



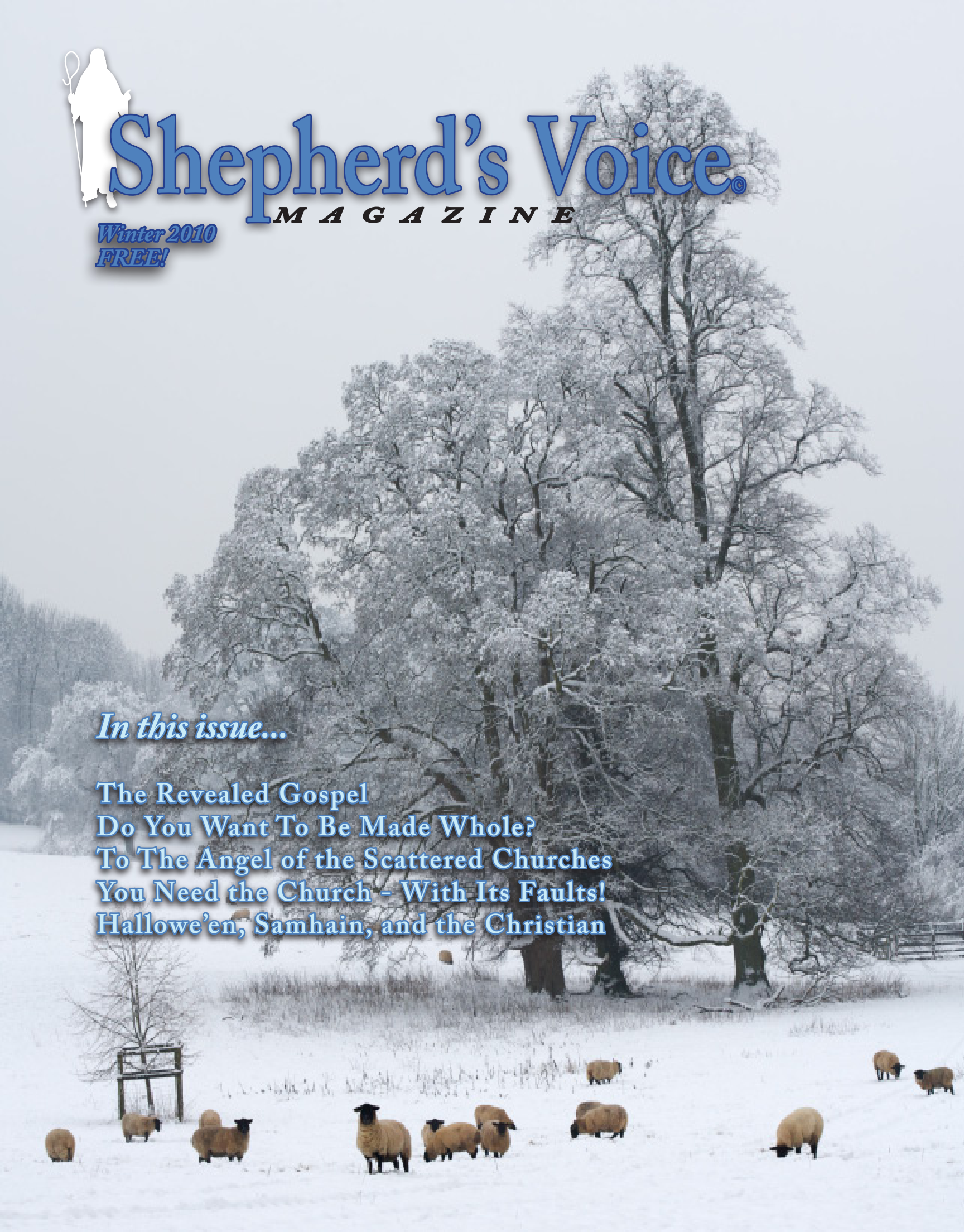
# Shepherd's Voice<sup>®</sup>

MAGAZINE

Winter 2010  
**FREE!**

*In this issue...*

The Revealed Gospel  
Do You Want To Be Made Whole?  
To The Angel of the Scattered Churches  
You Need the Church - With Its Faults!  
Hallowe'en, Samhain, and the Christian





# Shepherd's Voice<sup>®</sup>

## MAGAZINE

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**Back cover:** Flock of sheep on a cold winter evening in England

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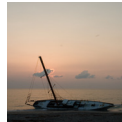
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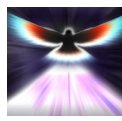
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### ***Greetings!***

One of the more interesting experiences I have had in Christian service is witnessing how the Lord tests the resolve of those who serve Him. I trust many who are reading this editorial have had a similar experience and thus realize how the grace of God sustains us in ways we often do not understand. Consequently those who may have wondered whether they missed the fall issue of this quarterly publication should not be concerned as unforeseen circumstances necessitated that we move straight to the winter number.

Our feature article this time is “The Revealed Gospel.” The apostles repeatedly warned of the devastating effect such ideas would have on the faith of some. From the inception of the church, the apostles struggled against those who claimed new and private revelations to authenticate their ministries, and we see such inroads even today. We must not risk stepping outside the boundaries of the revealed gospel once delivered. Peter told his audience that God has “... given to us all things that pertain to life...” – 2 Peter 1:3. What more do we need?

In the article “To the Angel of the Scattered Churches,” we hope to encourage those who feel there is something wrong with the state of the Church as a whole because of so the many different groups that exist in the Church of God culture. From an organizational standpoint, we stumble over our best intentions. One notable stumbling block is a failure to differentiate between uniformity and unity when it comes to our personal motivations; a distinction that is essential when it comes to a collective of Christians, such as was experienced in the Corinthian Church. The desire for uniformity in the Church probably feels like a reasonable motive to most church workers, but unity of the brethren

requires calling upon higher spiritual motives that develop from internal influences. We are able to achieve and sustain much more when Christians are united in faith and spiritual motivation, which allow for diversity and growth.

As an interesting development, and as the Lord wills, we are looking at developing an ongoing partnership with Norm Edwards, who has been the editor of *Servants’ News* for 15 years ([www.servantsnews.com](http://www.servantsnews.com)). During his recent trips through the Chicago area, we have had the opportunity to meet with Norm. He has read the first issue of *Shepherd’s Voice* and endorses the mission of the publication. In our personal discussions we have found very real common ground in our approach to the message of the gospel. After much prayerful consideration Norm and I have concluded that the collaborative efforts of the ministries behind *Shepherd’s Voice* and *Servants’ News* can be harnessed in a synergistic effort toward the overall work of the Church.

We are pleased to announce, therefore, that Norm Edwards will join the staff of *Shepherd’s Voice* and will continue a portion of the ministry of *Servants’ News* within it. He would like to continue writing Bible teaching and inspirational articles as well as reporting on significant world news and church events. As a sign of good things to come, Norm’s first article for *Shepherd’s Voice*, “We Need Church,” makes a compelling scriptural argument to those who found reason to excuse themselves from attending church to rethink their decision and rejoin the fellowship of the saints.

As an editor Norm believes content that examines problems of and divisions within church organizations should not be intermingled with the gospel orientation of *Shepherd’s Voice* and thus obscure its focus on the clear message of Jesus Christ. Norm brings a wealth of experience in publication to *Shepherd’s Voice*, and we are excited the Lord has blessed us and our readership through our new collaboration.

The staff of *Shepherd’s Voice* thanks God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ for blessing our effort to preach the gospel in print. With God’s power and oversight sustaining us, we will press onward and thus help fulfill Jesus’ mandate to preach the gospel throughout the world as a witness to God’s love and His glorious plan for humankind.

In Christ’s Service,

Jim Patterson, *Managing Editor*



## The Revealed Gospel

“Why do we say, “the revealed gospel?” Does that mean there are false, incredulous, or unrevealed gospels? Paul answers that in Chapter 1 of his letter to the Galatians, i.e., **“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (verse 8).** Paul is intractable in his fiery admonition to his readers. He says the same thing twice in verses eight and nine in the first chapter. In verses 11 and 12 Paul qualifies his credentials.

**“But I certify unto you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

The real gospel was revealed by Jesus Christ to Paul! Paul did not attend divinity school, did not subscribe to a Bible study course, and he did not even receive the gospel from his fellow apostles.

