is a process that nurtures the implanted Word (The Seed, all the genetics of God) within us. Without seeking the Wisdom of God in trial and seeing the situation from God's perspective and watching His hand at work, trials will only amount to drudgery, a hardened heart and bitterness. Frustration dominates the Christian's experience and a falling away may occur. A Christ-like character will not develop from wrong responses to trial.

As we develop a new way of thinking a new behavior emerges. It means coming to terms with a new motivation on how to go about life, supported by the knowledge that our needs are continually met by Jesus Christ. It demonstrates to the believer a way of life that is fulfilling and rewarding by the way of "give" and not "get." The selfish way begins to diminish. The transformation of the mind spurred on and set on course by the Holy Spirit begins to be recognizable in the character makeup of the believer, and an amazing selfless transformation in the heart and mind occurs -- highly esteemed by the apostles and Jesus Christ comes to fruition: *he begins to love his brother*.

Old Testament Testimony

"The lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." - Psalm 23:1

This line of Psalm 23 illustrates the state of mind attainable only by a believer. David writes of the same condition of the Christian following Christ, the perfect work of patience, in want of nothing, freed from living in a deficit condition and living life from fullness. David expresses this in his opening line of the 23rd Psalm. Sheep are very nervous by nature, and rarely lay down unless they feel safe. Secure in the Lord, they can lay down in green pastures, walk in the righteous path, and bravely walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The sheep's needs are totally fulfilled.

"... but now my eye sees You" – Job 42:5

Look at Job. James reminds us of the patience of Job (5:11). At the end of all the soul searching and long discourses, the Lord finally reveals Himself and Job exclaims, *"... now my eye sees you."* It was Job's patience through trial that brought him to realize and let go of wrong perceptions of God and of himself. Although vastly different in a dramatic sense, the experience of Christians under trial should be the same as Job's in the real sense. Christians under trial and in bewildering situations undergo stressful soul searching like Job did, and usually seek

understanding by having discussions with others, but the same patience must endure and have its perfect work as it did with Job. Sound familiar?

A Life of Fullness

The joy is in knowing that the experience of a trial enlarges the realization of how Christ has freed us from living in a burdened deficit condition, and that we can live a life of fullness regardless of our circumstances.

Christians are tempted to develop alternative strategies in an effort to feel worthwhile and accepted. This has been a tragic mistake for some and is the subject of distain in most of the apostolic writings. Paul wrote to the Colossians who were entertaining various forms of Gnostic and Ascetic beliefs in the hopes of finding further acceptance in Christ. Paul had this to tell them:

*“For in Him dwells all the **fullness** of the Godhead bodily; and you are **complete** in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” – Colossians 2:9, 10*

This is the theology that James wants us to realize. There is nothing in Christ you lack; we are complete in our standing in Christ. Our needs can be fully met, and the resources of God fully available. You have His unconditional love which is consistent and forever available. We are given the tremendous opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge, free from the burden of a deficit condition, free from unpaid debt and free from the law pertaining to sin and death. Talk about opportunity! This is what James wants us to realize: what the perfect work of patience in trial will bring us to embrace!

Help in Trial

Are you having difficulty in a trial? Are you frustrated that there is no end or solution in sight? Are you having trouble understanding the joy in overcoming and the value of what trials of faith have? James is not new to these questions, and provides us with answers and encouragement:

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him”.- James 1:5

Wisdom from Heaven, especially during a trial of faith, is the basis of the answer to these questions. Worldly wisdom is not consistent with heavenly wisdom. James tells us the wisdom from above “...is first pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” – 3:17. This wisdom is not self-seeking but aligns the mind to the Will of God. When we seek the wisdom from above we will receive it, and it is a tremendous reassurance of our complete sufficiency in Christ.

James adds:

“But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” – James 1:6-8

One who doubts and is double-minded has not accepted the promise of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, and the wisdom that God offers. The double-minded seeks the best of both worlds. Such a believer is not confident in the security God offers and still holds onto worldly securities and belief structures. Verse 6 illustrates the condition of a doubtful believer. It is as though the sea is driven by something else. The sea is driven by the wind; the Christian is driven by external (worldly) influences.

The wisdom from above is aligned with God’s view on life. It reaffirms our significance in Christ, overcomes confusion and brings clarity in the life of the believer. This experience compounds for the believer, and eventually compels us to exclaim as Paul did:

“... to live is Christ, and to die is gain” – Phil. 1:21

Christians with transformed minds who have released what security they knew outside of Christ and have now found in Christ can relate to what Paul wrote to the Philippians.

By ridding ourselves of double-mindedness, the trials of faith can be successfully overcome as we let go of the security of the world and lay hold of our security in God.

“Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away. For no sooner has the sun risen with a burning heat than it withers the grass; its flowers falls, and its beautiful appearance perishes. So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits” – Chapter 1, 9-11

These verses continue to speak to the point of our security in Christ. The lowly person rejoices in his humility. For in his lowly state with respect to the world’s standards, he is more secure than the richest of men. Despite his difficulties he knows where his true security lies, he is complete and satisfied in Christ, which James sees as reason to glory about. For the rich, he is to glory in being made low. For despite his riches, he knows if it were all lost suddenly his difficulties will be small compared to the knowledge that he lacks nothing in Christ.

The Savior’s Call to Salvation

“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.” - Matt 11:28-30

The burden of life that Christ refers to is mankind's constant concern to find adequacy and purpose while at the same time trying to sustain life in a world that always threatens to take it all away. Life is trying to fill a bottomless pit that if only filled, all burdens would ease. Only in Christ can a human's needs be truly fulfilled.

"I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger, and he that believes in me shall never thirst." – John 6:35

Jesus Christ has promised to be sufficient in meeting the believers' needs. Food and water are true needs that must be met (significance and security). Christ says those who hunger and thirst live in a deficit condition. Once an unsaved individual finds his needs filled, the means by which they are being met will again be threatened. It is only temporal security and significance. When threatened, the individual will again hunger and thirst to defend or find new means to find purpose and adequacy and the cycle continues often leading to frustration and despair. A Christian is not to hunger or thirst for security and significance beyond Jesus Christ. James is advocating true security and significance can only be found in Christ, giving us an everlasting uninterrupted relationship with the Father. And the fulfillment of our needs being met cannot be threatened:

"And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one." – John 10:28-30

"Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." – John 4:14

Again we see that Christ promises to meet our every need continually by the analogy of the well where we will never thirst again.

It should be obvious that the wrong way of thinking to fulfill needs can be corrected by trials of faith. If we properly interpret trials as James desires that we do, then the experience will transform a Christian's thinking to realizing what he now has in Jesus Christ, and at the same time recognizing the futility of seeking meaning for life outside the promises He has given.

"I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." – John 10:9, 10

An abundant life can only be found by knowing through the perfect work of patience that all his needs are met and cannot be taken away while he abides in Christ. All living extends outward of a believer's acceptance. It has been said that a man's life consists of the abundance of his thoughts. Perhaps Paul can help us on the truth of an abundant life:

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."- Phil 4:11,12

Notice it was a learning experience for Paul, as it will be for all Christians who are steadfast.

Rivers of Living Water

God's call to salvation includes security and significance, a life fulfilling and everlasting, in Him. Only God offers true security, significance and meaning that cannot be threatened or taken away by others.

"If anyone thirsts, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water." – John 7:37, 38

James wants us to realize all the promises that God's offers His children, and how God wishes to sustain us in life, now and forever. For this reason, it is to be counted as all joy when we fall into various trials, for they are instruments used in bringing us to terms that we have been set free by Jesus Christ.

"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." – John 8:36

The choice is for us to believe it.

Chapter 2

1. What does verse 4 mean?

Again, James has double-mindedness in view (from Chapter 1), where the believer thinks like the world does in one respect, and thinks the way God does in another. It depends on the situation. The believer is pictured being interested in showing the rich favor as to make some gain for the church. He should not think in terms of what the church can gain from them, but rather what the church can impart to them. So, the believer is being partial with this kind of judgment practice.

2. How do we reconcile verse 24 of this chapter with Galatians 2:16, Ephesians 2:8, 9?

James is not discussing the theology of our justification before God that is through Christ. The writings of Paul are directed regarding how we are justified before God and accepted by Him. Paul is referring to the works of the law that we cannot maintain sufficiently to be accepted (faultless) before God. Perhaps from Paul's point of view is that works, without faith, is dead.

James is discussing a different point of view. He is presenting that faith without works is dead. We cannot excuse ourselves from good works that demonstrate a changed behavior, or from obedience because we have attained understanding of the truth. If such a mindset exists James refers to it as a dead faith. An unexercised faith cannot save. If a believer has given intellectual ascent to the truth, but does not have works that exercise his faith, then the individual never 'got it' anyway, so it is a dead faith.

The works that exercise our faith overcome the wrong and selfish ways of thinking in any given situation. The examples in this chapter are in verses 1-13. In verse 1 we are told not to hold the faith in Jesus Christ with respect to persons. Faithful judgments go against worldly judgments, which are typically motivated by self preservation (respector of persons, showing no mercy).

3. What might be one or two main messages we are getting from James thus far?

One main objective in James' message is this: "Prove it!" (verse 18), and do not try to prove it by the ignorance of others. That is, do not distinguish yourself because you know the Truth, and the unbelievers do not, or because you have not apostatized when so many others have fallen away. Let the proof of the hope that is in you be seen externally by works.

Make no mistake however: our standing in Christ is confirmed, and we know our works of righteousness are manifestations of His work, and we are to give God the glory.

Chapter 3

1. Is James advocating would-be teachers or those with talent to be a teacher to possibly reconsider? Is there anything wrong in receiving a stricter judgment?

Judgment for the Christian comes over a lifetime, perhaps culminating before the Throne of God³³. It is an evaluation or assessment by God that may cause Him to act

³³ See Corinthians Bible Study, II Corinthians Chapter 5, Question 1.

in correction. The continued intercession of Christ our Savior allows our continued growth under the grace of God. It is not a final condemnation or acceptance, but an ongoing process overseen by God. Therefore in the sense of a stricter judgment, teachers are under a stricter correction, and perhaps a more stringent evaluation at the Throne of Christ.

James has in mind restraining the desire on the part of those not qualified. He is actually looking out for those who see the attraction to teach but do not have the character resources to fulfill the position adequately. A more severe correction process is not for everyone. It is not for those who are unqualified, and who are inadequately trained.

2. What would James be concerned about regarding those who might become teachers?

We find the answer beginning in verse 2. All stumble in many things, including teachers. One in particular is our speaking forth. Teacher's words are highly effective or highly destructive. James has in mind the destructive potential of what is spoken.

O generation of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart brings forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned. - Mat 12:34-37

But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashed hands defile not a man. - Mat 15:18-20

3. What then is the solution to taming the tongue?

Verses 8 to 12 make it clear that no man can tame the tongue. He makes the claim that its very nature cannot be trusted.

James moves on to the solution. He does not address taming our words directly. His answer is in the transformation process that must take place in our minds and is the key to our success. It is this transformation spurred on by the Holy Spirit to a new way of thinking that makes the tongue limited in its capacity to do damage.

The way we think influences the quality of our lives, makes our paths straight or crooked. The wisdom from above comes to us in pure form (cannot be contradicted), and brings about a healthy life pattern who have their minds changed by it. Teachers

will be well served with such wisdom for they are looked to for a Christ-like response to external influences.

Verse 18 is important. The fruits of righteousness (fruits of the Spirit), come about from those who preach the word (by mouth and by actions) in a peaceful way. This peaceful way should be recognized by the sincere believer. These are words that do not incite the believer.

Words that incite can be words that resonate with the carnal mind. They may cause us to think in a manner that cannot bear righteous fruit. The language that resonates with carnal thinking is evident in recent Church of God history by the fruits they produced. Prime examples are words of condemnation of those who do not agree with the Truth, or those who do not agree with specific doctrines not directly relating to salvation. These include church hierarchy or church ages. The words create an *Us-versus-Them* syndrome which is contrary to the message of Jesus Christ. They fuel our self centeredness and are designed to proclaim one's own righteousness. Confusion is usually the end result.

It takes a certain kind of climate to cultivate and raise righteousness, much like having good weather. In harsh and bitter weather it is difficult, if not impossible, to grow a healthy crop. An environment that is self-seeking and bitter cannot bring about the righteousness of God in the believers. It brings about confusion. That is, they know they are in the Truth, but can't understand what is wrong, feel the power and presence of God working, or what it is they are supposed to do.

See also Hebrews 12:11 and Romans 8:6

Chapter 4

1. What is James getting at when he says we do not ask in verse 2? Why wouldn't we ask God for something?

The first two verses come at us to describe the carnal need for satisfaction and how we go about having our satisfaction fulfilled carnally. When we are without, history shows that it is our nature to go to far reaches to have these wants fulfilled. It should be established by now to the believer that carnal desires cannot be fulfilled. There is more to consider however. *What may not be clear is that the way we go about fulfilling our actual needs (security, meaning, significance, peace) is often carnal as well, and our needs cannot be satisfied this way.* Our attempt to find security may be directed by the carnal lusts of the mind.

The self deceptive aspect of our carnal desires is this: that we believe God is there to fulfill them. They appear as reasonable expectations of God, but that is not the case. We are far too focused on:

- Improved health so that we may be more comfortable
- Healing and longer life to continue our comfortable lives.
- Making something out of this life that puts God second

Other deceptive requests include asking God to give us the means to obey Him rather than stepping out in faith and believing God will provide. An example is asking God to relieve us of our debts so that we can attend the Feast of Tabernacles. This translates to having God make changes in our circumstances on our terms before we obey Him. This is not a prayer of faith.

Asking for the seemingly reasonable things such as these is the target of James' disdain. For he points out that we will not receive them (verse 3). Although we cannot help desiring such things, it is our motives that are suspect for James points out that this is self-serving and lustful behavior. He calls those who have such motives as adulterers and adulteresses, even enemies of God. Although these incitements seem extreme, they can be considered very real if we can come to the understanding just how serious this issue can be before God. God has no relationship with the enemy. The Christian that has a relationship with the enemy strains his own with God.

If over time our expectations of God are not met, due to misconception of how needs are fulfilled, the believer will no longer seek Christ. Friendship with the world is the only other alternative, and the believer will slip back into such a way. Although the belief in God will continue, the believer will be ineffective for God.

Also see the Chapter 3 discussion in the Colossian Bible Study.

The common denominator is that we do have a need, but the satisfaction of those needs differs widely between our carnal need to fulfill them and God's wishes to fulfill them. Therefore we do not have, because we do not ask God for true fulfillment and satisfaction. The important thing to consider is that there are things we should ask God for. Not asking indicates fulfillment from sources other than God. No asking, no receiving. Yet, God promises those who ask will receive.

If our motives are to glorify God however, and to do His will, that is an entirely different story.

2. What does he mean when he seems to interject the statement "*But He gives us more grace*"?

This is the beginning of the answer to those who have been frustrated by an unresponsive God to have their needs and wants fulfilled.

James tells His readers that God answers with grace.

In the New Testament, *grace* is a very meaningful word. It is often referred to as a state of unmerited pardon, but that is a limited description. In the context, grace is the divine enabling power that God gives to believers.

For this to happen we are to humble ourselves before God (verse 10). At this time we should be clear on what is true humility?

True humility does not necessarily mean to proclaim some kind of unworthiness, or to make oneself out to be a lowly individual. These are often outward signs of humility. True humility boils down to submitting to God's will and disregarding our own, an inward sign of humility. This is often difficult.

There is sometimes the locked-in syndrome in the Church of God. The believer will start to think that Christianity is 'this way', a way that misinterprets God's intentions as to how Christian growth occurs, the nature of evangelism and how the Gospel should be preached. An unwillingness to yield to revealed knowledge of God's plan indicates a lack of humility.

3. Why would the Devil 'flee' from you?

The word 'flee' as it is used here implies fear. The Devil has nothing to fear about you, but when the Christian resists the Devil he does so by the grace of God, that is, by power divine. The Devil has reason to fear the power of God.

Chapter 5

1. Why does James seem to come out of nowhere to rebuke the wealthy for the first six verses?

He mentions prior (in Chapter 2) that the rich oppress them in their courts, and blaspheme the noble name to which they are called. It appears the wealthy had little regard for the believers James was familiar with.

James makes a scathing rebuke of the rich on behalf of the brethren, and announces the penalty of their oppressive actions.

We see in verse 7 he uses the word 'therefore', and calls them to be patient. The brethren should not lose patience with the Lord in experiencing unjust treatment at the hand of the rich.