We can gain more insight from Paul’s letter to the Colossians on the same subject: **“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” – Col. 2:8.** Paul did not want his readers to be taken captive by deceit and cunning craftiness of men. The problem, however, is that virtually no one believes he or she is being entranced by a con artist or a false gospel. The Church of God is in view here and is not immune to manmade ideas on how to understand the gospel. That is precisely the reason Paul was so determined to implant truth in the minds of his precious readers and hearers in the faith.

Paul cites an example of two men who shipwrecked their faith. In I Timothy 1: 19, Paul charges timothy to continue **“... having faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck....”** Paul cites Hymeneus and Alexander as the two who had been put out for blasphemy. We should see why truth and belief in the revealed gospel are essential for our salvation. As with these two men, when we believe and promote added ideas and elements to the gospel message, we too can have our faith shipwrecked. Many today have been shipwrecked concerning the faith. For example, many have run aground by the “God’s Government on Earth” framework. There is still anxiety and anger due to the flagrant

exploitation of money to preserve a fraudulent non-biblical hierarchical church system. If we add the “watch Germany” syndrome and a plethora of doctrinal issues that create doubt and consternation, it may lead to something like the shipwreck of Paul’s description. Herein there is cause for concern.

Paul was insistent that his readers and hearers be cognizant of his knowledge of the gospel. He did not attend a prophet’s school, nor was this even of Gamaliel, a prominent doctor of the law. We read Jesus’ remarks found in Luke 4: 18-19, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Is this the gospel that Paul referred to? We will find that healing and caring for the destitute is a part of the gospel message. The gospel message is really about life; life that is abundant, coming to its fullness and consummation in the Kingdom of God. The broken-hearted, the captives, the blind, and the poor are relieved of their suffering. The gospel is from above and does not even entertain any worldly influences. How can an individual even begin to become shipwrecked if he or she is healed and relieved of their earthly plight and understand and believe the gospel?

We will look into the ways that shipwreck can occur within a called one’s life. It is curious that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century we can become involved with the same problems as the Israelites did in their time on earth. The problem the Israelites experienced was syncretism. The dictionary meaning of syncretism is this: The reconciliation or union of conflicting beliefs, uncritical acceptance of conflicting or divergent beliefs of principles, and egregious compromise in religion (Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Ed).

In other words, they mixed manmade doctrines with truth and then proclaimed this as the true gospel message. This is what Paul was opposed to as he spoke to his audience. Paul knew how easy it is to fall away even when we have the truth.

Notice his rebuke given to the Galatians in Chapter 1:6-7, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon



from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some that trouble you, and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” Some were perverting the gospel with varying forms of syncretism. Paul marveled that new Christians were willing to give up so soon on precious information and dedication and practice of the true gospel. That is exactly why Paul went on to say in the next verses that anyone who preached



***“Adding ideas and other elements to the gospel message can lead to the shipwreck of our faith”***

another gospel was to be accursed! When the Lord encountered this phenomenon with the Israelites, he punished them severely. Paul is telling the Galatians that the man who practiced syncretism was to be accursed. Jesus Christ and Paul were both on the same page with syncretism. It was intolerable for them both. We have the task of sorting out the chaff from the wheat in regard to the gospel. This task when accomplished helps us to be more astute in

deciphering a perverted gospel.

In Revelation, John gives us an example of a people who were aware of their teachers and their propensity to lead people astray with another gospel! Revelation 2:2 reads, ***“I know your works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou cannot bear them which are evil; and hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.”*** The Ephesians were worldly-wise in seeing false apostles for what they were. The Ephesians were gutsy, in that the church was not divided due to errant leadership. They were not afraid to call out the dubious apostles on their false pretenses either. The people in Ephesus were like the example written in ***Heb. 5:14, “...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”***

Mature Christians need discernment to keep from train wrecking their faith. The strong should also protect and help the weak so they are not swept up in the fervor of an enthusiastic false teacher. Our eternal lives may someday hinge on our ability to discern another gospel proposed by cunning, suave, disarming false teachers. We must not underestimate the power of persuasion by a pretentious, crafty presenter of egregious compromise in religion. They are very good at their craft as is our adversary Satan.

The gospel by definition is simply good news. So what is the good news? There must be something in the gospel that draws people to the message. Is it a love of Christ? Is it a love of His message? What does the gospel reveal to humankind that is alluring to them? How do we ensure there is no manmade encroachment into the gospel? Let us examine some of the gospels and determine their content and see for ourselves what is true.

There was an occasion when John the Baptist sent two of his disciples to inquire about Jesus and if Jesus indeed were the Messiah. We pick up Christ’s answer in Matthew 11: 4-5, ***“...Go and show John again those things which you do hear and see; The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”***

We find in the entirety of the gospel messages that this scenario is common. The disenfranchised were cared for by Christ. The ones least able to defend themselves were privy to Christ’s message. This message would be unlike any other human message. Most if not all messages today do not consist of true healing as depicted by Christ. For one thing the poor and the sick would not be able to contribute

mightily to the television programs being produced.

In modern America the class mentioned by Christ in His message for John would be the last to be considered for the gospel of the kingdom by many outreaches. Notice again what Jesus did as recorded by Matthew 4: 23, ***“And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.”*** We have already discussed this same format for the gospel in Isaiah, Matthew, and Luke.

There is indeed a common format for the gospel. The word is preached that repentance is needed then the recipients of the word are healed. They are looked upon with mercy and consideration. They are not condemned for their lifestyle; they simply are healed. The gospel brings an armistice between sinners and God.

Let us go to Matthew again for another insightful exposition by Jesus Christ about who are called by the gospel message. Matthew 9: 12-13, ***“... They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go you and learn what that means, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: For I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”*** A person not in the class of people mentioned might be offended by Christ's remarks.

Everyone needs repentance. The sick, deaf, blind, or imprisoned know they need help. The ones who have a job and enjoy good health may not realize that they are in need. The broken-hearted, the poor, and the captives know without a doubt they need help from someone, who is Jesus Christ. They will respond to a message of hope and deliverance. They will be exuberant to a message of forgiveness and healing of physical ailments and frustration. These people know they have sinned once the gospel message is preached to them.

Those rich and increased in goods as described in Revelation 3:17 do not know they are wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Notice the correlation between these people and the aforementioned ones needing the gospel message. They are exactly in the same straits as the sick, broken-hearted, poor, blind, and captives! However, they do not realize their plight. That is why Jesus was so unrelenting in his discourse against those who think they are whole. The revealed gospel levels the playing field. The revealed gospel shows all of us that we truly need healing of the mind and body including forgiveness and ultimate salvation.

The testimonies given to us in Acts and the epistles demonstrate that Jesus Christ was in them. Their messages were filled with God's Spirit and inspiration. They had passion and zeal in their travels, in their message, in their healing, and in their sowing of the gospel seed of repentance and salvation. They did not have a message of conflicting beliefs. The same message that they preached and lived by is the same message we have to preach today.

We too should have confirmation of our word by healings and the freeing of captives. Some today are captives of drugs, illicit sex, extreme health issues, and other addictive and enslaving elements of society that are even backed by industry. It is God who heals us, and it is God who can free us from the pulls of society.

Therefore our message of hope and deliverance should cause its readers and hearers to ask pertinent questions. Is your ministry engaging in healing, with confirming results? Is your ministry delivering captives? If not, why not?

If we are remiss in some area of the revealed gospel, we all should be searching for answers. Healing is sadly missing in today's ministries. Some on television claim healing, but such accounts are suspect at best. It is the intent of our writers to raise questions that can and should be answered. We will talk in future editions about the types of healing, the biblical answers for those types, and how they are properly implemented. For the time being let us all strive to know the true revealed gospel of Jesus Christ and preach it into the entire world.



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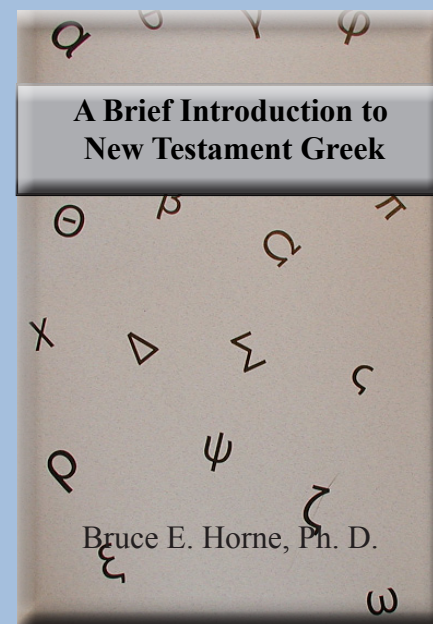
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## POOR IN SPIRIT?