2. Patience seems to be the word of the day in this chapter. What is the nature of the kind of patience a Christian should have?

Patience is not passive acceptance. It is a patience that confronts trials by the grace of God. It is confrontational to the demands of the world that would cause us to stumble. It is the kind of resistance that produces results for God.

Patience is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is in control, not the carnal mind that seeks unlawful solutions.

There is the patience of the farmer. The farmer toils in unfavorable circumstances to get results that he believes will come.

Patience works its way through doubtful situations.

Patience does not compromise for comfort.

There is the patience of Job (verse 11). He refused to complain and curse God for destroying their lives (see Job 13:15, 16:19 and 19:25). Job had to work it out! In the book of Job we see plenty of discussion and questions. We too must work out what God might have us see through trial. God uses evil to bring out what needs to be brought out, and it happens by our patience in the suffering through it.

3. What are the appropriate responses and behaviors for a Christian to have through trial?

- Do not grumble under lousy circumstances that try your patience.
- Do not curse or swear. Don't make a show, but don't hedge either (verse 12).
- Don't ignore your sufferings or your cheerfulness. Express yourself appropriately (verse 13).
- Sick? Call for an anointing (verse 14-15).
- Confess your faults (not in detail) and pray for one another (verse 16).
- Seek out the backslider (verse 19).

4. In verse 15, what does it mean the sick would be saved and what does it mean for the Lord to 'raise him up'?

The term 'raise up' in verse 15 should be interpreted in a broader sense that means that the sick person will be enabled to overcome the sickness by the grace of God. This may mean God's direct intervention by healing the infirmity, or it may mean God will show how His grace is sufficient to overcome illness, much like Paul's case with the thorn in the flesh.

I Peter

Peter called the recipients of his letter “strangers”, which means resident aliens, or sojourners and pilgrims. His recipients were also a persecuted people, scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern Turkey). At least 15 times Peter refers to suffering. Peter wrote to strengthen and encourage them. He also repeatedly spoke of the future glory, which is also a theme of this epistle. It is good to be reminded that our pilgrimage has an end, and will be transformed into glory.

In North America, the Church of God does not suffer persecution as did the early Church under the Romans. The Church, however, does sense the feeling of being scattered, alienated in a sea of religious confusion, and there is no shortage of personal trials in which we suffer. Peter’s words should be readily transposed on the modern believer, for whether a trial comes by persecution or by any other means, Peter is giving encouragement by reminding them of the reality that is as real today, as it was in the first century – that Christians are begotten for glory and nothing less.

The best form of encouragement for a suffering Christian is to help him find strength and security and there is only one way to do that – he must know he is saved and absolutely sure that he is under the care and love of God. When a Christian is unsure and wondering, making wrong interpretations about his situation, doubting his security in Christ, he is experiencing undue and needless torment. Peter combats his readers doubts by re-assuring them of who they are as God’s people; leaving no doubt in his reader’s minds.

Often believers (who suffer under a trial or dealing with the human condition) are advised to “pray about it”, that it is “building character”, and/or offered constructive advice in overcoming. Although there is nothing inherently wrong with that kind of supportive advice, the Church of God today should embrace what is shared by Peter to brothers and sisters who are scattered and suffering. A dose of our spiritual reality (begotten for glory) will work wonders whether we are being persecuted by the Roman authorities, or beset with modern problems in overcoming.

Chapter 1

Partial exposition:

1:1-2 The group being addressed are Christians that are scattered throughout Asia Minor. They are “*pilgrims of the Dispersion*”. These opening verses describe the state of his readers: they are both dispersed sojourners and the very elect of God. This describes the true state of Christians in every age.

Many in the Church of God today lament not having a unified force, a single or cohesive organization to promote the gospel (as there once was for some in the Worldwide Church of God). They believe that it was Satan's effort to scatter and fracture the Church to diffuse the efforts of promoting the gospel. Although Satan must have played a role, Peter rather proclaims the real reasons:

" ... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (1), in sanctification of the Spirit(2), for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ(3)..." - 1:2

Peter suggests nothing wrong with being dispersed and has no difficulty implying that the Father Himself sees nothing unusual about their state.

In fact, God's people are by nature a scattered and conflicted people. There has often been a sense of isolation and sorrow. Ask any prophet. We wrestle with two opposing realities: we are the object of our Heavenly Father's affections, yet seemingly abandoned in out of the way places and circumstances that have us bewildered at times.

There is not any hint of Peter having concern for their scattered state in his epistle. He offers them only grace and peace. The Church of God today should consider this, get over the past, and move on.

1:3-4 Furthermore, Peter doesn't begin with any call for divine intervention on their behalf, or give them advice (plenty of time for that), he actually takes his readers to a whole new level and pronounces blessings on God! And we are blessed because He is blessed. The remedy for our feeling of isolation is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we are already alive in Him.

The future isn't left out either. There is an inheritance that awaits us. Peter does his best to describe the nature of the inheritance. As we continue to live in this world there is increasing awareness that starts at being unnoticeable and then eventually becomes ever present – everything is transient and decays. However, Peter ensures us that our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and will not fade.

1:5 It is the power of God that preserves us for the believer's final salvation, that being born again in the spirit. It is interesting to note that it is not faith that preserves the believer to salvation; it is the power of God. The recurring theme in the Bible is that through faith God's power is accessed.

1:7 The heat from fire purifies gold. It separates the impurities from the gold. Faith that is tried by fire reveals what it truly is, both to the

- believer and to God, that it be found to the praise of God and in the praise of God.
- 1:10-12 The thing that angels do not know well is our experience. They know all the things we `fight' about, what it is to have free moral agency, but it appears that they would rather inquire into the unique Christian experience of being begotten by God.
- 1:13-16 Peter does not leave any room for insobriety or self pity. Instead believers must have an outlook that foresees the glory of God. Attitude determines action; we must have a mindset that is assured in what has been given (the revelation of Jesus Christ), and a behavior that is worthy of such a calling.
- 1:17-21 "Each of us will give an account of his works, and each will receive the appropriate reward. This is a 'family judgment, 'the Father dealing with His beloved children. The Greek word translated *judgeth* carries the meaning 'to judge in order to find something good.'"³⁴
- It is important to maintain a steady reminder of the price that was paid for us and maintain it with the fear of the One who has control over us. In verse 17, Peter casually reminds us of our brief sojourn through the trials of this life.
- 22-25: God has very little interest in our physical attainments. Grass is even the least significant in the plant kingdom

1. What can we say is the overall theme of this first chapter?

The overall theme could be expressed in terms of appreciation.

The Jews may have had a sense of appreciation that we may not identify with today, at least not initially. Although religious in the ways of the Old Covenant they knew that atonement and the connection to God was a limited offering, and that they did not have hope or assurances in the Old Covenant. Therefore they would appreciate to a greater degree what they have in Christ to the point that they would "*rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory*" (v8). This is also emphasized by how the prophets inquired, and even angels.

Christians today can have that same appreciation too, but we have been raised in a culture that already expects salvation, unaware of what early Christians, especially

³⁴ (Wiersbe), p. 2:397

Jewish converts understood. Most are already used to the idea of having a heavenly Father before actual conversion. The general belief is there has always been a relationship with a heavenly Father. Scripture says explicitly the unconverted do not; all of us were disobedient slaves to sin and under condemnation before we were saved.

Chapter 2

1. **What is a spiritual sacrifice? Answer in terms of how it is used here. Think about the spiritual house being described.**

Spiritual sacrifices are sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. A sacrifice may be defined as an offering of something precious to a deity. In verse 4 Peter says we are precious. If we are precious, we offer up ourselves, free of the things listed in verse 1 (malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy etc.), taking in the word, and taking our place in the Church community, realizing our dependence on one another.

Before we were as grass (lowest form of vegetation, far from precious), but now have tremendous value having been purified (1:22). With that Christ has implanted His word, which lives and abides forever. It is the character (nature) of God that is in the seed.

As a note on verses 2 and 3, mother's milk has an addictive substance in it. Peter seems to have a sense of this in these verses.

2. **What is the difference in the experience of Christ between an obedient Christian and a disobedient Christian?**

This question is in relation to verses 6-8.

In verse 7, the words 'believe and disobedience' are contrasted, so we are not to assume that Peter is contrasting believers with unbelievers in the world at large. We find in these scriptures the different experiences between those who remain obedient to the true faith, and those who continue to be disobedient.

In the Church of God, Christ will become either precious or a rock of offense to the individual. If the believer learns that love is the bottom line in having a sustained and fruitful relationship to Him, not the love of principles or teachings, then there is no cause for him to stumble. This demonstrates the value that the believer places in his relationship to God and His people. It is easier to obey someone that you love, admire and appreciate, and those who do know their relationship to God is precious.

Those who find Him precious:

- Will not be disappointed (ashamed, confounded ... caused to act disobediently (hastily in self preservation)).
- Will not have cause to stumble.
- Will have clarity.
- Will have growth.

When Jesus walked the earth He offended the religious order of the time. He became a “rock of offense.” He was not the Person they wanted Him to be. The Pharisees and many Jews were satisfied with their interpretation of the law and the scriptures because they could be wielded to their own benefit and to control others. They already felt an entitlement:

“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have eternal life” – John 5:39, 40

Jesus Christ challenged their claim to the righteous interpretation of the law, and pleaded with them that they instead come to Him and find eternal life.

Recent Church of God history testifies as to what happens when individuals and organizations invoke their own interpretations on the Person of Jesus Christ. The Worldwide Church of God (at a certain time) began to promote position over relationship. This convenient teaching was beneficial to those designated with higher rank and was used as a means of control. Even one senior member commented in a conversation many years after that organization apostatized “We thought we had Jesus right where we wanted Him, *but He moved*”. Many who put their faith in organizations and their leadership (which is an act of disobedience) are likely in the end to become offended and stumble. This became true of the Worldwide Church, and many formerly involved with that organization no longer serve and worship God.

Those who are disobedient:

- Will be disappointed. Christ will actually become an offense. “How could He allow this?”
- Do not have a foundation on the Chief Cornerstone.
- Will lack clarity.
- Will become fruitless.

The ministry today needs to stay in a position of authority of the kind that Jesus approves and does not seek the approval of men. Dwindling congregations in the Church of God tempts leadership to compromise the truth in order to hold onto everyone that enters into their congregation. The reality is truth will eventually confront everyone’s lifestyles and internal pride. Those who get upset and are not submissive to the Lord will become critical of every aspect of the Church and leave. They become disobedient and stumble. Jesus offended many of His followers, but

those who remained with Him recognized that He had the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)

3. Verse 13 and 14 Peter says Christians should submit themselves to every ordinance of man. What if they have laws that violate God's laws? In what cases should a Christian be disobedient to civil laws, if ever?

We are to submit to the authority of government rulers by obeying established laws. This is well established in scripture. Though we Christians may not feel that those in authority are worthy of our submission at times, but even so, in submitting to them we are, in fact, honoring God. Government has a valid purpose and is appointed by God.

There is a place for civil disobedience, as Peter attested to in Acts 4:19-20, and this is when laws make it illegal to obey God. It should be noted, however, by disobeying the law (even under these circumstances) Christians may very well bear the civil consequences of disobeying it.

Chapter 3

1. Verse 1. Likewise? Likewise to what in what way?

In the like manner that Christ committed himself to God who Judges righteously, despite circumstances that caused him to suffer. He did not take judgment into His own hands and counter punched his adversaries (2:23-24). Wives are being asked to commit themselves to their husbands, despite their disbelief. By Christ's stripes we are healed, and in Peter's mind the husbands should also be 'healed' of their disbelief seeing what pleasure they have in their wives' chaste conduct verse 2.

2. Do unbelieving men need to earn the respect of their wives as described in these verses?

No. There is no condition placed here. This is not to say that abusive and other extreme situations are not an exception. The point is that Peter, as much as it depended on the believing spouse, did want their relationships adversely affected because of their new beliefs.

3. Verse 6: "... not afraid with any terror." What does this mean?

Although they may suffer for doing right, or suffer in spite of doing right, they should be confident in that they are pleasing the Lord by their submission just as the highly regarded Sarah.

4. Does verse 13 contradict verse 14?

The statement in verse 13 follows the message of the Psalm just quoted. Since God punishes those who do evil, who will harm those who do good? When we are doing

the right thing, society at large will, in fact, encourage it. If we do good to those who do evil society cannot help but see the positive of such behavior, but this is not an absolute, as it depends on how people interpret good treatment. Ask the prophets and the Lord Himself.

Therefore, in verse 14, we see Peter is aware that we can suffer for righteousness sake. People can be perverse and the people of God can suffer at their hands, but in such cases we should rather consider ourselves blessed instead of unfortunate.

Note on verse 18-20

This short passage of verse has been a source of confusion, and there are many discussions available in efforts to interpret Peter's meaning. We will not enter into them fully here, but make a couple of notes to consider when interpreting these verses.

These verses speak of Christ's vindication. When looking at verse 19, we are tempted to wonder if Jesus, after His resurrection, went to "*the spirits in prison*" (fallen angels), and delivered a message, the content of we just don't know. One helpful thought is that we are often locked into the idea that preaching is a verbal presentation of some sort. However, Christ's resurrection in itself proclaims as a herald (Greek: *kerusso*) victory over His adversaries. He didn't need to go and give a sermon about it.

There were disobedient mockers in Noah's day, and they interpreted the Lord's long suffering (120 years) as His unwillingness to act in judgment. Although Noah preached to them also, the flood did come and vindicate Noah, and only a few were saved. Peter's readers must also be a small minority, and his message is that this is not a consideration, for God is very capable of delivering a few from their many mockers.

Chapter 4

1. In verse 1 Peter says to arm ourselves with the same mind. What is the mind set Peter wants his readers to have?

In verse 1 Peter reminds us that Jesus Christ suffered in the flesh for our sakes, and He was able to because He was a Person of resolve. We must also develop the same mental disposition of Jesus and start to think clearly. A mental disposition that resolves to obey God is the overcoming mind. If we do not take Peter's advice, we will be going through life unarmed to deal with the inevitability of trials. Those who

have developed the mental resolve to endure suffering for the gospel have demonstrated by their willingness that they are done with sin, fully identifying with the Savior.

Note on verse 5 and 6

They who speak evil of Christians will make account to Him (v 5) but this is not what we want to happen. Peter reminds us that the mind of Christ wants to save men, not condemn them (v 6). It is better to be judged by men (while in your flesh as a Christian) and live according to God in the Spirit.

2. In verse 7, Peter interjects a sense of urgency that the climax of history is at hand. What does he advise believers on how to live, especially near the end of all things?

We are to be serious and watchful in our prayers. The mind is always busy and easily wanders off. Therefore, be always sober. Bring every thought into captivity.

Have fervent love (not a passive love, but one that reaches out, with strain) for one another (verse 8).

Be hospitable, (keep the welcome doors open, your home, your time and your mind) and stop grumbling (so and so irritates me when they do or don't do this) (verse 9).

Use your gifts for the edification of one another. Use your gifts to strengthen one another in the grace of God (divine enablement and the experience of God). We are to be stewards of what God has given us. We are responsible (verse 10).

If we are preaching, we speak the words of God and not anything else (verse 11). We depend on God to do the speaking. Our words must accurately reflect His words.

Do all these things so that God may be glorified. Therefore the right intention must always be there. Do it with a cheerful heart. God loves a cheerful giver! (2 Cor. 9:7)

3. How is it by our own trials we partake in Christ's sufferings (verse 13)? How should we interpret and understand reproach and trials? Why is it a strange thing?

Trial, distress, and bad luck are strange things as they go against all logical and intuitive thinking. To us it does not fit in the schedule, but that is only if we fail to make the connection between suffering and glory.

The saints of God and Jesus Christ, Himself, never thought glory could be obtained any other way, but through suffering. Jesus Christ did not think it strange that he would suffer to obtain glory, and He was not ashamed to admit it:

“Father the hour has come, glorify your Son...” – John 17:1

Peter is connecting the sufferings of Christians with the sufferings of the Christ. When we identify with Him, not just intellectually, but with devoted sense to the cause of salvation, we must partake of his sufferings. At the same time, when His glory is revealed, we, too, shall receive the promise of a great reward that exceeds even all our expectations.

When reproached, those who reproach are actually reproaching God because the Spirit of God rests on you. On your part He is glorified, on theirs He is blasphemed.

There is a timely word for us when we feel at times, due to our difficulties, as if God’s presence has left us. Verse 14 says in actual fact, seasons of difficulty are when God’s smile and approval is especially upon us. However, if we are ashamed when rebuked, or return kind for kind, we do not obey the gospel. There is a dangerous consequence of this kind of disobedience (4:17-19).

Chapter 5

1. Why was it necessary for Peter to relate his experiences with his fellow elders the way he did in verse 1? That is, why did he remind them he witnessed the suffering of Christ? Is his claim as being a partaker of the glory that is to be revealed in reference to the transfiguration on the Mount in Matthew 17, and if so, why was it important to relate that experience?

As Christians, today, we can only read about our Savior’s scourging and crucifixion, and try to comprehend it the best we can. Perhaps if we actually witnessed it, we would be far more able to get beyond some personal hardships and issues that distract us and be more passionate about what He wants us to know. In this case, Peter uses his well known status as a witness, not only of the life sufferings and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, but possibly as one of the apostles who saw the transfiguration, as a means to give exhortation (a strong word) to get the elders to feed the flock.

So for us, think about what is on Peter’s mind when he wrote this. He is one who truly knows what Christ went through to give us salvation, and one who truly tasted a bit of the glory of the Kingdom of God. He is telling us that it is worth it! Therefore feeding the flock must be worth it.

2. The exhortation is to feed the flock. What is the primary diet in what the elder’s are to feed to the flock?

The Word of God. The Bible. Scripture is not to be worshipped, but the scripture is to teach you the mind of God. Elders should make it a priority that the brethren are fed God’s Word. It takes a lot of work to explain God’s word as sometimes it is

difficult for us to understand. Here a little, there a little. Teaching is held in very high regard in the New Testament.

Feeding the flock is an inclusive word that includes tending to other needs of the brethren, but they are incidental to teaching what the scripture means and how it is to be understood.

Elder's are facilitators for the One who is truly teaching. See Matt 23:8.

We must not solely depend on ministers to teach us. Do not overly rely on other sources such as booklets, magazines or this Bible Study volume. The scripture can speak to you directly, and that sometimes takes more effort.

3. What are the main benefits of submitting yourself to the elder?

You will learn. In fact, learning to submit to an imperfect being makes it easier to submit to a perfect Being.

4. What does it mean to be humble, and what does it achieve to be humble before God?

To be humble is deny yourself (i.e. deny yourself of asserting your own rights), in order to help others.

Asserting our own rights can come in these forms:

- I deserve this.
- I don't have to do that.
- I don't have to listen to this.
- This isn't my spiritual gift.
- This is somebody else's responsibility.
- I am too busy.

Subjection and humility takes a concentrated effort. It takes a deliberate decision to be this way.

In regards to Questions 4 and 5, by submitting to one another (verse 5), a learning environment is created. Thus, church or community of believers becomes functional and grows in grace and knowledge. See also James 3:18.

5. The "... mighty hand of God" (verse 6). What does the mighty hand of God do in verse 5 and 6?

The mighty hand of God should not be underestimated. God will resist the proud Christian (one who only does what he wants to do, and is guided by asserting his own rights). This individual will not learn very well, or not learn at all. God, however,

gives grace (enabling power, more experience of Himself) to those who subject themselves to His will and forgo their own. This includes subjection to the others in the Church.

The above is very real. Many Sabbath keeping Christians who tried to assert themselves and their own ideas on others, did not consider first the development of others, or did not make the necessary effort to subject themselves have not fared well, have lacked understanding, and are continually frustrated. Shipwreck is a very real possibility.

6. What does casting all your care (anxieties) on Him mean?

For us to truly be effective and learn from Christ, it is necessary to alleviate anxiety which is a major learning disability. He cares for us as He wants us to have peace of mind. A peaceful mind is a learning mind.

Some, from experience, will tell us it takes repeated prayers of handing (throwing, casting) our cares and concerns on Him.

7. What is a Christian's state of mind, who has gone through suffering?

This is in reference to verse 10. A perfect, strengthened and settled Christian walks in His authority as a Christian. He has learned his security and significance rests in Christ and not in the world, himself, or anything else. That is the purpose of trials.

II Peter

When Peter wrote this second epistle he knew his death was near (1:14). With this knowledge, he writes with specificity, a style that many would write if it was their last will and testament. Jesus' instructions to Peter was to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32), and His further instructions were to "*feed My sheep*" (John 21:15–17). We see Jesus' instructions to Peter in this *last will and testament* to the brethren.

This epistle stresses the importance of knowledge. In this short epistle, the words *know* and *knowledge* is used sixteen times. God's people are not called to *wonder if*, they are called to know. Knowledge is strength in defending against false teachers, which is one of Peter's primary concerns.

Chapter 1

The opening verses:

1:1 The writer introduces himself as "Simeon Peter", instead of just "Peter" as he did in his first epistle. This time he gives us his birth name and the name Jesus gave him. Perhaps this is intentional, as he is introducing himself as the whole man, his life as a whole; the man he was born and the man he is now in the Lord. It would seem he is presenting the stumbling man during his time with Jesus on earth, and the name of the new man, experienced in the Lord's grace. Peter refers to Simeon in verse 9, remembering the man he was, who is now redeemed.

1:3-4 Notice He has given us all things that pertain to life. Scripture has confirmed that we are now living our eternal lives (1 John 5:11). God is not withholding what life is all about. Christians are not described in scripture as holding on in hopes of attaining eternal life or acceptance. These we already have, and what we wait for is a new body, yet to be revealed at the Lord's coming, and forever after being in His presence. We have life, and life sustained, and this by His divine power he has begotten us by the implanted Word. Peter calls this '*through the knowledge of Him*'. By the implanted Word we must know that by this we are not lacking anything that pertains to godliness. God has made everything available to us.

We should note '*Word*' is the seed that must be nourished, not left unattended. We must not forget or neglect our relationship to Jesus Christ. No matter the stage of development, the implanted word must not be unattended. In fact, a grown plant even requires more attention than a seed, the larger the plant, the greater the incremental growth.

Be patient on your road to discovery and growth.

1. Why did Peter find it necessary to remind his readers of the things he refers to in this chapter? That is, why is it important to be diligent to add these things?

Peter uses the word '*remind*' three times in verses 12-15. In verse 12 Peter essentially points out that although his readers are established in the faith, he finds no less of a reason to remind them of the things he is telling them. He points out even after his passing his will for them is to be continually reminded, as it is a defense against any thoughts they simply believed a fabricated truth, because he was an eyewitness to it (v16).

The things Peter is referring to are all things he has presented thus far. In verse 4, Peter mentions exceedingly great promises, and to lay hold of these promises it is necessary they nurture the fruits of the Spirit he subsequently lists. Nurturing spiritual gifts is absolutely essential for success. These gifts of the Spirit are not things we should hope for in the Kingdom, but to be ever so diligent that they are cultivated in the here and now.

In the Lord's Prayer, '*Thy Kingdom Come*', is not an exclusive prayer request for the Lord to return and set up His Kingdom on earth, it is more to say '*Thy Kingdom come and rule in our hearts*'. The kingdom must rule in your heart first before you can enter it. This is not commonly understood, for often the Church claims its commission is to '*Proclaim the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God*', the Church inserts the word '*coming*' in the future prophetic sense, but this phrase cannot be found in the New Testament. The Good News (Gospel) of the Kingdom is available now to rule in your hearts. Peter is essentially telling us the same thing.

2. Peter makes the point of reminding them that they (the Apostles) did not follow cunningly devised fables. In the context of all that has been written in this chapter up to this point, how does it reinforce his point to them?

Verse 16 starts with that connective word '*for*'. Peter's point is that what he had been emphatic about is for real. He witnessed the transfiguration; therefore his testimony to them is rested on historical events that he experienced personally. He had seen the power of God through Jesus personally, and he makes specific reference to the transfiguration on the mountain (Matt. 17:1-8).

The transfiguration gave the few Apostles that witnessed it a taste of the power that His coming will be when He returns. They did not see the actual return, but the prophetic basis of what His return will consist – "... *we have the prophetic word confirmed*" – v 19. His point overall is that they have the credible truth to believe they knew the prophesied Messiah.

There is something very applicable to the Church of God today. The Church of God is beset everywhere with cunningly devised interpretations of scripture. These include, but not limited to:

- Church Eras
- Hierarchal Church Government
- A single physical place of safety during the tribulation

These interpretations and others have developed serious traction and have many devout believers, because they have been cunningly devised by believable men. Many that subscribe to these teachings castigate those who do not, and gravitate to teachers who uphold these interpretations. Often these teachers claim special status as God's witnesses in the end times (apostle, end time Elijah, two witnesses of Revelation, lineage to Israel etc.).

There is something more than intellectual in our hope. The light that shines in a dark place will continue to shine until the morning when our inner hopes come to fruition. The light is surrounded by darkness, and we must concentrate on it, because in our hearts we know what it is.

Chapter 2

1. Are these false teachers Christians?

Yes. They deny the Lord who bought them (verse 1).

2. Verse 3: "By covetousness" they will exploit What is it that is being coveted, and who is coveting?

Both the false teacher and those who hear them are coveting.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 help us answer what is being coveted. Covetousness comes from a need to fulfill one's own desires. Here, carnal needs are in view, and false prophets, especially those that come out of the Church, know exactly what desires to exploit, and what deceptive words to use.

See also II Timothy chapter 4, question 2.

3. What is the appeal of false teachers to Christians?

Jesus Christ has lifted us from the bondage of sin so that we now have the choice to serve Him. The important thing to understand is that we now have the freedom to choose, before we did not. A false teacher's trick of the trade is to have their targeted victims believe they are choosing Christ when they choose to believe them. Often false teachers (and their followers) give permission to believe and act on that what is actually carnal in nature; an avenue of excuse to get out from underneath the restraints that hold back carnal needs. Such teachings lower the Person of Jesus Christ to where the carnal mind wants Him, on the carnal mind's terms. As an example, the teaching

that a place of safety will exist for select believers during the prophesied tribulation authorizes the carnal mind's need for self preservation and escapism during times of trial.

The deception of false teachers can be great as their arguments can be still loosely connected to the confines of the true Way, but they lead the believer down a different path.

We should note two other observations that relate to this question:

- Often those who are deceived by false teachers, (who originated in the Church), erroneously believe these scriptures point to mainstream Christianity and all its sects and pagan beliefs.
- False teachers, at least the most dangerous kind, continue to preach that Christ is the Savior. Peter's statement '*... denying the Lord who bought them*' does not necessarily entail outright denial of the Lord, but denial of His true nature and will.

See also Romans 16:17, 18.

“What was happening in the case of Peter's people was that certain men, who claimed to be prophets, were insidiously persuading men to believe the things they *wished to be true* rather than the things which God has revealed as true. They did not set themselves up as opponents of Christianity. Far from it. Rather they set themselves up as the finest fruits of Christian thinking. Insidiously, unconsciously, imperceptible, so gradually and so subtly that they did not even notice it, people were being lured away from God's truth to men's private opinions, for that is what heresy is”³⁵

Expository notes on verses 3-9:

2:3 The idea of swift judgment and destruction is that when judgment comes there will be no debating it, it happens without appeal.

Although it seems false teachers prosper (as they may well do, for one can prosper well feeding on the lusts of others (making merchandise of you), their judgment is alive and well and ready.

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea” – Mark 9:42

³⁵ (Barclay), p. 374

- 2:4 “*For since God ...*” might be a better rendering. God’s judgment happened on the angels who sinned without appeal.
- 2:5 There was no appeal of mankind during Noah’s time either. Noah was shut in the Ark, the preaching of righteousness had then stopped, and the warnings ended.
- 2:6-9 There is no excuse for the false teachers. They receive only judgment and destruction. God is capable of reserving false teachers for judgment by keeping them under their own delusions (this explains much of why they seem to continue successfully on television and print).

And, therefore, know this also, there is no excuse for the godly to succumb to temptations either, for He saved Noah and Lot out of more precarious situations than we have ever encountered. In the context given, God will, in fact deliver; (separate) the godly away from false teachers.

4. Verse 20 states that the latter state is worse than before if a Christian is enslaved again by the pollutions of this world. Why is this the case?

They are promised liberty and think they have it, yet in reality they are brought into bondage (v 19). The bondage is again living in uncertainty, as they have put their hopes in that their teacher is right. Heads of some organizations, in order to maintain control, require their members to shun members in the Church of God.

Being entangled in pollutions of the world is not necessarily to duplicate its symptoms, but it is rather to live again with self preservation. They choose how it is the right to be angry and deal with others as the world does. They look out into the world with disdain or disregard to justify themselves. We should note that righteous Lot was tormented by the ungodliness; he did not condemn the ungodly.

5. Why would God allow false teachers to arise in the Church, and why would He allow some to fall for their deception? How do you identify a false teacher?

False teachers and their teachings fall under the same category as any other temptation to believe what is false, and for any reason. God does not appear to disseminate between false teachers and their deception, and any other kind of lust of the flesh. Peter generalizes all desire for falsehood as ‘*lust*’ – 1:4. If our desire is to listen to them, it is because we prefer darkness over the light.

To God, Jesus Christ is our only true focus. Any other focus that draws us away from Jesus is to look to darkness:

“ ‘*And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*’ ” – John 3:19

“ ... ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life’ ” – John 8:12

“ ‘I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness’ ” – John 12:46

As with any other temptation, Peter reminds us in verse 9 that God is capable of delivering His children from false teachers and their doctrines.

Out of the Church of God come a number of false teachers. It is important to know the true from the false. Peter gives us a number of descriptors, two of which are in verse 10:

Presumptuous – they are daring in their claims. They claim they are the only one proclaiming the gospel, they are a *Philadelphian*, out of their Church will come the two Witnesses of Revelation, and other similar claims.

Self-willed – arrogant. Un-apologetic about their claims. The love of God is the opposite, as it is willing to yield as necessary (James 3:17).

In Chapter 2, Peter identifies false teachers by symptoms that include what comes out of his mouth, sees with his eyes, and desires with his heart.

We are not to confuse who is a false teacher or a true teacher by how well they speak, how likeable they are, or how big their Church is.

Chapter 3

1. Peter to his readers: “keep things in perspective”. Explain why and how he is doing this.

There are two different and opposite perspectives given in this chapter; God’s perspective and man’s perspective. They have to do with the view of time and what is of value.

The scoffers look to history and see no change. Things appear to continue as they always have (v 3-4). However, their consciousness of history is extremely limited compared to God’s. They tend to extrapolate to times past to times future in terms of their present state, which is erroneous.

Verse 10 and 11 give us an indication the value God has on the physical (see also 1 Peter 1:24). This world is all what unbelievers have to value. Peter gives us a strong contrast in values.

Behind the scoffing of the scoffers is simply their own agenda. They don't want Him to return and interrupt their 'thing'. Again, their motives are self serving, as Peter points out by '*lusts*' (v3).

Because man's perception of time and values differ, men can interpret God's intentions wrongly. The Lord's tarrying should be understood as His long suffering that leads sinners to repentance.

His intentions are to arm His readers to keep their own faith in perspective so that they may keep their confidence alive until the Lord's return.

I John

The first epistle of John is a general epistle as it was not written to any specific Church or individual, rather it was written to all Christian believers. It is “An Epistle Written From a Father to His Children”. As it is not written to any specific Church, it is not hard to extend this understanding that it was not written to any believer in any specific time in Church history. We can believe that John was thinking of us also, for he would have hoped his epistle would exist so long as the Church exists.

A main purpose of this epistle can be found in verse 13 in Chapter 5: “*These things I have written ... that you may know you have eternal life*”. In John’s time Gnostic heresies were creeping into the Church, some of which we may be familiar with in our modern times and some we may not. His answer to Gnostic or Ascetic heresies helps us in modern times to clarify who we are in Jesus Christ. Although not in spiritual bodies, we have already commenced living our eternal life; it is not something we are to hope to have someday.

In verse 3 of chapter 2 we read “*Beloved, now we are the children of God ...*”. There is the mistaken belief today in God’s Church that some tend to think we are *becoming* children of God; that we are only begotten and not fully developed, or “made it”, and that we need to be born again into the family to be full children. John 2:3 corrects this mistaken belief. Although such a distinction between now and the future, seems unimportant at one level, it can become an underlying problematic issue. As much as God’s Church recognizes that God’s purpose for mankind is to become part of the very God Family, we fail to truly accept that an embryonic stage which, the begotten believer is at is just as much a child of God as he will ever be. Albeit it has not yet been revealed what we shall be in spiritual body—but is the human embryo less of a person than those who have been born? If we don’t think so, our anti-abortion argument loses its power, for life begins at conception.