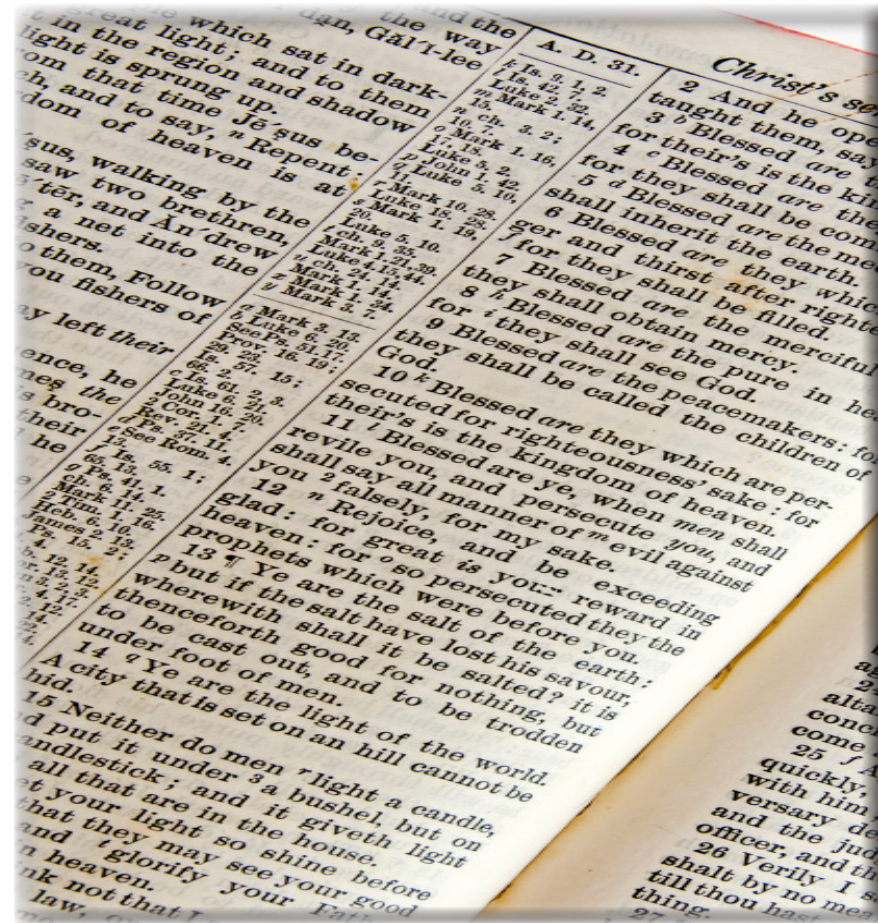
*We are all worms, but I do believe I am a glowworm. ~Winston Churchill*

In Matthew 5, (the beatitudes) Jesus is directing his comments to his disciples and the first thing out of his mouth is. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* As a Christian and a disciple of Jesus Christ I want to inherit the kingdom but what does Jesus mean by poor in spirit? Why not rich in spirit?

When God mentions rich and increased with goods... it is not a good thing. Talking to the Laodicean Church Jesus says, *“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked”* - Rev. 3:17. These Christians seem to enjoy a nice standard of living, but they are blind to their spiritual condition. Remember the rich fellow who came to Jesus asking how to enter the kingdom...and Jesus replied *‘go and sell what you have.’* Apparently his riches stuck a wedge between him and what was truly important. Remember the scripture that says it’s easier for a camel to go through an eye of a needle than a rich man to enter into the kingdom.

It seems when we come to a place where we feel physically satisfied, we become less and less hungry for God because we become content with where we are. This contentedness is actually a form of pride and because we are no longer poor in spirit and reduced to beggary we have officially considered our own actions and abilities as the key to our success. We feel that we have reached a place where we have already experienced the fullness of God and therefore have nothing else to learn. The members of the Laodicean Church were in that mind-set

When we look at different translations of *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* it becomes clear what Jesus means. He said, *‘God makes happy those who know that they need him. The kingdom of heaven is for them’* (Worldwide English NT).



*“Blessed are those who are spiritually needy. [not necessarily physically needy] The kingdom of heaven belongsto them”*(NewInternationalReader’sVersion).

In today’s Gospel Luke is translated as *“Happy are you who are poor”*. This suggests physical, financial poverty. Matthew’s Greek text is translated as *“Happy are the poor in spirit”*. The Hebrew word behind both renderings into Greek has both meanings. In fact, depending on the context, the Hebrew word for “poor” can also mean oppressed, afflicted, wretched, miserable, helpless, humble, patient, meek.

In such a religious context, the poverty intended is poverty in spirit, that is, the humble recognition of one’s utter nothingness before God; that without His gifts one is and has nothing. This poverty of spirit, this humility, this recognition of one’s absolute nothingness before God, is a virtue God says should characterize all members of His Kingdom. It is only with this recognition of what we are that we are able to grow in grace and knowledge. It is the kick off point...



the beginning of our conversion.

He said of Himself “Learn of Me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (Matthew 11:39 Young’s literal translation).

I asked a minister a long time ago if he would look at one of my articles and he refused, saying he already knew all about that subject and he was not interested. I was certainly taken aback. I wonder how God looks on that kind of attitude. When we have a child, even if a grown up child, who is still willing to listen and take advice from his elderly parents... who does not brag that he knows it all...it is pure pleasure. There is something about a person when they have a humility of spirit about them that is utterly disarming. No wonder Isaiah says, “Our holy God lives forever in the highest

heavens, and this is what he says: *Though I live high above in the holy place, I am here to help those who are humble and depend only on me*” (Isaiah 57:15, Contemporary English Version). Someone who is arrogant and knows everything cannot be helped.

In this materialistic, technological age, in so many ways, we have removed our need for God, His instructions, his direction, his blessings.

We must ask God to make us poor in spirit. We must repent of our own self righteousness and our own areas where we consider ourselves rich enough that we do not hunger for God. { We must not confuse poor in spirit with being poverty stricken, we can be prosperous and still hunger for God.} Jesus is saying that our emptiness and nothingness before God is a virtue. We cannot look to ourselves because the cupboard is bare, the plate is empty.

**“Blessed are the poor in spirit” means “blessed are those who admit their spiritual emptiness, their spiritual hollowness, their spiritual inertness”.**

Jesus speaks these words to the Smyrna Church: *“I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich!”*- Rev. 2:9. Here are members of God’s Church living in poverty yet Jesus says they are rich. They recognize their condition of neediness for God and that makes them rich indeed. *“Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it’s safe from moth and rust and burglars...The place where your treasure is, is the place you will most want to be, and end up being”*(Matthew 6:19,20 The Message translation).

Paul says it a little differently in 2 Corinthians 6: *“Rather, as servants of God ..having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”*

Being poor in spirit is not taking vows of poverty, which can be acts of pretense, or despising the blessings God has given us. Instead it is a condition of the heart. As Matthew Henry said,

*“this poverty of spirit is a gracious disposition of soul, by which we are emptied of self, in order to our being filled with Jesus Christ.”* He also said it was, *“To be contentedly poor, willing to be emptied of worldly wealth, if God orders that to be our lot; to bring our mind to our condition, when it is a low condition. Many are poor in the world, but high in spirit, poor and proud, murmuring and complaining, and blaming their lot, but we must accommodate ourselves to our poverty, we must know how to be abased, Phil. 4:12.”*

Continue in the words of Paul *“... for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need”* -Phil. 10-12. Paul admonishes us to be content in whatever state we find ourselves. Being poor or being rich does not make us righteous. It’s our need for and our responsiveness to God that is important.

When speaking of being ‘poor in spirit,’ Christ focuses on and emphasizes a change inwardly of the heart and mind. So let’s get rid of our pride, our stubborn self will and we will inherit the kingdom!