If we don’t allow John’s words to help us with these things, we are subject to possible confusion over our lives in Christ. In the Church of God there is apprehension in the ministry to explicitly express who we are in Jesus Christ so as not to potentially influence the believer to think of himself more than he ought, but this kind of sincerity should never be a substitute for the Truth.

It is often stated that Christians are “*sinners who are overcoming*”. Although such a statement appears to be a fair assessment of us as believers, it also has some potential for problems. Those in the Church who believe in God and obey Him are always contrasted to sinners, never likened to sinners in any way in the New Testament scriptures. Sinners are unsaved, and although we do and will sin as John makes it clear in Chapter 1:8, we are not to assume this defines our status before God. John’s epistle addresses this erroneous idea also. We know that a believer is a new creature in Christ, and John makes it clear what that means “*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin.*” (3:3-5). See chapter 3, question 1.

The epistle of John should give us comfort, for his words remind us that we may continue to abide in Christ confidently with the certainties we have been given.

Chapter 1

1. How can we relate verses 1 and 2 with Job 42:5?

The known senses of touch, hearing and seeing are all covered here expressing all that John and the other apostles experienced in Jesus Christ. Nothing is left out. The apostles fully experienced the expression of God the Father in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the perfect expression of God and of what God wants man to be. This expression of life was revealed (manifested) to the apostles.

Even Job, of whom the Lord said there was none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright individual (Job 1:8), recognized that he only heard of the Lord by hearing, but now can 'see' Him with greater ability at the end of his experience. Job has greater revelation of God through experience, and John is essentially saying the same thing here.

We sometimes think the apostles had an advantage over us, for we were born twenty centuries too late. They had the physical advantage, but that is not what we should emphasize. In verse 2 the emphasis is the life that was manifested to the apostles. It is not the physical nearness to Jesus Christ that is being expressed here, but the spiritual nearness. The message in verse 3 is that his readers would also have fellowship with them in the same spiritual nearness.

2. Verse 4. What are 'these things' he writes? Why would these things make their joy full?

These things are what he had just written, but also the book as a whole. In the subsequent verse he writes how sin limits their joy, and that it must be dealt with properly so that their joy may be full.

There is nothing that John wanted to withhold from those who did not see or touch Christ in the flesh that would limit their fellowship (experience) with Jesus Christ. He is declaring it to them (verse 3). The heart of a true minister is to work towards his fellow Christians to fully experience Christ in their lives.

What we want is as close a relationship with Christ and God the Father as possible, because joy is the product of active fellowship with God. We should want it for others also if we love the brethren.

3. What does it mean to walk in darkness? Is there a connection to this and saying we have no sin (verse 8)? What does it mean for a Christian to “have sin” here? Is this different from a non Christian that has sin?

We need to know our true condition. If our condition is poor it is best to know it as such. If our condition is poor and is hidden from us, we are, in fact, in the darkness.

The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body is also full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, the whole body will be full of light, as when then the bright shining of a lamp gives you light. – Luke 11:34-36

Jesus Christ is telling us to take heed (be careful). The darkness tends to sneak up on us. This is about perception of the self and of others.

Walking in the light is where Jesus Christ dwells. If we walk in the light we see our true condition and we are acknowledging (confessing) our true condition to Jesus Christ. We are not to hide our sins from Him.

4. Verse 8. What are some examples of self deception in the Bible? What is the nature of self deception that the Christian needs to watch out for?

All believers will tell you they are not perfect, all will say they have sinned and fallen short in some way or another. Even the most self righteous Pharisee will tell you that. This is not the whole story, and we tend to overlook the warning here from John.

Jesus Christ gave us a good example in Luke 18, which is the story of the tax collector and the Pharisee who went to pray. The lesson is not to trust in our own righteousness, and despise the ignorance of others. The Pharisee believed he had no sin, *at least not in respect to others.*

This has been a problem in the Church of God, which is not surprising as Christ would have no need to warn us if it were not possible. When a mind is opened to understating historical truths about God’s true Church, the Holy Days, and the Sabbath, it is tempting after a time to begin to trust in ourselves having known the truth and therefore differentiate ourselves from deceived ‘sinners’ who have not known the truth—enter the modern day Pharisee.

Trusting in oneself is not trusting in Christ anymore. When we do this His words are not in us as it can no longer be our guide to righteousness. All righteousness acceptable to God comes from God only; it is imputed on us by our identification with His Son. It has no origin in us. We cannot add it, or make ourselves more righteous. All the genetics of God comes from his implanted word and our role is to nurture the seed (implanted word) by obeying and submitting to God. When

nurtured, the seed grows and our mind changes to the way God thinks and loves, which is acceptable to Him.

James also warns us of self deceptive thinking:

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. – James 1:23, 24

If we do not feel guilt of the sins we have, we are lying to ourselves.

Jesus Christ warned us to be careful that the darkness does not overtake us. We will think the darkness is light! Paul warns Timothy of such a special case:

... correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that then may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. – 2 Tim. 25, 26

A great deception occurs when the believers who were once enlightened, unwittingly for any number of reasons, begin to back an agenda that they believe is for the good of the Church, believing they are serving God. Division and strife are symptoms that surround them, and because of their mindset, they can be triggered to act by the devil in opportune times.

Chapter 2

1. Verse 1. What are `these things' he writes that they may not sin? Why would John write 'these things I write to you that you may not sin'?

These things are what he just wrote. After writing essentially that Christians do sin, he didn't want to leave room for the suggestion that sinning is inevitable, and therefore, why should we try to avoid it? He is essentially clarifying the intent of his remarks.

2. John mentions that we are to abide in Him and that the word is to abide in us numerous times. What does it mean to abide in Christ? See also John 14:4, 7.

When we were baptized we were buried with Jesus Christ, our old self died, and, therefore, no longer lives. From God's reckoning, He identifies the believer with Christ in His death, and also been raised with Him in His resurrection. God considers the person as having died and risen with Christ.

Christ sits at heavenly places, so we must also set our mind on heavenly things and not on earthly things. In Ephesians 2, we know that we are in Christ and, therefore, risen together with Him to the right hand of the Father.

- We have identified with Christ in His burial.
- We have identified with Christ in His resurrection (not in part, but the whole).
- Therefore to abide in Him *is our continued identification with Him!*

God abides in the believer because He continues to see the believer identifying with His son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ does not seem to make a major theological distinction between abiding in Him, and Him abiding in us: “*Abide in Me, and I in you ...*” – John 15:4.

In verses 3 to 11, John lays out what it is to abide in Him:

- 2:3-4 We identify with Him by keeping His Commandments. These are His commandments, not just a set of external rules to obey.
- 2:5 We know we are in Him (continued identification, continued believing) and the seed which is His implanted Word is continually nurtured, and comes to maturity (perfected). The mind is transformed and the fruits of change are seen.
- 2:6 Walk as Christ did is a way of identifying with Christ.
- 2:7-11 We love the brethren. This means helping others at a real cost to ourselves which is to “lay down” our lives so that others can benefit. The love of the brethren is the love that may cost you. It must not be interpreted as anything less.

Identification of a Living Being equates to having a relationship with that person. A relationship that continues leads to a continued learning about each other. With God we learn about His desires, His wants, His very nature. We take these traits on in the process.

The commandment is to believe in Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23). This means a continual subjection to His Will. Believing causes a mind change in the believer, as over time he realizes that Christ is his life, and his life becomes full knowing he is worthwhile having Jesus as Savior. The believer, therefore, does not have need of other reasons to be righteous. He is righteous because he believes and follows Jesus Christ.

Righteousness only comes from God, God imputes righteousness on the believer because he believes in Jesus Christ. Believing for us is to keep His commandments and continue to identify with Jesus Christ.

“He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him “Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered and said to him, If anyone loves Me, he will keep my word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.” - John 14:21-23

3. In reference to verses 7 to 11, how is it that if a Christian loves his brother there is no cause for stumbling?

The ability to love your brother comes from God.

It is the culmination of His commandments in one: the mind that has matured in Christ, by the implanted word that has been nourished and cultivated to think as God thinks.

What we think controls our thoughts and emotions, and no doubt gives the ability to love fellow Christians in any circumstances. Love of the brethren opposes conventional wisdom, which may cause us to stumble. It overcomes the petty needs to correct wrongs, hold grudges, despite all the convincing reasons that we should. As the selfish carnal nature loses control over the thoughts of a believer, there ultimately will no longer be a cause to stumble.

4. Does anyone who leaves a Church congregation not of the true faith (verse 19)?

Experience tells us that many need to leave congregations or churches for reasons beyond their control. The best we can interpret John is that one of the evidences of a true Christian is seeing the desire to be with the people of God. When people share in the same divine nature, they are compelled to enjoy fellowship and share with them.

We have seen some leave the fellowship of God’s people out of matters of principle, and they do so feeling little or no loss of what they had with the Church they left. This is often a symptom of what John is talking about here.

5. Why would John advise that they do not need anyone to teach them in verse 27? What role do teachers have? What does this scripture have to say to the Church of God today who follow various leaders claiming revelation and teaching authority above others?

In verse 27 it is the anointing that teaches. It is the implanted word (all the genetics of God, His Holy Spirit) that teaches the pure truth that actually transforms minds to think like God. We are His workmanship (Eph. 2:10), and only His workmanship. No other person or being can teach you holiness, for there is nothing else holy. To be holy is to think holy. Verse 29 reflects this fact. Those begotten of Him have all the genetics of God to learn to practice righteousness.

What do teachers (ministers, apostles) do? They bring to attention to the believer what is already in them. To facilitate what the Holy Spirit intends to do.

Special notice should be given to this verse for some believers in these modern times. John wrote this to combat false teachers who claimed it was through them primarily, or even exclusively, that they may receive revelation. It was likely either implicit or explicitly taught that by supporting them they are only truly serving God. Although all or most of the Church of God today would not think of themselves following a man in this way, there are many that do, and in the thousands.

At one time the Worldwide Church of God felt it was the only organized and unique organization that Christ had ordained for preaching the gospel. Regretfully, the leaders of this organization began to proclaim that the Church must be structured in hierarchal form, with a single man at the top, with that man claiming apostleship, and that all revelation subsequently came through him.

Jesus Christ was tempted, and the Church has always been tempted to accelerate growth by various means outside of God's will. Jesus was tempted by Satan to use sensationalism (Luke 4:9-12). The early Church was tempted to compromise on the truth of the gospel by requiring Gentile converts to submit to circumcision. This would have brought temporary peace to the Church, but peace or growth at the expense of the truth would have led to disastrous results. The Worldwide Church of God gave in to the temptation of following human desire for control. It catered to mankind's willingness to give up their liberties for the security man offers. Often we want strong self assured people to take care of us, and there is security in the hierarchal government with a strong leader. The self assured persona in the leadership the Worldwide Church of God lured many into a false sense of security. The subsequent apostasy of that organization was inevitable.

Since then, various groups headed by individuals that believed in the hierarchal style of Church government continue to claim a lineage from the Worldwide Church of God and are alone the anointed of God to proclaim the gospel. Included in their message is that other groups are "splinter" organizations and not part of the body of Christ, which they claim is their own organization. Such claims are deceptive and are exposed in verse 27. Each of us have a personal anointing and connection to Jesus Christ and will not be judged according to what organizational allegiances we have.

Chapter 3

1. How do we reconcile verses 6 and 9 in Chapter 3, with verses 8 to 10 in Chapter 1?

1:8 is emphatic that the Christian is still dealing with sin. We only have a limited appreciation of the extent we fall short. Sin can be found from the mere thought to

the very action, not to mention sins of omission. John is countering the idea that just because we do not feel guilty of sin, that there is no reason to suspect one is entirely sinless. 1:10 is a more serious charge, where the believer decides for himself what sin is and what it is not, putting aside God's revelation of sin.

John's words in chapter one are often used as a proof text that Christians are still sinners. The objective of this interpretation is to prevent a Christians' possible belief they are no longer accountable, or have a kind of immunity that sin won't stick to them. It is based on the idea that if we believe we are sinners before God we will remain humble. At first glance this would seem to be a prudent measure, but we should examine John's intent more closely to see if this is his thinking also, as this idea appears to be contradicted in 3:6-9.

John is not defining what a Christian is before God. He is making a point that we should keep our walk in perspective and not to overlook the carnal nature and our limited capacity in the knowledge of sin. Verses 1:5-10 are crucial for *daily* Christian living, as they are basic principles in our walk with God. Openness to God and integrity is paramount for continued success.

In Chapter 3, however, we are told Christians do not sin. Here John is speaking of how God sees His children. As we abide in Christ we are by definition sinless, as there is no sin in Jesus Christ (3:5). Paul gave us help in Romans:

“But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me” – Rom. 7:17

If verse 1:7 is active in the believer, then Chapter 3 defines the state of the believer before God.

Note on Chapter 3:6-9

This passage of scripture is very powerful for those who understand it. They are an expression of Christ's total atoning power. Unfortunately, various interpretations of these scriptures that have been presented by expositors and preachers diminish the power of these verses on those who listen to them.

If abiding in Christ means that we do not sin, then this seems to contradict personal experience since genuine Christians do indeed sin. As a resolution, some explain that a Christian does not habitually sin, but this is not only contrary to experience, but leaves us to wonder to what extent does sin become habitual and when it is considered not. Advocates of this interpretation support it in terms of the Greek present text that can read *“keep on sinning”*. However, this approach is beset with problems, and competent Greek scholars do not agree with the “tense solution”. It is a mistake to interpret these verses to say that Christians who do not habitually sin is what is being inferred by John as it takes away the power of what is being said about the new creature in Christ.

"... it is not surprising that commentators have attempted to water down John's teaching to refer merely to the believer's freedom from habitual sin. But we must not misinterpret the text for pastoral reasons. Properly interpreted, the text remains a source of comfort."³⁶

Another interpretation is that we cannot abide in Christ without interruption. That is, when we are sinless we abide, and when we sin we do not abide. Such an idea equates to the belief that the new creature in Christ exists, and then does not exist, only to exist again upon repentance. Again, Paul helps us in understanding the new life:

"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" – Rom. 7:17

The reason why all who are begotten of God do not sin is because a sinless Parent has begotten them. The Christian sins because he has a sinful human nature, but the new life he has is sinless, and is hidden in Christ.

Any definition of a Christian should not include that they are sinners, either overcoming or in transition. Such a definition takes away what Christ has done. The Christian must know who he is in Christ to be successful. The sinner has already died, and the new life of a Christian has begun.

3. Verse 16: What does it mean to lay down your life for the brethren? Why would we do that?

Laying one's life down for another is a continual self-sacrificing love, as the present tense Greek suggests here. It may ultimately include dying in another person's place in Christ's service.

It is important to contemplate what self-sacrificing love is. Laying down one's own life may mean foregoing your own wants and needs so that others may have theirs fulfilled. The carnal mind insists on asserting its own rights, holds on to matters of principle (I deserve therefore I get), which is the opposite of a self-sacrificing love emphasized in verse 17 to 19; only Christ's indwelling Spirit can lead us in the path of understanding and the practice of this kind of love.

Laying down one's own life is not getting in the way of others so that they can be successful and encouraged even though they may not be as deserving as you or as good as you. It means protecting your brother and sister from harm.

"Most people associate Christianity with the command to love, and so they think that they know all about Christianity when they have understood its teaching in terms of their own concept of love. John

³⁶ (Marshall), p.187.

found it necessary to explain clearly to his readers what he meant by love . . .³⁷

4. Refer to verses 7 and 10. Many people of the world exhibit righteous behavior. Does that mean they are righteous? Where does righteousness come from?

We must define first what righteousness is. There are two qualifiers in these verses that define for us what is righteous, and this is important as unbelievers can exhibit very moral and charitable behavior.

“... *just as He is righteous*” – 3:7 is our first qualifier. The righteousness of God is a manifestation of His love. For us to identify righteousness in a believer we must see the love of God. The only righteousness that God recognizes is the righteousness of His son, and it is imputed on us who believe and identify with His son.

The second qualifier is that righteous behavior can be seen in brotherly love (3:10). Brotherly love is the love that costs, and again is the love that only comes from God, cultivated and brought to open fruition in the believer.

Chapter 4

1. Verse 5: what is the nature of speaking “*as of the World*”?

In verse 1, John is referring to false prophets (teachers). When they communicate, they speak of good wholesome things, and about a means to salvation. Their message is different from true teachers because within their message the means to acquire these same things is different. This includes the means to have Jesus Christ, the means to be acceptable to God and the means by which we become righteous and blessed.

The world hears them because their message appeals to the carnal mind, and like-minded people will flock together. All want to become justified before God, but on their own terms and schedule. False teaching gives them the right to do so.

The Church of God is not immune to both producing worldly teachers and their followers. In 2 Peter 2:18-19, Peter pictures members who have gone astray, preaching liberty to their hearer, but in reality they are alluring others by giving them the right to salvation in what feels right to them. This equates to “... *denying the Lord that bought them* ...” (2 Peter 2:1), i.e. denying how righteousness comes by Jesus Christ).

2. Relate Romans 8:14 to 1 John 4

³⁷ (Marshall), p. 192.

There is only one way to escape the spirit of error: to always be lead by the Spirit of God. Romans 8:14 explicitly states that those who are lead by the Spirit of God are sons of God. All who are not lead by the Spirit of God will inevitably fall victim to believing falsehood, no matter how wise or biblically astute they are. The reason is this: that the spirit of error is powerful and continually available.

The spirit of error finds it strength because it is backed by demonic spirits with superior intellect and they know what appeals to carnal thinking. It cannot be defeated by human will alone.

Throughout this chapter John identifies elements of the true believer who is lead by the Spirit of God. Those who are lead by the Spirit overcome the power of the spirit of error because they depend on the far greater power of God (v4); they have the spiritual gift of discernment to know true teachers (v6); they know what love is and have cultivated love in their lives, and know the source of love (v 7-21), and they are confident in their relationship to God (v17-19).

3. Why is it that one who does not love does not know God?

“All of His activity is a loving activity. If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature, is – to love.”³⁸

If we are not motivated by love in all of our activity, which starts in the mind, we cannot relate to Him. We will end up imputing a wrong kind of motivation on God. We will believe that God thinks and cares the way we think, and what is just for me is just for God.

See question 5 below.

4. How is it that the love of God is manifested toward mankind by sending His only begotten Son for our salvation (verse 9, 10)?

Love was the motivation behind sending his only begotten Son that we might live. What John is saying is that *there is no other possible reason for God to send His son*. All other reasons do not make it worthwhile. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son ...*” – John 3:16. It is not a casual love, but a love that costs. No other reason is offered, or believable.

“*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners (i.e. not worthwhile), Christ died for us.*”- Romans 5:8

4:10: Neither did we love God for Him to send His Son.

³⁸ (Dodd), p. 110.

4:11: He loved those who are unworthy. Therefore, there is no excuse not to love one another. To love as God loves includes loving the deserving and undeserving, the acceptable and unacceptable.

5. What does it mean when love is perfected in an individual?

It means everything. Therefore, we are only capable of only partially answering the question.

When one loves, it means God's life, all that He is, is manifested in the believer, and so is the knowledge of what it means to love, therefore, God becomes known to him (v7-8).

In verse 12, John reminds us that no one has seen God at any time, then immediately discusses the matter of loving one another, which is the perfection of love in a believer. This is repeated in verse 20, in the sense that it concludes the passage of verses starting in verse 11.

John is essentially saying that it is easier to love someone who we can see, than it is to love someone we cannot see.

Verses 17-18 also point to an important life manifestation of love perfected; the defeat of fear.

Mankind fears all kinds of things (losses mostly). Fear is the cause of anxiety and phobias. If a person's self worth is tied to anything that limits an honest expression of himself, the love of God is by no means perfected in that person. This is a self love.

“Fear and pretense usually go together. ... But when our hearts are confident toward God, there is no need for us to pretend, either to God or to other people. A Christian who lacks confidence with God will also lack confidence with God's people. Part of the torment that fear generates is the constant worry, “How much do others really know about me?” But when we have confidence with God, this fear is gone, and we can face both God and men without worry.”³⁹

If you love God, your love is placed in the right place. You love a perfect and holy Being.

Why should we not fear in the Day of Judgment? Perhaps we answer this by the question, *how does love judge one who loves?*

³⁹ (Wiersbe), p. 522

Doubt about salvation points out to us that we have not been perfected in love. Only abiding in love do we have secure confidence in the standing before Him in the day of judgment, for “... *as He is, so are we ...*” – (4:17). This is the Oneness that Christ talks about in the gospels.

When love is being perfected in a Christian, there is a wonderful reassurance that John wants us to realize. If we are one with God, God intends that we know it! God is not leaving something like our salvation to guesswork, hopefulness, or any other mental uncertainty. There is hope for what lies ahead for us in the future, but it is not a hope about our standing in Christ.

Chapter 5

Brief Exposition:

5:1-3a These are some of the clearest statements in scripture. These are some of the clearest definitions of what is a Christian. It is opposite of a definition that implies Christians are sinners.

We love who He has begotten because we are begotten. We see the value He has put in us, the same value as God put in others. If I am worthwhile to Him and love Him for it in return, and He has declared you worthwhile, therefore, I love you also.

And, therefore, I have willingness to make sacrifices for the brethren so they can be successful in their walk and experience as fellow Christians. How we relate to others is crucial.

It is God’s command to love the brethren and the measure of our obedience is also. Reciprocation by association. It is proof of our identity as Christians.

5:3b-5 His commandments are not burdensome, which implies obedience should be a joy. Reluctant, grudging obedience also indicates that there is something wrong or there is immaturity. They would be burdensome if we did not have the kind of faith that overcomes the world, we would have difficulty keeping His commandments. Breaking His commandments is a false way of fulfilling needs, the right way of fulfilling needs is believing God will fill them.

Christians live in the real world and are beset with obstacles; those who have the Divine nature indwelling, and in control of them, will not disobey God, despite opposition. The world tries to make His

commandments look and feel burdensome, but this does not appeal to the divine nature.

5:6-10 The words inclusive and between “*in heaven*” and “*on earth*” are not in early manuscripts.

The Holy Spirit testified of Jesus’ identity at His baptism. The Spirit witnessed through the apostles’ teaching. There was the water at Jesus’ baptism (Matt. 3:13-17), and there was the blood of His crucifixion with the many physical events that surrounded it (the earthquake, the veil torn and supernatural darkness).

We receive the witness of men. We tend to believe what is being told to us. We trust our employers to pay us, we trust doctors, we trust institutions, so why would we not trust God whose witness is greater?

The Spirit bears witness to believers regularly. We should have an inner confidence that we belong to Him.

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...” – Rom. 8:15,16

So many in the professing Christian world we see on television are trying to “work up” the emotion and feeling of belonging. This should not be for the true believer. Also, a true believer will feel at home with God’s people anywhere. Many lament that God’s people are divided and fractured, but the Witness is alive and we should naturally find ourselves with greater unity than we might think.

5:11-13 John is not writing these things to evangelize, he is writing to give them assurance. The assurance is a not a promise of eternal life, it is that we already have eternal life! Those who have trouble with this naturally lack the assurance of their life in Christ. John is giving them the assurance they need. Although we may have doubts about God’s will in various matters, there is no place for the kind of uncertainty of who we are in Christ.

5:14-15 Our prayers should be of the kind that reflect the inner confidence we now have in Christ. Again, it is His Spirit that witnesses to our spirit that we are asking according to His will. We should pray to

help us find obedience in time of need, just as Christ prayed for strength in obedience.

5:16 We should not only be concerned about our own obedience, but concerned for the obedience of others. Prayer is a resource to obtain help for brethren who are back sliding.

5:18 Our behavior will be in harmony with what we believe ourselves to be, which is how one "*keeps himself*".

II John

1. Is it possible to command someone to love (v 5)? Why does John remind the elect lady of this here?

This is not the first time we have encountered this commandment in the Bible. Our answer is yes, but until we understand what Christian love truly is are we able to obey this commandment.

Christian love is the act of the will, and although our emotions can be involved, emotions are not what vindicate true acts of love. Christian love is the love that costs, it comes from the inner self to serve others we do not even like. Such ability has its source only from God, and it is a gift we are commanded to cultivate.

God loves those whose actions he does not love, yet He loved enough to offer His Son to pay the price of their actions. God's will that none should perish but have eternal life is born out of God's capacity to love, and that capacity to love we are commanded to share.

John pleads (beseech) with the elect lady that her church love one another. The reason? *"For many deceivers have gone out into the world ..."* – 7. It would seem John believed strongly that in loving one another it provided a great defense against believing false teachers and their doctrine.

When people leave churches over various uncertain teachings, even of the most inconsequential, it is not because they love the brethren so much, it is because they do not love the brethren. Love never fails; it is more powerful than the demonic forces behind falsehood.

2. What does it mean when somebody 'transgresses' in verse 9?

Some Bible margins read "goes ahead". This may mean going on the limits of the Word of God and adding to it. In another sense, "to run ahead too far, beyond prescribed limitations". What John may be referring to here is a kind of false progress. The thinking is that some teachers are attractive because of their modern thinking that abandons old, fundamentalist views of the truth.

III John

This epistle can be described as one about leadership. From experience we know that how leaders live and behave is of critical importance: their lives affect the lives of the whole church. Three leaders are seen in this epistle, two were godly and one was a troublemaker.

John wrote to Gaius, and called him beloved four times in this short epistle. Apparently Gaius and John were very close friends in the Truth, and their bond was Christ. These kinds of relationships are valuable in the Church of God as they are a tremendous source of mutual benefit. For many elders, the Christian walk can be a lonely experience.

1. What does it mean in verse 7 when John says “ ... *taking nothing from the Gentiles.*” ?

Those that Gaius sent forth in the manner worthy of God were directed not to solicit help from the unsaved. This must be a consideration when offerings are being collected for a church as we are not to ask anything from unbelievers. For John to make mention of this fact it would indicate there were a number of teachers proclaiming their ideas of Christianity while also soliciting money from those they encountered.

When the work of God is self sufficient and not needful of outside support it is a testimony to unbelievers. We are not given to make Christianity to cheap and commercialized.

2. What can we learn from the situation that existed because of Diotrephes?

Evidently, a high authoritative position in the Church or congregation does not necessarily always come about according to spiritual maturity. There is no mention of Diotrephes spreading any false doctrine. What was false about Diotrephes was his motivation, and it was his motivation that revealed he was not of God.

Diotrephes had authority, demonstrated by his ability to cast brethren out of the congregation (v10). Being able to cast others out means that the some in the congregation had given him that authority. Divisive leaders often gather around themselves a clique that would help him oppose opposition.

He apparently desired recognition so much that he turned away a message from John who was an apostle. Accusing and criticizing are often a techniques to elevate oneself over another.

It is not uncommon to find mini-Diotrephes who have control problems, more often to a lesser degree. The need for control is not of God. Many who have experienced

being under this kind of leadership have over compensated. Some groups have determined not to have any minister in their midst.

The solution to dealing with divisive leaders in the church is very simple. Do not follow them (v11). This solution must be followed no matter what sense of loyalty or other reasons we may have that we may wish to continue to follow them.

Jude

1. What is the way of Cain?

We are familiar with the story of Cain who murdered his brother Abel. In the case of Jude's interest, he probably has in mind the words spoken by the Lord to Cain in Genesis 4:6-7 prior to Abel's murder.

Cain became angry and his countenance fell (turned his face away from the Lord) because the Lord did not respect Cain and his offering. This may have had something to do with Cain's lack of sacrifice in his offering. Abel sacrificed his firstborn of his flock, which must have been a costly sum to give up. Nevertheless, it would appear that Cain had expectations from the Lord, that not only did not come about, but the Lord rejected his very attempt, which Cain took offense to.

We are to be as living sacrifices to God. In the context that is given by Jude, perhaps his concern is when our expectations of God do not come to fruition because of our sometimes lack of personal sacrifice, we too would become rebellious, and turn our malcontent on to elders and other leaders who appear, like Abel, more at peace with the Lord, and are offering instruction to them to do better.

For certain however, Cain was instructed by God in the matter, taught him what was and wasn't acceptable behavior. In the end, Cain rejected God's word, apparently feeling no concern for judgment, as do those who Jude has in mind here, and they respond in brutish fashion when they do not get their way (v 10).

2. What was the error of Balaam?

Perhaps the error of Balaam is the classic story of beginning well and ending poorly. Balaam's downfall was the desire for money and an openness to sensuality. Balaam was a teacher of God's people, who turned against them, because a foreign king offered him a handsome sum to do so. Balaam's curse was advising Israel to engage in orgies and sensuality with the foreign women of Midian.

What is interesting about Balaam is that first he fought off the temptation and refused the king's wishes.

3. What was the rebellion of Korah?

"Now Korah ... took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"" - Num. 16:1-4

Korah took the teaching from Exodus 19:6 that the priesthood belongs to all believers, and interprets it in a way that challenges any few individuals should be allowed the kind of authority Moses and Aaron had. Like the angels in verse 6, Korah and his companions of like mind, were unhappy living under the authority of another.

The Church of God today, has an authority structure that is modeled after the family. The Korahs (in type today) seek to level those in authority by various challenges, normally with the idea that, as did Korah, that the individuals in authority are not sufficiently special (they have imperfections), or of sufficient understanding to instruct them.

4. What does it mean to be looking for the mercy of Jesus Christ.

It means looking into the grace of God. It means looking to find who we can forgive, who can we consider that needs help, where can we forgo our own needs and wants so that others may have a chance to be enabled and be successful. It means looking into what we may be depending on that is not of Christ and properly putting it in the proper perspective.

Notes on Jude

There is a significant introductory word in Jude: contend (v3).

If we are encouraged to contend for the faith, we deduce that there is effort required of us to maintain and teach it, and oppose all efforts that would try to corrupt the gospel message.

Contending for the faith that was delivered to the Apostles should be interpreted properly so that we do not become unbalanced.

In zealous contending for the faith, some have overemphasized what differentiates the Church of God from the rest of Christianity and interpret that as contending for the faith. It should be understood also that much of the gospel message that needs contending for is identical to the teaching of mainstream Christianity. The Church should not be speculative of a message or teaching that sounds "Pentecostal".

Contending for the faith should not shun the possibilities for new understating and insights to the Gospel.

Revelation

In any study of the Book of Revelation, it is important to recognize that Jesus Christ is its subject, and He is the Great Revealer.

This study of Revelation is not to be considered an expository examination of this book. We have seen various published pieces of literature in Church of God circles that are offered to explain Revelation, and this study does not intend to explain this book in the manner they have claimed. It is offered as a study, primarily presented in question and answer format as they were conducted on the Sabbath at the Chicagoland Church of God in 2004. The questions were designed for us to think about the message of Revelation, and hopefully provide some fresh insights that may be revealed to us by Jesus Christ.

The first scripture of Revelation should be considered before a study is commenced. 1:1 advises that the message of Revelation is only for His servants in regarding the things that must take place. The understanding of Revelation will come only to God's true servants. God has many worshippers, but His true servants are few.

A chronological chart is offered for discussion, to at least provide some framework for the bible student for which God's people all are.

The study was conducted under the spirit of helpfulness, not controversy. The commandment to love our brothers and sisters will in no way take second place to winning a scriptural debate over the message that the Book of Revelation contains, which has been debated extensively.

*Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried;
but the wicked shall do wickedly:
and none of the wicked shall understand;
but the wise shall understand. -Daniel 12:10*

Chapter 1

1. What does “revelation” mean in verse 1?

The Greek for revelation is *Apokalupsis*. This means to uncover and unveil, or to make known something. What is being presented in Revelation is something one cannot uncover on one's own. The book is introduced as The Revelation as it means there is something that God wants us to know. Note that it is not only the Revelation from Jesus Christ, but also the revelation of Jesus Christ from God. He is the central focus.

2. Who gave the Revelation?

God (The Father) gave it to Jesus Christ.

3. From whom did John receive the Revelation? What could it mean in that He “signified” it through His angel?

John received the revelation from His angel. Signified means the angel made symbols of the message.

4. What is the Book of Revelation?

The Book of Revelation can be called several things, however, it is written in a manner that resembles an epistle. This is an epistle from John to the seven Churches. In verse 4 we read ‘John, to the seven Churches in Asia’, along with the common salutations that are found in all the epistles in the New Testament. The book also closes with a message from John in a manner similar to other epistles

It is a book of destiny. In chapter 1:19, John is told to write also the things that shall be hereafter. A book of Destiny not only gives us a look into the future, but of history as well.