## Hallowe'en, Samhain, and the Christian

### The Celtic Connection

The origins of Hallowe'en trace to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in), which marked the start of the new year throughout much that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France. Samhain was celebrated on the night of October 31 when the ghosts of the dead supposedly returned to earth to make mischief of various kinds, damage crops, and frighten unwary individuals. The festival signified the end of the summer planting and harvesting season as well as the beginning of winter and was accompanied by sacrifices to the gods and other ritualistic acts of worship. Samhain became All Hallows Eve, or Hallowe'en, in A.D. 835 when Pope Gregory III designated the following day, November 1, All Saints Day. Although earlier festal events had been observed in honor of departed saints and martyrs, Gregory's Feast of All Saints probably was the first such annual observance.

### Hallowe'en and the Priesthood

In the Celtic world of two millennia ago, winter was a dark, foreboding time associated with transition in general and with human death in particular. The actual point of transition—from sunset on Samhain until sunset the following day—was seen as a time when the veil between the living and the dead was permeable and as a time of emergent intuition and insight for those receptive to inspiration from beyond the mortal coil. This notion made it especially easy for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to impress the populace with the Druids' annual predictions for the future. For a population largely dependent on the uncertainties of the natural world, these predictions were reassuring and at the same time were reminders of the power exerted by the Druidic priesthood over the everyday lives of the people.

Later the Roman Catholic priesthood exerted similar



influence over its faithful as Hallowe'en evolved into a popular church-sanctioned holiday replete with saints, martyrs, and the Roman church's promise of otherworldly bliss after an appropriate postmortem period spent working away one's sins in Purgatory. All this was presided over, of course, by priests of Rome from the Pope down to the lowliest monk.

While it is difficult to determine precisely how much influence the Celtic practices of Samhain had on the initial institution of All Saints Day and its role in the Roman church, it is clear that contemporary American practices, both within the churches that tolerate Hallowe'en and without, have a direct lineage back to Gregory's day through the Irish (Celtic) immigrant population that began to exert a strong influence in the United States following the Irish Potato Famine of the 1840s. Students of history will recall that the influx of Irish immigrants following that terrible agricultural tragedy significantly and permanently impacted American culture through increasing the American Roman Catholic population several times over in a comparatively short time. Hallowe'en is but one lingering example of this cultural shift.



### Hallowe'en in the Modern Era

At its core Hallowe'en is associated with the rolling over of one year into the next and with darkness, death, and the largely malevolent activities of disembodied spirits. Yet for most people in our secular society, Hallowe'en is a custom taken for granted. We all are born into a ready-made world and tend to accept cultural norms without a great deal of question.

Merchants, for example, love Hallowe'en, for it is the second most profitable season of the commercial year for a majority of them. Only the Christmas season consistently outstrips Hallowe'en in annual profit. Hollywood and the media in general love Hallowe'en as it affords them fodder for their various undertakings. Children love Hallowe'en for its opportunities for what seems to be fun. What child without parental restrictions on Hallowe'en fun and games would not leap at the opportunity to participate in Hallowe'en traditions such as trick-or-treating or carving a pumpkin into a grotesque caricature of someone or something? Such activities reflect the essence of human nature in its unregenerate state and are not to be underestimated in their power to influence thought and behavior. Children, in their naivety and innocence, are extremely susceptible to such influences.

Moreover, it is no secret that Hallowe'en has ancient origins that have nothing whatsoever to do with the Judeo-Christian values upon which our nation allegedly was founded. In his 1982 essay entitled "Hallowe'en: The Fantasy and Folklore of All Hallows," Jack Santino wrote:

. . . All Saints Day, otherwise known as All Hallows (hallowed means sanctified or holy), continued the ancient Celtic traditions. The evening prior to the day was the time of the most intense activity, both human and supernatural. People continued to celebrate All Hallows Eve as a time of the wandering dead, but the supernatural beings were now thought to be evil. The folk continued to propitiate those spirits (and their masked impersonators) by setting out gifts of food and drink. Subsequently, All Hallows Eve became Hallow Evening, which became

Hallowe'en—an ancient Celtic, pre-Christian New Year's Day in contemporary dress . . . .

. . . Virtually all present Halloween traditions can be traced to the ancient Celtic day of the dead. Halloween is a holiday of many mysterious customs, but each one has a history, or at least a story behind it. The wearing of costumes, for instance, and roaming from one door to another demanding treats can be traced to the Celtic period and the first few centuries of the Christian era, when it was thought that the souls of the dead were out and around, along with fairies, witches, and demons. Offerings of food and drink were left out to placate them. As the centuries wore on, people began dressing like these dreadful creatures, performing antics in exchange for food and drink. This practice is called mumming, from which the practice of trick-or-treating evolved. To this day, witches, ghosts, and skeleton figures of the dead are among the favorite disguises. Halloween also retains some features that harken back to the original harvest holiday of Samhain, such as the custom of bobbing for apples and carving vegetables, as well as the fruits, nuts, and [spiced] cider associated with the day . . . .  
(Essay available from the Library of Congress)

### How Should a Christian Handle Hallowe'en?

Consider the Hallowe'en cast of core characters: witches, sorcerers, and ghosts. The Bible, however, plainly forbids occult practices of all kinds. God says:

When you enter the land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the Lord; and because of these detestable things the Lord your God will drive them out before you. You shall be blameless

before the Lord your God. For those nations, which you shall dispossess, listen to those who practice witchcraft and to diviners, but as for you, the Lord your God has not allowed you to do so. (Deuteronomy 18: 9-14, NASB)

All counterfeit and spurious efforts to peer into the future, to control one's fate or the fate of others, or to solicit spiritual guidance or favor from any other than God Himself are absolutely forbidden in the pages of the Bible, for God's people are to be a peculiar treasure belonging to and trusting only in Him. Hallowe'en is an observance that in all its nuances elevates that which is dark and contrary to God's way of life.

How is it, then, that so many well intentioned folk who call themselves after the only "name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" ([Acts 4:12, NASB](#)), the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, find ways to justify the observance of Hallowe'en and even, in some cases, to incorporate the practice or some contrived alternative into their churches' autumn activities schedule? As noted earlier, many feel that "baptizing" a pagan ritual, observance, or holiday brings it under the blood, figuratively speaking. However, they have no scriptural basis for their belief. On the contrary, God thunders "Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues." ([Revelation 18:4, NASB](#))

The immediate context here is the angel's announcement that "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!" ([Revelation 18:2, NASB](#)), which speaks to the destruction God will pour out on the world's political, economic, and societal systems at the return of Jesus Christ. There is little doubt that same destruction also will befall all forms of baptized paganism, including Hallowe'en.

Some believers feel that reinterpreting Hallowe'en as an opportunity for children to have "harmless" fun by dressing up and playing out fantasies not related to the occult does not violate the law of God. Others rationalize their participation in Hallowe'en by sending their children out to trick-or-treat with tracts to distribute or other evangelistic tools with which to witness, i.e., memorized Bible verses. Still other

parents claim Hallowe'en provides an opportunity for "family time" or mouth some other glittering generality that has a sound or form of godliness yet denies the power thereof. Such individuals, however sincere, are on dangerous ground spiritually and should remember the Lord's admonition that "sorcerers" will be excluded from the New Jerusalem ([Revelation 22:15, NASB](#)) and will have their part in "the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." ([Revelation 21:8, NASB](#)).

Hallowe'en is an observance undeniably linked to the realm of witchcraft and sorcery. Why would any sincere Christian want to take a chance on displeasing his or her Lord and possibly suffering the fate described in Revelation merely to cling to a pagan observance that will be swept away and remembered no more when Jesus Christ returns to establish His reign over the earth? How much more excellent it would be for the followers of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Messiah, to "wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city" ([Revelation 22:14, NASB](#)), for outside are those who follow the ways of the world even after God, in His mercy, enlightens them to His ways and His true form of worship.

How should a Christian handle Hallowe'en and all that pertains to it? The Apostle Paul provides as definitive an answer as one can find in all of scripture:

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? 'Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,' says the Lord. 'And do not touch what is unclean; [a]nd I will welcome you. And I will be a Father to you, [a]nd you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' [s]ays the Lord Almighty. (II Corinthians 6:14, II Corinthians 6:17-18, NASB)



## Are You Plugged In?



A few weeks ago, I attended my niece's dance recital. I sat in the audience patiently waiting for the show to begin. The auditorium was filled with parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and friends. The lights dimmed, the curtain opened, and the music started. There on stage stood the little dancers-ready to show off their year of hard work and practice. As I scanned the room, I was bewildered by what I saw. Most people were not watching the dance routine unfolding on stage, but were on their phones texting, playing games, scrolling through their applications, checking out Facebook, listening to music, checking scores of sports games... you name it. Since that day, I have made a conscious effort to watch people. From my two months of observation, it appears that more and more Americans spend their time "plugged in." But exactly what are we plugged in to and where should our attention be directed?

Technology has opened up the world to most people. Even in Africa the sales of cellular devices have skyrocketed. With a click of a button, you can surf the web for just about anything. You can shop for clothes, gifts, and household items. Information on

just about any topic can be found with the touch of a few keys. You can instantly send an email and get immediate feedback. Viewing streaming television shows, news channels, or movies can now be done. With social networking sites like Facebook, you are able to get a constant news feed that tells you what all of your "friends" are doing throughout their day, and have the choice to play many different interactive games. At one point in time, all of this information could only be done from a laptop or home computer, but in today's world you can do this all from a cellular phone. Wow- we now have the ability to get constant information and, in reality, do not even have to have personal contact with other people. Many people I know would rather send a text message to a friend then pick up the phone.

Being the owner of an Information Technology Consulting firm, I am well aware of the benefits that technology has brought to our world. On the flip side, I am also mindful of the dangers. What worries me is that a great deal of time appears to be spent "plugged in" to this world of technology. When our minds are plugged in to these distractions, then it must be "unplugged" from something else. Unfortunately, that something else tends to be the relationships that should matter most; those with a spouse, children, family, friends, and most importantly the relationship with God our Creator. My mom has been in private counseling for over twenty-five years. She shared with me that she has seen a rise in couples in need of counseling because they feel "disconnected from their spouse." Many complain that their partner is more involved with a cell phone or laptop then they are an active participant in the relationship.

This trend is especially worrisome for members of the church of God. We fully understand the ruler of this world and the distractions around us. Even with the knowledge we have of God's plan, it is very easy to fill our days with the cares of this world. In 1 John 2:15-17, John writes *do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all this is in the world- the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the*



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*lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.* These words remind us of where the worldly distractions lead us...nowhere! Therefore Brethren, we especially need to be “plugged in” to the Spirit of God.

Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-22, *Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.* What exactly did Paul mean when he said “pray without ceasing?” The Greek root word for “without ceasing” means uninterrupted. The word uninterrupted means unceasing, without interruption or intermission.

Many would tell you that this is impossible. How can one pray all of the time? In fact many people I know turn to God only when things get hard or during times of trial. When things seem to be going well, many go back to the concerns and distractions of this world. It is the true child of God who stays focused on the Creator at all times or “without ceasing.” No matter what we are doing throughout the day, God should be on our minds. Every decision we make and actions we take should be pleasing to God. This is the habit of true devotion to our calling. We are told in 2 Corinthians 10:5 *to control our mind, ...”casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”*

I am the mother of two boys; one is 5 and the other 10. I often ask them when they make a decision that if Jesus were to come back at that very moment would he be pleased by what he saw? I apply this to my own life. I have many roles: I am a wife, mother, daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, friend, neighbor, business owner, and most importantly a disciple of God. Every baptized member of God’s family needs

to be fully awake, and using our talents so that we bear good fruit (Mark 4:19). We need to have our lanterns filled with the oil of truth. To do this, we need to read our Bibles daily, study God’s word, meditate, and pray without ceasing. When this world comes to an end, we want to be in God’s Kingdom doing whatever role he sees fit for us. In order to get there, we need to stay focused on God’s plan and continue doing what is required of us. Every thought and action needs to have God at the forefront. We cannot allow this world and all of its diversions to get in the way of that.



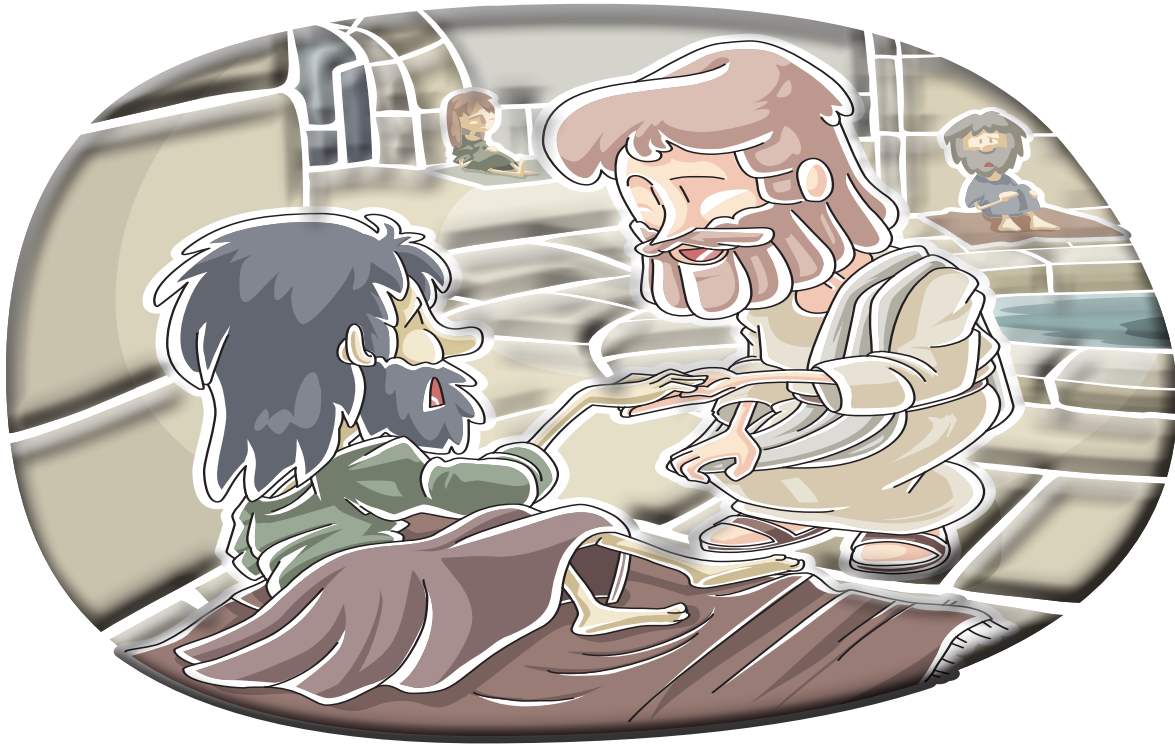
I challenge you to become aware of your habits concerning technology and all of the worldly distractions that come with it. At the end of each day, take note of how you spent your time. If more of your time was used surfing the web, texting friends, or on social network sites then it was being active in the relationships in your life, especially that with God, then serious changes need to be made. In Luke 21:34-36 Christ warns us of the importance of watching “*But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*”

Brethren, I pray that we can all “unplug” ourselves from our computers, laptops, cell phones, or anything that distracts us from being single-minded. We all need to remain focused, be watchful, walk on the narrow path, and stay “plugged in” to God’s Spirit. ***Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour -1 Peter 5:8.*** Don’t allow the amusements of this life to become a weakness in your armor of God.



## Do You Want To Be Made Whole?

(John 5:1-14)



During one of the annual festivals of the Hebrew religion, Jesus came to Jerusalem. He entered one of the gates of the city called the Sheep Gate. Therein lay all manner of sick: the blind, the halt, the withered. Adjacent to this gate was a pool called the Pool of Bethesda where the sick gathered and waited for the water to be troubled. For an angel periodically troubled the water, after which the first sick person to enter the water was healed.

At the gate lay a paralyzed man who had been sick for 38 years. Perhaps for many years, this man had been attempting to thrust himself into the pool so that he could be healed. But every time he pathetically made his way to the pool, someone jumped in front of him and was the first person whose body touched the cool, healing water. When Jesus arrived he asked the man, “Do you want to be made whole?”