5. Who was the book sent to?

To His Servants – John – The Seven Churches in Asia Minor (v4)

6. In verse 4, who are (is) the seven Spirits?

Seven in The Bible means Completeness. Here the seven Spirits before His Throne represent all the fullness of the Holy Spirit – These Spirits should not be confused with Angels, as grace comes from God only.

7. How should verse 6 really read?

This verse should be read in the future tense. The original texts appear to omit 'hath' from this verse. The Septuagint reads 'a Royal Priesthood', and no priesthood existed at this time.

8. Verse 8 ... What is Alpha? What is Omega?

First and last letters of the Greek alphabet – He is the Beginning and End of all there is.

Which is, and Which was ... suggests He is unchangeable and eternal.

9. Verse 8 What does “Almighty” mean anyway?

All Controller – the All Ruler Possessing ALL Power – Omnipotent – can do anything—everything is Subject to Him. Let us, therefore, consider Him as a “Friend in high places”.

10. Where is the Island of Patmos? Why was John there?

Only 40 miles out at sea from the City of Ephesus, 10 miles long, and 6 miles wide. It sat in a group of Islands called Sporades, which were isolated and barren. John was there for 'Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ' (verse 9). This suggests, but does not explicitly state that he was banished to Patmos.

11. In verse 10, In the Spirit?

The phrase 'in the Spirit' in Revelation is the Spirit taking him to a specific point or place where he may receive a vision. See 4:2, 17:3 and 21:10.

12. Verse 10: “... on the Lord's day ...” What day is he referring to?

The Day of the Lord.

13. What is the significance of the description of the Son of Man in verses 13 to 16?

Verse 13: This garment goes down to His feet. This is the robe of prophets, priests and kings and princesses. It symbolizes the prophetic, priestly, and kingly ministry of Jesus Christ. The golden band about His chest is something like the breastplate the high priest had on (Ex.28.4; 39.29).

Verse 14: His hair was white, perhaps signifying purity.

Verse 14: Eyes of flaming fire – penetrating power, a piercing capability, able to see in the innermost places and in the dark. (See Hebrews 4:13)

Verse 15: His feet like fine brass – perhaps signifying strength and perseverance. He had a voice like the sound of many waters. Niagara Falls comes to mind. What John hears are many voices – Authority (full spectrum from comfort to rebuke), and this sounds like many waters.

Verse 16: Two Edged Sword – Penetrating power of the Word – Hebrews 4:12

See also Daniel 10:5, 6 for a similar description.

14. What is significant about verse 19?

John is told to write three things. These three things give us the outline of the Revelation. He has seen the glorified Christ. He is to write about the things that are: that is the condition of the Churches, and perhaps the world. He is to write the things that shall be hereafter: that is, the consummation of world history.

Throughout the book, John reports what he sees and hears. He does not give interpretation, and he writes things in the order he receives them, and does not worry about historical order.

Chapter 2

1. In verses 7, 11, 17 and 29 to whom are these messages to the Churches for? What does it mean to have an ear?

Although each Church is given a single message, these verses say to ANYONE who has an ear to hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. Note that the word Church is plural! Anyone!!

2. In verse 4 what is “their First Love” and “first works” in verse 5?

Read verses 3 and 4. This Church at Ephesus is still vigilant, laboring for God, and has not grown weary. Their first love may very well be their love for one another (refer to John 13:35). Perhaps their first works is to love one another before working for God! Doctrinal purity is not the greatest desire of Jesus Christ; it is the love of one another.

3. Verse 6 Who are the Nicolaitans?

Nobody really knows.

4. Verse 9 is a little mysterious. What do we know of it?

This is addressed to the Church at Smyrna, where there lived many Jews and many influential Jewish people as well. Smyrna severely persecuted the Church. Jews

(professing) who persecuted the Church are not Jews to God but (to His mind) are from the Synagogue of Satan.

5. In verse 14, what is the Doctrine of Balaam? Did they all at the Church of Pergamos have this doctrine?

The story of Balaam can be found in Numbers 22, 23, 24 and 25. Balak, a Moabite king reigning adjacent to Palestine, feared Israel. Balak asked Balaam to curse Israel. At first Balaam refused to curse Israel, and instead blessed Israel. Then Balaam came up with a plan. He would corrupt Israel by suggesting Moabite girls seduce Israel's men to intermarry and to lead them to worship idolatrous gods. So Balak got his curse – used a different way instead – use of fornication – getting around the law. Balaam got Israel to curse themselves.

When Balaam asked God for permission to go, God turned him down. But Balak insisted, promising him even greater rewards and honor. So Balaam went back to God. One answer from God should have been enough, but not for self-willed Balaam. When God saw his perversity, He told him to get up and go. Quickly he saddled the donkey and away he went. He should have realized that this was simply God's permissive will and he wouldn't be able to curse them if he went twenty times and tried twenty times. How like Balaam, are people today! See, the doctrine of Balaam. Go ahead anyway. Do it your way. They say, "Well, God has blessed us. It must be alright."

The Doctrine of Balaam may be best described in the shortest terms as duplicity in heart. Balaam knew what the Lord wanted, but yet still asked if he could go.

6. What is the Doctrine of the Nicolaitans?

Anti - Law – A system of breaking God's laws. Compromise: The once saved always saved, for example.

7. In verse 20, who is Jezebel?

Jezebel was a patroness of Baal Worship, which is idolatry.

She was a real person – a prophetess who was given time to repent!! She was a believer! She seduced the Church to commit fornication with the World.

In the New Testament, Jezebel's name is used symbolically as a false prophetess who seeks to lure Christians into idolatrous practices. The story of Jezebel is found in 1 Kings 16, 18, 19, 21, and 2 Kings 9.

8. In verse 25, the Church at Thyatira is told by the Lord to hold fast till "I come". Does this suggest the Church of Thyatira exists today? Or are there many "comings" of the Lord?

There are many comings of the Lord. It is any time the Lord gives, or comes, in Judgment. The day of the Lord is any day of divine visitation. God has intervened and brought both destruction and deliverance many times in the past, and each divine act was a "day of the Lord". There is the "great and terrible day of the Lord" (eschatological day of the Lord) and this final day lies future. Other previous forerunners of the day of the Lord did not fulfill the promise of divine retribution of the ungodly.

9. In verse 28, what is the morning star?

We learn in Revelation 22:16 that Jesus Christ is the morning star.

First star to arise is the morning star – brightest?

Chapter 3

1. Who are these Angels of the Churches?

Christ, himself, tells us these angels are the seven stars in His right hand in 1:19. Stars in scripture have been associated with the spirit beings, messengers from God (Job 38:7).

Another assertion is that these angels of the seven Churches are pastors overseeing the Churches. The Greek word translated angel is *angelos*, which can also mean messenger, which by implication means pastor or minister.

God (A Spirit Being) gave the Revelation to his Son (a Spirit Being), sent and signified by His Angel (yet another spirit being) to John, a human being on the island of Patmos. To assert that John was writing back to the spirit world is difficult and would seem unusually bureaucratic. Secondly, to assert that these angels of the Churches are spirit beings, one would have to accept that the angels are guilty of the charges Jesus Christ lays to each of the Churches (with perhaps the exception of the Church at Philadelphia).

The weight of the evidence points to the angels of the seven Churches as ministers, or a "first among equals" overseer.

2. What is the significance of this key referred to in verse 7?

This is quoted from Isaiah 22:22: *"The key of the house of David I will lay upon His shoulder; so He shall open, and no one shall shut; and He shall shut, and no one shall open."*

The key belongs to the entrance of the King's court. The Old Testament tells us the story of a servant of King Hezekiah. This servant was in charge of the king's affairs, and no one could gain entrance to the king's presence without coming through this servant. The servant alone determined who entered the king's court.

Jesus Christ has the key and He alone determines who is granted to be in the presence of God. No other person or being has that authority. Note also that He can open or close it. Nobody can cast you out of God's Church (spiritual body) but Him.

3. What is wrong with the Church in Sardis?

The Church is Dead (verse 1). They have a name that they are alive (they look busy with programs) but are just going through the motions. This church goes through ritual and focuses on activities, not Jesus Christ. Perhaps they are also serving the vision. The vision of how they want to see themselves. A church such as this is social not spiritual. This is a church that does not have devotion (growth and edification) or zeal. It is not thirsting for spiritual growth.

4. Verse 18. What is this gold refined with fire? What is the spiritual significance? (Think about the properties of gold and the refining process).

Refining is done in a fire and fire in a spiritual sense is the Holy Spirit. The process of refining is everything that happens to us every day. We are constantly in the process of being refined by the Holy Spirit. Gold and silver are precious metals that need to go through fire to remove impurities. Interestingly enough, the impurities in gold do not show themselves unless the gold is subject to heat. The impurities rise to the surface. We do not know what imperfections we may have until we are shown them in our trials, or put through the heat. So in the refining process the Holy Spirit uses circumstances every day to show us what impurities need to be removed from us. We then have the choice to accept or reject what the Holy Spirit has shown us.

5. Verse 16 ... What is hot, what is cold, and what is lukewarm?

Hot – Healing

Cold – Refreshing Quenching spiritual thirst

Lukewarm – does not taste good, and therefore He spews it out of His mouth

We may also see this in terms of the difficulty in identifying our state or condition, as we are NEITHER hot nor cold.

6. Are these seven Churches in Asia symbolic of seven Church Eras?

Who the Churches are can only be interpreted in 1:4 “-John, to the seven Churches in Asia”. These are Churches in Asia. To assert that they have anything to do with Church eras is pure speculation.

Chapter 4

1. In verse one "... things that must take place after this." After what?

Although this question seems simple, we are pointing out the fact John is reporting what he sees in the chronological way the revelation is given to him. On several occasions he writes "after these things". He does not attempt to find and place what he receives in vision in any historical order. He is reporting as he was instructed in Chapter 1:19, and this is important to keep in mind throughout the book.

2. What does Chapter 4 set up for the reader in verse 1?

The voice tells John "... I will show you things that must take place hereafter." The visions John has now are regarding the future. There are nineteen more chapters in the book of Revelation that will show the reader an enormous amount of information about coming events. John is already reporting what is outlined in Chapter 1:19, to write the things that shall take place hereafter.

3. What is described in verses 2 to 11?

The Throne room in Heaven.

Chapter 5

There should be no break between chapters 4 and 5. The same scene at God's Throne is being covered.

1. What is the big deal about the scroll (or 'book' in some translations)? What is in it, etc?

The scroll is being held in the right hand of Him who sits on the Throne. This book, as we shortly find out, has all the future of the world in it. Being in the right hand of God shows us that he is the supreme Authority over the future.

The scroll has seven seals. Therefore, this scroll can be considered the Last Will and Testament of God for mankind.

It is the Lamb, Jesus Christ, who is the only one who can remove the seals. He is the only one who can carry out God's final will.

A few Comments on Apocalyptic Language

The book of Revelation contains what is known as apocalyptic language. It may help to make a few helpful comments on how to understand a little about this type of writing.

Numbers often have symbolic meanings, including periods of time. Although not discussed in this study, some possible examples are:

- 12 is the number of God's people and governmental perfection
- 10 is the number of completeness.
- 7 is the number of perfection.
- 6 is the number of imperfection. It is called the human number.
- 8 is the number of renewal, or resurrection.

Apocalyptic language almost always has historical significance, so we must study history in order to interpret it properly.

We should understand apocalyptic language figuratively unless we are forced to do otherwise. This principle reverses the usual rule of interpretation in which we understand language literally unless we are forced not to. Similarity of language does not prove identity of subjects. (Sometimes the same symbol is used to describe two different things.) Dissimilarity of language does not prove distinctness of subjects (sometimes different symbols are used to describe the same thing). Easy to understand scriptures should be used to understand more difficult passages.

Chapter 6**1. This Chapter has the Lamb opening the first six seals. Summarize the events of these and relate these seals to Christ's prophecies in Matthew 24.**

First Seal	White Horse - A false Christ	Matt. 24:5
Second Seal	Red Horse - War	Matt. 24: 6 & 7
Third Seal	Black Horse - Famine	Matt. 24 :7
Fourth Seal:	Pale Horse - Death	Matt. 24 :7
Fifth Seal:	Persecution of the Saints	Matt. 24: 9-28
Sixth Seal:	Sign of His Imminent Return	Matt. 24: 29-31

2. When is the Tribulation Christ speaks of in Matt 24:21 in terms of the above six seals?

Take note of Christ's words:

IMMEDIATELY AFTER the tribulation of those days the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give its light; the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. – Matt. 24:29, 30

From the parallels we read in the description of the sixth seal, we learn also from Matthew 24:29 that the tribulation is over (although its affects might not be) by the time the sixth seal is removed.

3. Is the sixth seal the Return of Christ?

No. It announces the 'Day of the Lord'. In verse 17 we read that: " ... *the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?*"

Chapter 7

The famous 144,000 are introduced.

1. What does it mean to have the Seal of God on one's forehead (see Exodus 13:16, Deut 6:8 and Deut 11:18)?

The Human intellect is primarily found in the frontal lobe region of the brain behind the forehead. The anterior portion of the frontal lobe is called the "prefrontal" cortex. This is where our personality and intellect reside.

It shall be as a sign on your hand, and as frontlets between your eyes, for by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt. – Exodus. 13:16.

Now this is the commandment, these are the statutes, and judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess ... And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes – Deut. 6:1, 6-8.

Therefore you shall lay up these my words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and bind as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. – Deut. 11:18

“The meaning of the injunction to the Israelites, with regard to the statutes and precepts given them, that they should "bind them for a sign upon their hand, and have them as frontlets between their

eyes," was that they should keep them distinctly in view and carefully attend to them⁴⁰

Those with the seal of God are those who with their character and intellect observe carefully the commandments of God. See Revelation 12:17.

See also Ephesians 4:30.

2. Are those described in verse 9 the same as the 144,000? Who are these people in verse 9, and are there more than 144,000 of them?

No. In verse 9 we read that John sees a multitude that no one could number, as opposed to the 144,000 that could be numbered.

3. Who are the 144,000?

The 144,000 are a group introduced in chapter 7 and later discussed in chapter 14. In chapter 14:4 they are said to be redeemed from among men, being first -fruits to God and the Lamb. From what we gather from chapters 7 and 14, they are a specific group from the descendants of Israel called for a specific purpose that is not clearly understood. We do know they are comprised of 12,000 from each of the twelve tribes. They have repented because of the tribulation and end time events. They are Israelites. They are not the Church.

Chapter 9

1. Verse 1. Who/ What could this star be? What is this bottomless pit (Abyss)? Is this the same place mentioned in Luke 8:31, in Jude 6, in 2Peter 2:4 and in Revelation 20:1? Is it mentioned elsewhere?

The pronoun 'him' is used in reference to this star, and he takes action also by accepting a key and opening a bottomless pit or abyss. The star is a being. Perhaps the word star is used as it is used in scripture as showing a being of high, or once having high position. The word 'fallen' is in the past tense, suggesting this is a fallen angel or demon. It is suggested that this star is Satan.

The Greek word used for the bottomless pit or abyss is *phrear*. It is the same word used by demons in Luke 8:31, where it appears it is a prison where apparently demons seek to avoid at all costs. This same place is referred to in Revelation, nine times in all.

References in Jude and Peter likely refer to the same place.

⁴⁰ (Easton)

2. What is the difference between the fifth trumpet and the previous four?

In the first four trumpets the ecosystem is struck and so also the sun, moon and the stars. The fifth trumpet is different in that mankind (those without the seal of God) is affected directly by the plague that is released from the abyss.

3. These locust-like beings described as having the sting of a scorpion, and are described physically in verses 7 to 10. Are they demonic creatures or are they symbols of man-made war machines?

It has been taught that what John sees is modern warfare and he describes these machines in terms of the language of his day. He is unfamiliar with what he is seeing. The interpretation that these locust-like creatures are weapons of modern warfare is beset with several problems.

First take notice in Revelation 9:4.

And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. – 9:4

Weapons of warfare inevitably destroy grass and trees and any form of life. Secondly, these weapons and those behind the weapons must somehow distinguish between those who have the seal of God and those who do not. Further, if men were controlling these, they, too, would be subject to the torments of this weaponry, as they would not have the seal of God either.

Perhaps the biggest problem of the modern warfare interpretation is found in the next verses: 5 and 6.

And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.– 9:5-6

War brings death, and the weapons of war are always designed to kill; that is their purpose. These creatures cannot kill, and men cannot have it even if they desire to be killed.

These creatures may very well be unknown and unfamiliar to us as well. The period of their power to hurt men is five months, which is the life cycle of certain types of locusts. It is likely that what John sees are unearthly demonic creatures.