What type of question was that? Was Jesus being sarcastic, insensitive? After 38 years of being crippled, and with the prospect of being healed literally inches away from him only to be denied year after year after year, would not this man want to finally be made whole? I believe the question is understood better if we realize

that Jesus was talking about more than just physical health. I believe Jesus was talking not only about the man’s physical health but about his spiritual salvation. By asking the crippled man, “Do you want to be made whole?” Jesus, I believe, was asking the man if he were willing to make necessary changes in his life. When Jesus said, “Do you want to be made well?” Jesus really was asking the man, “Are you ready to give up the life style which you have lived? Are you willing to change not just your mobility but also your mind-set? Are you willing to go into the unfamiliar and follow me? Are you ready to step forward into the new life that I will give you?”

One might ask, “What does a crippled man healed 2000 years ago have to do with me?” For Jesus to make those of us who suffer (physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually) whole, changes will have to occur in our lives. People who are not well may be holding on to thought patterns, habits, and practices that are detrimental, maybe even sinful. In other words, we have to want to be made whole and be willing to do what is needed to facilitate our healing.

The necessary changes may come in two forms.

Under the first model a person is doing the right thing but needs to exert more effort in doing the right thing. There is a Latin phrase, *citius, altius, fortius* coined by Henri Martin Didon which means faster, higher, stronger. Indeed there are occasions in which a person is doing the right thing but must do it faster, higher, and stronger if success is to be achieved. A person in training to improve his or her physical conditioning may be exercising 30 minutes 2 times a week. But to achieve the desired results, that person may have to start exercising 45 minutes 3 times a week. A Christian praying to God for a certain thing that is noble, good, and within the will of God whose request has not yet been granted may have to invoke the *citius, altius, fortius* formula in that he or she may have to pray more and perhaps even add fasting to those prayers.

The second form of changing one's life may be more difficult. This involves changing one's course of action and in some cases completely abandoning habits, practices, and thought processes. Wanting to be made whole may require a person to leave an unproductive, self-destructive, or even adulterous romantic relationship or even to abandon the abuse of a chemical substance. In the area of career aspirations and finances, it may require going back to school, formulating and executing a new career strategy, abandoning reckless spending, finding additional sources of revenue, or saving more money.

“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.” - Psalm 34:11-14

The prophet Isaiah says, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” – Isaiah 55:7

### **Man healed despite himself**

Please note that when Jesus asked the crippled man if he wanted to be made whole, the man did

not give Jesus a responsive answer. The man responded that he had no man to assist him into the pool when the water was stirred up and that others stepped in front of him every time he tried to enter the pool. I am sad to say that if some of us Christians had dealt with the paralyzed man rather than Jesus, we might have scolded him by saying, “I did not ask you if anyone stepped in front of you. I asked you if you wanted to be made whole!”

Jesus, however, dealt with this pitiful man on the man's level of faith and understanding. This instance of Jesus healing the paralyzed man smacks squarely in the face those Word-Faith teachers who believe God only heals people according to their faith or who even go so far as to state that a person's lack of faith renders God incapable of such healing.

God, in fact, has all power and is sovereign. While faith certainly pleases God, God can heal or kill whomever he chooses despite their so-called “negative and possessive confessions.” (See Deuteronomy 32:39.) In this instance Jesus, the Son of God, healed the man despite himself.

### **Man playing the victim**

It is also important to note that while Jesus healed the crippled man despite his non-responsive answer to the Savior's question, Jesus would have no part in this man's self-pity and blame of others. The man was playing the victim in stating that he had no one to put him into the pool and that another stepped down before him when the water was stirred up. But Jesus did not get bogged down in the unfairness of others reaching the water before the crippled man.

Jesus did not upbraid the others at the pool for being selfish in the pursuit of their own healing. He did not decry the unfairness of this competitive healing scheme. No. Jesus was more interested in showing the man that He was there — right there — to help.

This is an important lesson for Christianity today. Today liberation theology abounds in which socialist preachers constantly rant against the unfairness and inequality of society. There are also those on the “religious right” who want to use the power of



## You need the Church - with its faults!

*And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries - Hebrews 10:24-27, NAU*



What a strong admonition for Christians to assemble together on a regular basis! The writer connects the forsaking of assembly and mutual encouragement with loss of salvation! Why, then, do so many people have trouble going to a church? Nearly all will point to hypocrisy, errors, and injustice that they have seen in a church group. Are they right? In most cases, "Yes." Jesus spoke a whole chapter (Matthew 23) pointing out the hypocrisy and error of the synagogues, the

religious assemblies of his day. Later, He spoke two chapters pointing out the errors (and the strengths) of seven Christian churches (Revelation 2 & 3).

Why are we supposed to go to these Church congregations when they are full of faults? Because the Christian has not only the responsibility to learn there, but also to do good works, set a good example and teach others there. In His Messages to the Seven Churches, Christ told every person to repent of their sins, and to overcome and do the good works of their congregation. He did not tell anyone to leave their congregation because of its sin.

It is not enough for us simply to know the faults of a particular congregation. And if we are spiritual, it is our responsibility to help solve the problems! Strong words? Read on.

*Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge (James 4:11).*

If we consider ourselves new believers, without a mature understanding of the law of God, then we do not have to judge other believers who appear to be sinning. It is enough for us to do what is right ourselves. If we do consider ourselves to be spiritually mature, then it is our responsibility to help others overcome as we are able:

*Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted (Galatians 6:1).*

The church is not just a place for us to benefit from the spirituality of others. It also is a place where others are to benefit from us. The Apostle Paul tells us how we can know whether to be quiet and

not judge or to become involved in others' faults. To help others overcome sin, we need 1) to be gentle, and 2) to help without sinning ourselves. The Bible does not give the Christian any "middle ground." The Christian **cannot say**: "I am spiritual enough to recognize the sins in a church congregation but not spiritual enough to help correct them, so I just won't go." This is the genesis of what the writer of Hebrews warns his readers about. Isolationism, whether by fear, fastidiousness, self-conceit, or other reasons risks becoming a willful turning away.

### No churches near me; What do I do?

Some congregations—especially those that meet in homes or rented buildings—are very hard to find. Try visiting every nearby church you know about and ask people there about other groups known to them. If you are remote, try to connect with ministries by various means available in our modern age. You will probably be surprised at the results!

### I am not healthy enough to attend

God never expects us to do what we cannot do. If one is ill and promises God he will attend regularly if He heals, and God does not heal, then God is not requiring them to attend. God is a fair judge. He knows who is able to attend and who cannot.

Jesus, the most spiritual of all, did not remove himself from temptation but befriended notorious sinners (Matt 9:11-13) and endured the sins of his own disciples (Matt 26:31). He was tempted just like we are, but He did not sin (Heb 4:15). Jesus went on to die for all of us while we were sinners (Rom 5:8). Christ said His disciples would be known by their love for each other (John 13:34-35), and that the greatest love is laying down one's life for another (John 15:13). If Christ suffered and died for us, we can certainly brave the difficulties of a church

congregation to be a blessing to the others there. God is not perfecting a church denomination, organization, program, or building. He is perfecting you and the rest of us too (Matt 5:48). If you can, find a congregation where you can learn as well as serve and be a blessing to others. Go there. Do His Work.

***Bear one another's burdens,  
and so fulfill the law of Christ  
(Galatians 6:2).***



***continued from page 16 (Do You Want to be Made Whole?)***

government to promote virtue and who think they can set up a "kingdom" of God right here on earth. But as with the crippled man, Jesus Christ would have no part of it. Jesus Christ did not come to the earth to change society, but to change you and me. (He will change society when he comes the second time.)

### A health more important than physical health

I proposed above that Jesus, in asking the man if he wanted to be made whole, was referring to more than just physical health. My theory is supported by the fact that Jesus, after healing the man and finding him in the temple, said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you." - John 5:14.

In telling the man a worse thing could come upon him, Jesus was telling the man that there is a health more important than physical health. Jesus was telling the man that now that his physical health had been restored, it would be imperative that he maintain his spiritual health by following Christ and not practicing sin.

### Conclusion

As we have seen being made whole might require us to make some changes in our lives. To be made whole may take great commitment, personal honesty, and determination. May God help us understand fully what it means and what it takes to be made whole, and may He give us the courage and will to do what we need to do to be made whole.



## FIRST CENTURY THEOLOGY

### “Spiritual Manifestations”

Are you filled with the Spirit? Does the Spirit of God work in you in such a way that it is obvious to others? Have you personally witnessed a manifestation of God’s Spirit in someone?

Acts 7: 55-56 tells us, *“But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”* Throughout this chapter of Acts, Stephen recounts the history of the Israelites. Stephen was chastising his audience over the laxity of their actions and their forgetfulness of the past. In verse 51, Stephen lashes out in consternation, *“...You always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do you.”* Notice the similarity of what Jesus told the Pharisees Matt. 23: 31, *“...You are the children of them which killed the prophets.”*

Unfortunately Stephen’s audience was so incensed by his sharp remarks that they stoned him to death. God, however, had provided Stephen with the opportunity to see the Father and Jesus Christ as the heavens opened up to him before he died. What a grand spiritual manifestation!

This example may be too extreme for most of us to relate to personally. No one wants to be stoned to death due to demonstrating a spiritual manifestation.

Stephen was *filled* with the Spirit as he gave his testimony to his audience. The goal is being filled with God’s Spirit in our actions.

Does anyone ever feel he or she has been guided by God’s Spirit? It is not likely we will see heaven open for us, but can we in lesser degree have a manifestation? Can we know for a certainty that God is honoring our service to him?

A clue may be found in Matt. 26: 41: *“Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”* Jesus told this to his disciples while he was praying in Gethsemane. He wanted them to watch and pray with Him, but they fell asleep. Is the weight of our worldly duties causing us to *sleep* and not have the will to be filled with the Spirit? Are we too worldly to be filled with the Spirit?



Another clue that may relate is found in Rev. 3: 17, *“...I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing.”* We in North America are blessed in wealth compared to other nations. Is that a factor? Are we satisfied to the extent we cannot

find the energy to be filled with God’s Spirit? Why the lack of healings today? Is this an indicator of spiritual deficiency? Why are we not filled with the Spiritual zeal like Stephen? Let’s search in greater detail to examine this phenomenon of being *filled* with God’s Spirit.

Perhaps the greater question to ask is, *“Why not be filled with the Spirit?”* God freely gives us His Spirit upon repentance and baptism. We are to grow in grace and knowledge. We are to overcome our shortcomings. We are also to be Christ-like in our behavior. There is no doubt about Stephen’s spiritual maturity as witnessed in Acts 7. His audience,



however, was dull of hearing regarding spiritual matters. Stephen accused them of always resisting the Holy Spirit.

What does that mean? How do we resist God's Spirit? When God reveals His plans and purpose for us, we have to respond. Staying in the same mode or attitude we are in is resisting the Spirit.

The attitude of Stephen's audience was one of extreme anger. Why the anger? Because Stephen was very direct in his vitriolic invective toward the people. Stephen, at that moment, had the very attitude of God. But people want to hear *smooth* things. This is why televangelists are so popular and prosperous. They appease their audiences. Appeasement is pleasing to the ear. It does not, however, lead to change in the heart of humankind. Change or repentance is what God demands of us.

A manifestation is a display, an example, an illustration, an epiphany. Stephen gave an illustration to his audience, and they did not like it. The zeal that Stephen displayed was like God's zeal in accomplishing what He wants for all eternity.

In Isaiah 9:7 we read, "*Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end ...The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*" The zeal is God's unswerving determination to make it happen. God is accomplishing His will because of His enthusiastic, powerful desire.

God in us creates the same zealous desires. When we are baptized and hands are laid on us, we inherit the Spirit of Christ. Romans 8: 9 tells us "...*Now if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*" There is no reason not to be filled with zeal and desire just as God has in carrying out His plans.

Have you ever heard the term, "tired old Christians"? Are you tired? Has the zeal you had when you were first introduced to the truth of God's plan diminished over time? Many look for the return of Christ only to be disappointed. Still others have left the church due to faulty administrations. Work demands, school, and extra-curricular activities are exhausting and

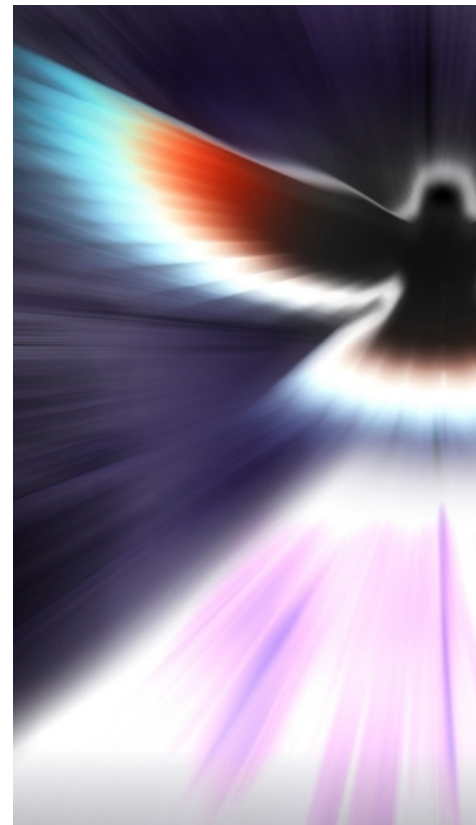
zap our time and energy. Many choose to stay away from church rather than cutting down on activities or rescheduling work duties.

God expects us to put Him first in our lives. Are you blessed? Have you forgotten your blessings and left God out of your life? Where is your zeal? Deut. 28: 1-2 tells us, "And it shall come to pass, if you hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, and observe and do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: And all these blessings shall come upon thee, and overtake thee, if thou shall hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God."

We also find in Deuteronomy 28 fourteen verses of promises for obedience to God and fifty-three verses of curses for disobedience to Him. The Israelites were instructed to obey His laws and not allow worldly activities before God. Does this apply to us as well in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Yes, it most certainly does! Our disappointments in life should not dampen our zeal. Our work problems should not interfere with our Sabbath worship. Our financial burdens should not prevent us from tithing.

The *zeal* of God will take us into eternity. Our faithful zeal will be received by God the Father who gives us so much in return for obedience to Him. Tired old Christians do not live forever! Those without zeal or the incentive to gain more talents may end up like the unprofitable servant. God wants those He calls to be excited about His plan. To be zealous of good works all our lives. To have the insight, bravado, and enthusiasm of our brother, Stephen!

The Pharisees Stephen chastised would not take correction. Hebrews 12:6-7 tells us that God corrects



us because of His love for us. We should learn to take His chastening willingly because it shows how much God loves us. It is especially poignant in verse 8 of Hebrews, *“But if you be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then you are illegitimate, and not sons.”*

This is rejection from God’s family. God wants us to live. God in His zealous desire to save us from ourselves causes a correction or chastening to take

place. When we get too far away from God a correction may seem unfair. We become familiar with our habits and attitudes, and that is satisfying due to our propensity to get comfortable. Chastening is uncomfortable! God gets us out of our comfort zone. He wants us to partake of His holiness. The zeal returns in God’s correction plan. Rev. 3:19 says, *“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore and repent.”* This is an appropriate response to address our laxity and forgetfulness. God has done this from the very beginning of man’s creation. No one is immune to correction. The zeal of God works wonders!

It is also heart-warming to know how much God loves us.

There is an admonition for us in Luke 12:43-44: *“Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he comes shall so find doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he has.”* This is said in the context of watching for the bridegroom to return. For example, all hourly workers know the rule is to keep working until the whistle blows for quitting time. All salaried workers know to keep working until the job is done. They may even work longer than the normal quitting time. This is the sense that Jesus is trying to get his hearers to comprehend.

What happens when the boss or overseer is absent? There is a laxity in production. The office workers may talk more since there is no one to see them. This is a common scenario among workers. Jesus is saying we have to keep going until the trumpet sounds.

Our Christian walk is in a similar situation. Jesus is not present. He too is absent. Is there a tendency to wonder when Jesus will return? In Matthew 24:48, *“The evil servant will say in his heart, My Lord delays his coming.”* Many today honestly believe Jesus should be returning. Weariness, distractions, and loss of faith cause many to give up. Jesus did not live up to their expectations. The Father alone will decide when Christ is returning. Our job is to keep working until the trumpet sounds just like our work place sounds when to quit.

Many do not realize that it takes faith to keep going until the trumpet sounds or our hearts stop beating. We may seem tired, but it is a lack of faith. Faith is what Stephen had and it gave him the zeal to speak out against his hearers. Believers act on their beliefs and their zeal propels them to victory. They do it until there is no more life in them. They are motivated by an inward powerful desire to succeed. How can we possibly overcome when we faint at the slightest obstacle?