4. In verse 13, what might be significant about where the voice is coming from (four horns at the golden altar) in light of Revelation 6: 9-10, and 8:3-4?

Notice that the prayers and the cries of the saints are at the altar. These trumpets are the response to the cry of the saints to avenge their blood on the earth.

5. How many horsemen are there? Point to ponder...How can such an army be assembled after all that has happened so far?

There are two hundred million horsemen.

6. Again, are these demonic beings being described or are they weapons of man-made warfare seen in vision?

We can only presume these are descriptions of man-made arms. Notice points 3 and 4 in the discussion on Apocalyptic language on page 10 above. The language in this chapter describing what is released by the sixth trumpet causes us to interpret what John is seeing more literally as weapons of modern warfare. Although there is a similarity between the descriptions of the locust-like beings in the fifth seal to the army in the sixth seal, we cannot necessarily interpret them the same way.

7. After the chaos and destruction and pain inflicted by these two woes and the destruction of the first four trumpets, you would figure the rest of mankind still alive (two-thirds) would repent; but they DON'T! Why not?

It demonstrates how blatantly apparent men's hearts, man's carnal nature, are so hostile toward God. There is reason to believe that men feel God has stripped away their wealth, as they would not repent of idolatry.

Chapter 10

1. Verse 1: Is this angel one of the seven Angels that blow a trumpet?

No. He is 'another' angel. It is significant as John is receiving a vision or message that is apart from the Trumpet message he has just received.

2. He is clothed with a cloud (symbolizing majestic, glorious and heavenly appearance). He is 'Mighty' and comes from heaven with a message. What does the rainbow above his head indicate? Think of Noah.

The only reference to a rainbow in scripture is in relation to the promise to Noah, when God promised to remember His covenant not to blot out all living creatures. So in light of the events in Revelation, He will not blot out the whole earth. What follows may be awful, but is tempered with mercy.

3. Where have we seen the description of this angel's feet and face before? Overall, what does his description in verses one and two tell us about him?

The description of the angel is similar to what we have read before in chapter 1 of the description of the Son of Man. This would indicate this angel has great authority, perhaps the authority of Jesus Christ Himself. He is likely the angel of chapter 1:1. He bestrides both land and sea, signifying his mastery over both.

4. When this angel cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. Why seven?

Seven is a divinely perfect number. This time we have the ultimate in thunders, whereas before we did not have seven associated with sounds of thunder.

5. What is the big Announcement? What does it mean?

The angel cries out that there should be delay no longer, and that in the days of the seventh trumpet the mystery of God should be finished. God's longsuffering is now at an end. Also consider the words of the prophet Amos:

"Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." – Amos 3:7

All mysteries that even the prophets themselves could not understand are completed in the last trumpet.

6. In verses 8 to 10 we read about the little book, which is sweet to taste but bitter to his stomach. Note that Ezekiel had a similar experience (Ezekiel 2:9 to 3:4). So why was the book sweet? Why bitter?

Perhaps the book was sweet because it declared the intentions of God, but when it was devoured it was bitter because of the awfulness of its message.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 is a continuation of chapter 10, where John is still interacting with the mighty angel. He is told at the end of chapter 10 to prophesy again about many peoples, nations and tongues.

1. Is the information in Chapter 11 part of the Seventh Seal?

Notice in chapter 10 there is a storyline thread break, when in verse 1 another angel appears to John. This implies that what follows is not part of the sixth trumpet, and should be considered outside the trumpets. This other angel continues to interact with John in chapter 11 and is told to prophesy AGAIN about many peoples, nations and tongues, which occurs in chapter 11:1 - 13. Essentially, what he prophesies is not part of the Seventh Seal, nor part of the trumpets either. It is from the little book, or small scroll.

If not part of the Seventh Seal, the question to ask is: when are these two individuals to appear in terms of end time prophecy. As they are a type of Moses and Aaron, they stand against the ruling national power over the people of God. They stand against the beast power (as it is the beast that kills them) and interfere with the prosperity of the world at that time. The world is still able to have a celebration over their deaths, so it is a time before all the havoc and death illustrated in the first six trumpets. The time of their prophecy just precedes the Sign of the Son of Man, and during the tribulation period.

However, John tells us that the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit kills them. The fallen star with the key to the bottomless pit does not open it until the fifth trumpet, so how can they be killed by the beast prior to the bottomless pit being opened?

The Abyss, or "bottomless pit" at the bottom of the sea, was thought to be the place where the vilest of demons dwelt. We cannot take this literally, of course; but it serves as a fitting way of describing the "beast" that persecutes God's people. It associates him with the vilest of demons, thus revealing volumes about his nature and character. That's why he is described as coming up from the "bottomless pit," or Abyss.

The beast that kills the two witnesses is the beast described in Revelation 13 and 17. He should not be confused with the demonic creatures that come out of the Abyss at the sound of the fifth trumpet. He comes from the sea (13:1), and "*was given authority to continue for forty-two months*" (verse 5), or three and one-half years, the same period of the two witnesses' ministry ("one thousand two hundred and sixty days"—11:3). Apparently, John presupposes that the sea-beast came from the Abyss, since the Abyss was thought to be located at the bottom of the ocean. This is all visionary. We need not think there is really a big hole on the ocean floor containing demons.

2. Does verses 1 and 2 lead us to believe a temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem?

The Roman General, Vespasian, laid siege to Jerusalem eventually razing it to the ground leaving only the "court of the Gentiles" intact, just as John prophesied. The remnants of this court can be seen today in Jerusalem. It is called the "Wailing Wall". Perhaps there will be a later fulfillment.

3. `... my two witnesses ...' Whose are they? What is sackcloth? Is sackcloth in fashion in the latter days? What does it mean that they are wearing sackcloth? How long do these two witnesses prophesy and when?

It is the angel speaking to John, and this angel states 'my two witnesses', therefore we can assert they belong to him (the angel).

These two witnesses may likely be called according to the old dispensation (as the prophets were) and may not be called as the Church is today where we are begotten by God and see him as Father. They are wearing sackcloth, which is a rough garment of hair associated with the prophets (Zech 13:4, 2 Kings 1:8, Mark 1:6).

God uses his witnesses as a witness and a warning to sinners to repent before impending judgment. The witnesses are active at a time prior to the sixth seal, and are likely active during the fifth seal where persecution of the saints is great, very near to the return of Christ.

They are introduced in a manner that they are already known to the reader in verse 3, and are given power at that point for 3.5 years. Because 3.5 years is half of seven, it may be that they have been prophesying already for 3.5 years without power, which has put them in the condition they are, beat up and wearing sackcloth.

4. What olive trees and lamp stands is he referring to?

The reference to the olive trees and lampstands is found in Zechariah 4. Olive Oil is symbolic of God's Holy Spirit. In Zechariah 4:12 these trees drip of this oil, where we can see that these two anointed ones have been given the Holy Spirit in full measure.

5. The world celebrates their destruction, but you would think that the world would have recognized them as prophets with their power. Why not possibly?

This may be because of the false expectations of the world on what they perceive to be right and wrong, and what the Will of God is. We read in verse 10 that they tormented those who dwell on the earth, and the earth at the end will be populated with lovers of themselves. An earth populated by those who marvel at the beast and mourn the destruction of Babylon by whom they made themselves rich (Rev. 13:3,4 ;18:9). The two witnesses are hated for their continued disruption that attacks their way of life until the beast kills them.

It may also be in light of growing religious fervor in the world that follows a false messiah, that these two individuals are mistaken for the beast and false prophet.

6. In verse 13, we read about how the rest were afraid and gave glory to God. Is this repentance? Is this a response to the Gospel?

The remainder, in fear, 'gave glory to the God of Heaven'. It is unlikely that this is the language of conversion. They acknowledge God's greatness, but their hearts are far from Him. It is not a response of faith, or repentance.

7. In verse 14 John tells us the third woe is coming quickly, re-introducing us into the Seventh seal and the sequence of trumpets. In Revelation 22:7, 12, 20, we see Christ comes quickly. Any connection here? What is the final woe?

Yes, the third woe includes the return of the Judge of all the earth. The same applies to the return of Christ; where in Revelation 22 it is repeated several times as 'I come quickly' in verses 7, 12 and 20. The final woe is the return of Jesus Christ.

8. In verse 15, is this the same trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:52?

Yes

9. In verse 19, the temple is opened in heaven and the ark of His covenant was seen. Seen by whom? What might this tell us?

Seen by those on the earth. Nothing is secret any longer.

Chapter 12

Revelation 12 is an inset chapter that does not form a part of the storyline or part of the 7th Trumpet. There is a lot of symbolism in this chapter so we need to be careful.

1. Is this sign of the woman important?

In verse 1 we see that it is a 'great sign'.

2. What does this symbol of a woman with sun moon and the stars represent? Refer to Genesis Ch 37:9. Also think about Genesis 3:15, 16.

The woman likely represents Israel, with the understanding of Genesis 37:9, Paul tells us in Romans 9:5 Christ came out of Israel. (Also see Isaiah 66:7-8 and Micah 4:9-10)

3. In verse 3 what can we say about this dragon? Seven Heads, and ten horns. See Daniel 7:7 See Revelation 17.

All earthly rulership described in Revelation has its source in the Monster (Satan). Satan is behind them all.

*** Notice how the battle lines are being drawn up in this chapter. ***

4. Throughout this chapter, we have a depiction of Satan trying to destroy the Child, the woman and her offspring. Why is he so wroth?

See verse 11. The saints 'overcome' the devil. Also Satan being cast down is defeated, his aspirations will not be fulfilled, so he turns on The Child and the Woman and her offspring who represent and bring about his overthrow. After all, he is behind all the other earthly kingdoms (verse 3).

5. What does it mean in verse 11 '... they did not love their lives to the death?'

To love one's life in this world under Satan's systems, the individual would not see the totality of what is going on and is being depicted in chapter 12. To love one's life is to try and preserve it, and compromise somehow to make his life work in 'this world' and not subject himself to God and His will. In the time of persecution, we need to stay the course, and hold onto the 'word of our testimony' despite the disfavor the true Christian encounters.

What is depicted in chapter 12 is a GREAT SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE occurring behind the scenes of this world. In the last days, the spiritual struggle will climax with Satan cast down. Christians are part of something much larger than the individual. Chapter 12 gives us a 'higher vision' of this conflict.

Chapter 13

We won't spend time identifying the beasts in this chapter as there is significant historical and biblical background necessary to talk about in relation to them, but consider the following:

1. The world worshipped whom ?!!! Does the world not know better than to 'Worship' the dragon (the devil)? So how can they worship the dragon? What does 'Worshipped' mean here? And marveled? And followed?

In verse 4 we read that they also worship the beast. Since the beast receives power from the dragon, as far as God is concerned, they worship the dragon even though the world at large worships the beast and the devil is invisible behind the scenes.

'Worshipped' here means that they were obedient. They had reverence and respect for the wealth, ability and power of the beast. By being obedient and co-operative with the beast, they also receive the benefits of the beast's wealth. In this they marvel at the beast's strength, as in 'who is able to make war with him?' and therefore follow the beast.

2. What about verse 10. Is this another way of saying we reap what we sow?

Perhaps. Jeremiah 15:2 gives us the sense, '*such as are for death, to death, such as are for the sword, to the sword, and such as are for famine, to the famine, and such as are for captivity to captivity*'. There it referred to unbelieving Israel, here it applies to believers. God will not intervene to prevent persecution, for it is a part of His purpose and results in the fulfilling of His will. Thus His people will accept their destiny knowing that not a hair on their heads can perish. (Luke 21:18)

3. What does it mean to receive a 'mark' on their right hand or in their foreheads? How does God view this 'mark' on someone? (See chapter 14:9-10). Why does it make Him so angry?

There is no reason to assume that this mark is any more physical than the seal on believers (see Chapter 7, Question 1), rather it represents submission to the beast and his claims.

Those who receive the mark are in agreement with the beast. In verse 15 we read that those who do not worship the beast are to be killed. For all intent and purposes, this is persecution of the saints, and those who carry it out have the mark of the beast. For this reason we read of God's wrath on those with the mark of the beast in chapter 14.

Those with the mark of the beast have repeatedly rejected the call to repent. There are many who do, as we read of the innumerable multitude in chapter 7. Rejection of God's salvation is an open invitation to wrath.

Chapter 14

1. We have the 144,000 again. Please note in verse 4 that it should read 'a firstfruits', as they are not the only firstfruits. ... And how do we know this for sure (See Chapter 7)

In chapter 7 we read of the 144,000, but we also read of another innumerable group who have given their lives to the Lamb. See Chapter 7 Question 2

2. Verse 3. Are you going to learn this song?

This question basically asks: are you going to be part of the 144,000 who are the only ones who can learn the song? If you can learn this song, you will be one of the 144,000. It is unlikely that the 144,000 are comprised of the Church of God today, for we are already sealed. If that is the case, you won't learn this song.

3. Verse 4. Are the 144,000 now spirit beings?

We conclude that they are in the framework of John's visions, for they are 'redeemed' (past tense), being a firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

4. Verses 4 and 5: ... virgins, ... no guile, ... and without fault - is this how God sees them or the world? What do you suppose is meant by them being virgins?

We know that God the Father will look upon His resurrected children and see no flaws, or anything that offends. They will be washed thoroughly clean by the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14, Dan 12:10). It is like they NEVER committed sin. The 144,000 are no exception.

To believe that they actually have never had sexual intercourse or as physical virgins, we would have to accept they are all men, for 'not defiled with women' is also added. This interpretation is difficult to accept.

5. Verses 14 to 16 ... what is happening in these verses?

This is the first resurrection on a massive scale.

Chapters 15 and 16

Chapters 15 and 16 describe the seven last plagues in the seventh Trumpet. These are God's judgments against this false religious system, "Babylon" - (Rev. 18:4, 8-10).

1. Are these last plagues the Final Woe?

The final woe likely includes the return of Jesus Christ (see Chapter 11 Question 7) and the seven last plagues. We know the wrath of God is complete in the last seven bowls in 16:1.

2. Are chapters 15 and 16 more detailed about Revelation 14:9-11; 11: 15-18? Specifically 'Your wrath has come'.

There appears to be a significant amount of overlap in this book. This is likely one of those cases.

3. What is the implication of what is stated in verse 8?

No one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues were completed. Those who have repented of their sins and accepted the salvation of Jesus Christ up to then, are able to enter the temple of God to find mercy (Hebrews 10:19-22). That opportunity for mercy is no longer available to those who are to suffer the last plagues. They shall endure the brunt of all seven.

4. In chapter 16, is there any mention of God's Mercy? What is said about Him (what does the Angel of the waters say)?

As stated in question 2 above, the angel makes no mention of God's mercy, for there is none now, and the reasons are affirmed by the angel and the voices from the altar (verses 5-7).

5. In verse 12, what is the purpose of drying up the river Euphrates so that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared?

The purpose is so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. This essentially means the kings of the east can move freely westward. These kings are making their way to the battle at Armageddon, for they are more likely included for this battle as indicated in verse 14.

6. What does chapter 4:4, 5, chapter 8:1-5, chapter 11:19, and chapter 16:17-21 seem to share or have in common? Is there an increase in intensity? Are verses 17-21 of chapter 16 more detail on chapter 11:19?

Each time in these verses there is a reference, direct or indirect, to the Temple and to the One on the throne. First the One on the throne and the twenty four priestly elders before the throne, then the angel at the altar of incense offering prayers before the throne, then the ark of His covenant which is beneath the throne, and finally the great voice out of the Temple and from the throne. The lightening and voices and thunders proclaim the mighty activity of God.

In verse 18 we read that there were lightening, and voices, and thunders and a vast earthquake. Previously there are descriptions found elsewhere, gradually increasing in intensity. In 4:5 '*lightening, voices and thunders*' proceed from the throne. In 8:5 '*lightening and voices, and thunders and an earthquake*' follow the appearance of the angel at the altar of incense as he offers up prayers which went up before God, and then casts them down on the earth. 'An earthquake' is added to demonstrate that it is now connected with earth. In 11:19 '*lightening, and voices, and thunders, and an earthquake and great hail*' follow the opening of the Temple of God to reveal the Ark of His covenant. God's final judgment has come on the world. And now lightening, and voices, and thunders and the greatest of all earthquakes, joined later by the great hail (v.21) accompany the voice from the Temple and from the throne.

The Seventh Trumpet is sounded in 11:15 and its description ends in verse 19 with the same description of 16:17-19, which concludes the plagues. If we are to understand the seven plagues that make up the seventh trumpet, then we may understand that we are receiving more detail in chapter 16.

7. In verse 21, how heavy were these hailstones in modern measures?

A talent weighs about 114 Lbs. Considering the density of ice, each would be over 2 cubic feet in volume.

Chapter 17

In this chapter and those that follow, we are introduced to visions and images of strange creatures and unusual occurrences. It is stressed to the student that we are to gather ultimate ideas and understandings and not concentrate on literal descriptions and fulfillments.

1. What does Babylon represent?

Historical background is necessary to fully appreciate what Babylon represents (see the discussion on apocalyptic language starting on page 9). In brief terms, back when John lived, the ancient city of Babylon was in ruin and desolate. It was `Not`. We must remember that John is not receiving these visions in the days he lived, he is receiving them in the day of the Lord, or from the perspective of sometime future. It would be helpful, to consider what John thought when he was being told of Babylon being a great city in chapter 16:19, as in his time Babylon was desolate. So he must have understood of a future Babylon that would receive God's wrath.

In chapter 17, Babylon is a woman who rides (holds influence over) the beast. We learn also that the woman sits on seven mountains. We know Rome (as did ancient Babylon) sits on seven hills.

In verse 8: the Beast `Was` – the Roman Empire (as it is no longer). The Roman Empire today `is not`, but `yet is` – i.e. in a manner of speaking, or a version of it. It today has the spiritual sway.

John recognized the Babylonian influence on the spiritual symbols in Rome. Rome is a reincarnate version of Babylon with all its mysteries. Rome rides the Empire, and the empire rules the nations of peoples (v15). The Church of Rome held sway over the empire and the empire carried out the persecutions of those who did not concur with her wishes. She (the woman) did not, herself, murder anyone, but in her was found the responsibility, the blood of the martyrs (v6).

Perhaps take a look around you. The world is in Babylon today.

2. In verse 4, this description tells us what about the woman?

Purple, scarlet, gold and pearls and precious stones depict royalty and wealth. The woman is outwardly wealthy.

3. What do verses 9 and 18, and verses 1 and 15 tell us about the woman?

She is a city sitting on or amidst 7 hills, and has dominion over the rulers of the earth who rule the people. She is what Rome symbolizes.

4. In verse 14, is this the same war described in chapter 16:14 and 16?

Yes.

Chapter 18

1. Why does the angel express that Babylon has fallen twice as he does? See also Isaiah 21.

Babylon is fallen. It is repeated this time for it is now truly fallen. To express it twice is to emphasize that it is truly fallen in all ways, and shall not re-appear in any other form or any other way again.

2. What does it mean in verse 7 ‘I sit as a queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow’? See also Isaiah 47: 7, 8

Had she seen herself as a widow, she would have mourned and denied herself pleasures, but she rejects such a position and justifies her search for luxurious living by claiming royal rights. When we look at Isaiah 47:7,8, we see she does not recognize her true position.

Why does the world mourn the fall of Babylon?

We read from verse 9-15 how the world became rich by her in terms of material wealth. The source of their luxurious living is no longer. It is the very carnal aspect of man which is greed that is being expressed.

3. Is ‘Babylon’ responsible for the slaying of only prophets and saints?

In verse 24 we read in her was found the blood of the saints, prophets, and all who were slain on the earth. In her was found the responsibility of the deaths of countless people who, for one reason or another, falls prey to her ideologies. We think of the crusades, for example.

Chapters 19 and 20

1. What is being contrasted in verses 1 to 10?

We are given a sharp contrast between the celebration of the fall of the great harlot, and the celebration of the wife made ready for the lamb for marriage. She is clean and bright, where the harlot has corrupted the earth.

2. What does it mean ‘her smoke rises up forever and ever’?

The judgment is permanent. Her smoke does not even return to its source.

3. In verse 7 the wife (bride, Church of God) is made ready. This is a certainty!! ... But what are we to be certain of in so far as ourselves in this chapter?

The bride will be ready, whether we as individuals or as a congregation or organization are ready or not! So John (in verse 9) is told specifically to write by the angel: ‘*Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the lamb*’.

4. In verse 11 we know *'In righteousness He judges and makes war'*. In this verse and then verses 12 and 15, what can we say about His weapons?

Verse 11: In righteousness he makes war.

Verse 12: His eyes, like flames of fire, refer back to Chapter 1 Question 13, where we interpret this as penetrating fire that sees into the darkest places (night vision goggles comes to mind). His enemies cannot hide.

Verse 15: This sharp sword comes out of His mouth. It is a war of words, for His word is power, penetrating, and none can resist. Those whose power is less must enforce by physical means. Those with true righteous power have the power of words. See also comment in Chapter 1 Question 13.

5. What is symbolic about a *'rod of iron'*, or *'iron'* specifically?

In John's time, Iron was the strongest material. Iron is symbolic of something that will not wear out. The King's rod of iron that He will rule with will not wear out.

6. Are we going to be in this Army? Are we going to be armed?

What is stressed in verse 14 is the purity of those who are with Him. There is no suggestion of them being armed. Would the groom bring His bride to do battle?

7. Is there an actual battle?

There is no actual description of a battle, such as we find in chapter 12, where we are explicitly given the understanding that Michael and his angels fought and the Devil's angels fought. We have an invading Enemy that is irresistible and the world's armies flounder in their folly. If anything it may be just a rout.

8. In verses 17 and 18, are vivid descriptions of birds eating the flesh of kings literally?

Literal or not, what is being expressed is the awfulness of their death.

9. Verse 19: why do they want to make war against Him and His army?

He and His army is, in fact, the invading enemy. He is not welcome, nor is His ways. This finds its infancy in the Garden of Eden and throughout history, where mankind has rejected God. The book of Revelation gives us a full expression of the world under the sway of the beast. If Satan deceives the world, then he has deceived the world to believe God is not a fair God at all.

It has been also said that they are deceived into thinking that it is an alien invasion. Not completely unbelievable, considering the recent extraterrestrial hype in popular culture.

10. Are the Beast and False Prophet actual human beings or are they symbolic (as in Death and Hell in Rev 20:14)?

There is strong indication that they are human beings that are Satanically inspired. Scriptural reference such as 2 Thess. 2:3-4 and Rev. 13:18 indicate that a man will surface. However, in so far, as they are 'men' at all, they represent ideas and systems that have long existed. They are terminated in the lake of fire as death and hell are in chapter 20.

11. How are the rest slain, exactly?

In verse 21 we know that the sword of Him who sat on the horse kills them. The sword is spiritual and connected with His words of power. The actual method of their deaths is unknown to us. The story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 comes to mind.

12. Who are 'they' who sit on the thrones?

In verse 4, John saw thrones and they who sat on them. He says he saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus. We presume that he is still looking at those sitting on the thrones when he sees the beheaded souls. Those on the thrones are the saints.

13. Judgment was given to them. What does this mean? Were those on the thrones being judged or are they given the authority to judge?

They are being crowned, for they are now on thrones. Pronouncement of award in their favor has occurred. Judgment has been given unto them in terms of authority to judge. They are now in God's government.

14. Why do you suppose God will release Satan out of his prison, after the thousand years has expired (20:7)?

We know that God utterly destroys His enemies, and Israel was told not to spare anything, just as King Saul was instructed in 1 Samuel 15:3. We even learn in verse 14 that death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. There may be something in those who dwell on the earth at that time that wavers and Satan is used to bring it to the surface, where both the rebellion and Satan is ultimately destroyed, and for all to witness. There must be nothing left in history that is unanswered about the evil that once existed.

Some Relevant Scriptures for the questions of chapters 19: Isaiah 34:10, Rev 14:11
Isaiah 66:24, 2 Cor. 11:2, Eph 5:27, 1 Thess. 4:14, Eph 6:17, Hebrews 4:11,
Hebrews 1:3, Isaiah 11:4, 2 Thess. 2:8, Psalm 2:9, and Rev. 2:27

15. What/Who/Where is Gog and Magog?

Gog and Magog are referred to in Ezekiel 39 and were pre-millennial places. In Revelation, they are an inclusive term for all the nations from east (Gog) to west (Magog). Satan's post millennial deception is worldwide.

16. Why do you suppose in verse 20:11 earth and heaven fled away; and there was no place left for them?

Perhaps they not only flee in awe before Him, but they have completed the purpose for which they were created and are no longer required. This is apocalyptic language similar to Revelation 6:13-14.

17. In Revelation 20:12 ,13, what does it mean *and they were judged according to their works*''? Would those from Gog and Magog be included in this resurrection?

Note in verse 12 the books were opened, including the Book of life. The Book of Life was opened because names are to be added to it. Christians living now with their names in the book of life are being judged now according to their works and obedience to God. It is over a lifetime. Those resurrected in this resurrection will receive the same judgment, as judgment in biblical terms is a process.

Gog and Magog are names of Gentile nations in the Old Testament. These peoples are likely unconverted, and thus easily and wholly in huge numbers deceived by Satan. It is unthinkable God would predict deception of His people. It is therefore likely that these peoples will be part of this resurrection.

Chapter 21

1. Who do you suppose are being identified as 'Liars' in verse 8?

False Brethren. Worst liars of them all.

2. Introduced in Revelation 21:2, 9 and 10, is this city the place Jesus Christ describes in the beginning of John 14? What is significant as Jerusalem being identified as the Bride of the Lamb?

This is the place that Jesus Christ goes to prepare, in a physical and spiritual sense for His little flock. It is a place where His resurrected saints will all be, and the Church will be in one place, in the new Jerusalem, the bride.

3. How long is a furlong? How big is this place in modern terms?

About 202 yards. This place is big. About 1500 miles x 1500 miles x 1500 miles.

4. How many Apostles are there?

In verse 14 it says there are twelve apostles. Matthias was chosen by casting lots. Paul was chosen by Jesus Christ. At the end of the day it is the Lord's decision:

The lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the Lord. – Prov. 16:33

5. In the description of the City in verses 11-27, what do you feel is the most amazing/wonderful part, i.e. what are you looking forward to the most about this Place?

Verse 27 for some:

“And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life”. – Rev. 21:27

Chapter 22

1. In verse 2, the leaves of the tree are for healing of the nations. What nations? There are still going to be nations of people about?

Apparently so. Chapter 21:24 says the nations shall walk in the light of the city. They may be those people described in 20:12, 13.

2. What is new in verse 4?

We shall see the Father's face

3. In verse 10, what is different now than what was told to Daniel in his end time prophecy? Was the time at hand when the book was sent to the Churches in Asia? Is the time at Hand?

John is told not to seal up the sayings of the book for the time is at hand. Daniel on the other hand was to shut up the words and seal the book he wrote, until the time of the end (i.e. the time was not at hand). John, however, is in the new dispensation and there is nothing to necessarily intervene between His time and the final fulfillment of

God's purposes. Things will now play out in a manner that is controlled by the returning Christ. His readers are not to see it as something that will happen in the distant future but as something that is almost upon them. Now the book need not be sealed, it is about to come into fulfillment.

4. What is the message in verse 11 trying to say? Doesn't God want sinners to repent?

What John may be writing here is really the choice mankind has. We are concluding that in the Word of God, all the message of salvation has been given, and the choice that one makes will be whatever direction one takes.

The book is concluding in a climactic manner, and throughout the book we get the picture there is no middle ground. So now the concluding message is being summed up, with the revelation of Jesus Christ complete, all the witnessing is done, the time is at hand and we are left with the choice. Let your choice be your choice.

5. Verse 18 and 19. How does one take away or add to the sayings of this book?

The writer of this book is particularly serious about what he has written. Do not alter it in any fashion.

6. What does 'Amen' mean?

Easton Bible Dictionary says:

The word 'amen' is a most remarkable word. It is transliterated directly from the Hebrew into the Greek of the New Testament, then into the Latin and into English and many other languages, so that it is practically a universal word. It has been called the best known word in human speech. The word is directly related—in fact, almost identical – to the Hebrew word "believe" (*amam*), or faithful. Thus, it became to mean "sure" or "truly", and an expression of absolute trust and confidence.⁴¹

Chronology in the Book of Revelation

The chronological order for the seals, trumpets and the seven last plagues is worthy of inclusion in this Bible Study. It is most apparent that the literary flow of Revelation does not always mirror or parallel the order of the prophecies it contains as we follow the seals, trumpets, and plagues. The reader who is trying to make sense of the chronological order needs to maintain a sense of clarity and realize the limitations of charting out a time sequence. We know for certain that John is writing down, or reporting after the events in the order he is shown them. He makes no attempt to organize the visions he has in any other fashion. He does insert possible comments to

⁴¹ (Easton)

help us follow the events, such as in Revelation 11:14: *“the second woe is past, and, behold the third comes quickly”*. Before offering a chronological order of the book of Revelation, please consider the discussion below.

Jesus Christ told us that His return would be at a time that is least expected, and shall come as a snare to the whole earth. There is a limitation from what we can learn from all of prophecy concerning the return of Jesus Christ. We are, however, expected to recognize the time is near when we see all those things our Lord describes in Matthew 24.

The reader should also take into consideration the very real possibility that although there appears to be a concise order of each seal being removed and trumpet blown, in actual fact, an observer of these events at the time of their occurrence may not recognize them as such. For example, after the first trumpet is blown, the effects of that trumpet do not necessarily pass, nor discontinue before the second trumpet is blown. This would also apply to the second, third, fourth and fifth trumpets until John tells us the first woe is past in 9:12. If we are to be sober about the Lord’s warning in Revelation that he comes quickly, the first four trumpets may very well appear to happen almost at the same time. We only know the fifth trumpet locust-like creatures continue to inflict their torment for five months.

It is also important that the Tribulation discussed in Matthew 24 not be confused with the Day of the Lord, or the event of His return itself. The Trumpets, and sometimes the last Seven Plagues are sometimes mistakenly included as part of the tribulation or the Great Tribulation. The tribulation to which Jesus Christ refers to does not include the Judgment of God. The tribulation begins, or is initiated by the abomination of desolation, set up by (presumably) the ruling forces in this world. The Trumpets, as it was explained earlier in chapter 9 question 4, are an answer to the prayers of the saints. It follows, therefore, that the saints should not suffer along with the smitten earth or with those who do not have the seal of God (after all, the trumpets are an answer to the prayers of the saints).

There are at least two vastly different chronological approaches to the Book of Revelation. One makes the compelling assertion that the seven trumpets and seven seals are contemporaneous with the first six seals. There are interesting claims to contemporary approaches, where the removal of the seventh seal reveals all, and gives the reader more detail of the events already described in the first six seals. This cannot be possible for two reasons.

Firstly, in the first few verses of chapter 7, the four angels are told to withhold blowing their trumpets until they have sealed the servants of God on their foreheads. We also have the innumerable multitude redeemed by God that come out of great tribulation. We know that the locust-like creatures released from the bottomless pit after the sound of the fifth trumpet cannot harm the sealed of God therefore, the trumpets must occur after the tribulation, and after the sixth seal allowing for those

servants to be sealed. The sounding of any of the trumpets could not have occurred before.

Secondly, in the fifth seal, the martyrs cry out to God from the altar that their blood may be avenged, but are told to wait. We find later that the Trumpets are in response to the prayers of the saints in chapter 8:2-5, again at the altar. (See chapter 9 question 4). It is, therefore, difficult to argue with any strength that the trumpets are contemporary with the first six seals.

The chronological order offered in the next page is for discussion purposes only to give at least some kind of framework we can consider.

Beginnings

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First Seal

Second Seal

Third Seal

Forth Seal

Fifth Seal

Sixth Seal

Seventh Seal

First Trumpet

Second Trumpet

Third Trumpet

Fourth Trumpet

Fifth Trumpet

Sixth Trumpet

Seventh Trumpet

Indeterminable Beginning⁴²

Abomination of Desolation?

The Two Witnesses Prophecy 3.5 years with power⁴³

The Tribulation is over⁴⁴. The heavenly signs

5 months long

The First Resurrection

The Seven Last Plagues
The Battle of Armageddon
Second Coming of Jesus Christ

7 Years?

The Third Woe⁴⁵

The Millennial Reign of 1000 years

Final Satanic Rebellion

Second Resurrection

New Heavens and New Earth

⁴² Start of this period cannot be known from scripture. May begin sooner but the period likely encompasses all of the Fifth Seal.

⁴³ See chapter 11, question 3.

⁴⁴ See chapter 6, question 2.

⁴⁵ See chapter 11, question 7, chapters 15 and 16, question 1.

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