John was inspired to write in Rev. 3:10, *“Be thou faithful until death and I will give you a crown of life.”* Our Sabbath time is for rest and rejuvenation. Are we using what God has given us to keep our strength, our zeal, our dedication, and our unyielding desire to finish the race that has been put before us? If God be for us who can be against us? We are a people who have Christ’s Spirit and His mind. If we do not grow weary and maintain our zeal, we will reign with Jesus Christ for all eternity as His chosen Kings and Priests. We have seen that zeal, correction, faith, and work are essential components to enter the Kingdom of God. What we know and experience should cause all of us to exhibit some jaw-dropping spiritual manifestations!





## *To the Angel of the Scattered Churches*

A number of years ago at the Feast of Tabernacles located at a small retreat in southern Ontario, a gentleman made a comment to me in which he lamented “the Church of God is so scattered” as he shook his head in disappointment. I do understand his concern, and at that time my current thinking on the multitude of different churches was still developing. It was not until the last year that I had serious opportunity to consider with reflection on how to interpret the scattered condition of God’s church. My conclusions are these: It is the norm for the Church to be scattered, and it is its nature. That does not mean, however, that the Church is divided in its nature.

God’s people are less divided than we are often led to believe and always have the avenue to be in unity. We are afforded every opportunity to be undivided in the faith because God Himself is undivided. As we will explore in this article, unity is the goal, and Christian unity should not be mistaken for uniformity.

If we will rid ourselves of modern biases toward God’s Church that our recent history unfortunately has imparted, and if we will zoom in and out for clarity, we will learn that the Church today is not really that different from its first century counterpart.

### **The Organization of the Early Church**

If I described a church organization today that had leaders thrown in jail by the authorities, its leaders and members killed for their beliefs with many scattered from headquarters to go at it alone without

close oversight, we would not think it was being blessed by God. Such was the early church, however, and it all occurred in the confines of the Lord’s will. I am amazed at times how even today some (many?) would “*adorn the monuments of the righteous*” of the persecuted and scattered first century church, but refuse to participate in smaller churches or hide at the first sign of trouble, unwilling to withstand the winds of trials that affect the church of God today. Many have chosen to remove themselves from active involvement altogether, leaving it up to others to fight the good fight. It is a matter of conviction, and conviction stands in the face of all other opposing realities.

When persecution struck the early church in Jerusalem, the church was scattered to the surrounding regions. The apostles remained in Jerusalem, but the work continued with those who were scattered without them.

*“... At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the Apostles. ... Therefore, those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word.” – Acts 8:1-4*

In Greek the word for scatter is the same word one would use as one who scatters seed in a field. The story of those who were scattered picks up again in Acts 11. They remained courageous despite being separated from the apostles and remained steadfast in their instructions.



*Now those who were scattered after the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to no one but the Jews only. But some of them were men from Cyprus and Cyrene, who, when they had come to Antioch, spoke to the Hellenists, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord. - Acts 11:19-21*

Paul acknowledged to the brethren that there would be differences in various approaches to ministries (1 Cor. 12:5). This is not to say such differences would not lead to contentions from time to time, and we should not read too much into such things.

In Acts 15, our historian, Luke, gives the account of a sharp difference that arose between Barnabas and Paul. From this account, we should not assume they were not unified in the faith or divided in any doctrinal sense. What is clearly evident is they had personal differences influenced by past issues in how to go about executing their calling. If both men were mature and of full age in the training of God's Spirit, I suppose a sharp contention would not have erupted, but God is gracious. He took advantage of the situation, and a "split" in their ministries was to the advantage of furthering His will.

We should not necessarily interpret dissention of this nature as failure but rather as opportunity. God was not waiting for perfection before he put them to work, and so it is for us, His servants, in modern times. He expects results despite our limitations, including those things that make it difficult for us to get along. In fact, Jesus describes Himself as an austere Person. If he gives us a talent, He still expects results where conditions are not perfect.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul gives an account of his restrictions in chains that caused others to step up their game. This is an account to consider, for even though Paul was an apostle, he didn't exhibit a need for control as he commended their efforts to perhaps fill the void. The lesson here is that getting behind somebody as many have in the past is not exactly where it is at. The Philippians were not a dependent

people, waiting for permission to do the work. They felt enabled by a non-controlling apostle. We must acknowledge the fact that there are churches with leaders who are evidently more interested in control of the brethren than they are in preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

Interestingly enough some thought of Paul's detention as an opportunity. "We" will show Paul we can do this. Their intentions were not sincere. Even then Paul felt that so long as the gospel is preached, he still rejoiced in the fact that it was being preached regardless of motives.

When Paul wrote the Thessalonians, he did not write to a select elder but wrote to an entire church. What we need to consider here is that Paul is not recognizing a single leader or a few leaders. He is recognizing everybody. The Thessalonian church was a strong church because they depended on numerous leaders. A weak church builds itself on a few leaders, especially a single leader.

We understand the Thessalonian church to be strong because their faith preceded them to the extent that Paul and his group "*do not need to say anything.*" They are getting the job done.

### **The True Strength in delivering the Gospel**

We have all heard of strength in numbers, and so it is. Jesus Christ, however, takes us beyond such thinking and teaches that the greatest strength is the sum of all our weaknesses.

When Paul was struggling with his thorn in the flesh, he must have considered it a dampener on his efforts even to do God's will. He notes three particular efforts to convince God to remove whatever it was that was holding him back. After the third effort he received his answer:

*My Grace is sufficient for you, My strength is made perfect in weakness. - 2 Cor. 12:9*

As it was for Paul, so it is in general for us. As Paul also defaulted in his thinking, i.e., that his own

strengths would elevate his ministry, we tend to believe that numbers, money, charisma, and even hard work are the answers to growth and unity in a church. On the contrary, our scattered state and ultra dependency on God for sufficiency will enlarge our capacity to serve God. Paul realized it too:

*Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. **For When I am weak, then I am strong.** – v 10*

Can we not understand this too and come to see where the real capacity is for growth beyond our own abilities—even when we are at our best - and to be excited as Paul was when we get it? I believe we can if we forget our contemporary experience that elevates numbers and charisma higher than it should and look instead to the early church for inspiration.

No matter how much Truth we cry aloud about, if we take credit for our ability to broadcast it, it will not make the kind of impact it could unless Jesus Christ is utilizing us in our weaknesses. Any ministry that starts to glory in its work is about to end. There can be no boasting.

When Paul first delivered the gospel to the Corinthian brethren, his goal was not to impress upon them that they should think of their conversion and transformation as the work of a man. It is a lethal combination to have leaders desiring recognition and control beyond the Lord's boundaries, combined with followers willing to put trust in their leadership:

*And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.** – 1 Cor. 2:4-5*

I am always reminded of the following question: If the Pillar of Fire went one way, and Moses another, in which direction would you—or I—go? Would we perhaps just wait where we are until one or the other comes back to get us? We must follow the Pillar of Fire!

## Organizational Behavior

What did Jesus Christ have in mind when he said “*I will build My church*”? Is it Jesus Christ's ideal vision of his church as a kind of an organization? From experience are we then to conclude we have been only partially successful and partially frustrated in our efforts to bring them together? Have we allowed things to happen that have hampered our ability to spread the gospel of the kingdom? These questions are worth exploring.

If God had wanted to build a lean mean gospel spreading church building machine, I suppose He could have done that. It would have been a top down structure, which would have been well defined by the apostles so it ended up in the scriptures and clear in its organization and governance. It also would have been well funded by the unwavering tithes and offerings that Jesus would have emphasized in specificity. False brethren and persecution would not have been tolerated and would be bowled over and disregarded by confident brethren and bold leadership.

I believe it is an admirable thing when I read exhortations about teambuilding and co-operation in an organization, particularly when it is intended to produce an outcome greater than the sum of the individual parts. But we need to step back and look at the first century church before we jump to conclusions on how to best accomplish collective goals. Is there strength in numbers as is commonly proposed?

The Corinthian church was dealing with a number of issues that came out of being a collective. Paul indeed was offering guidance on specific issues and promised to elaborate on them more in person. At a certain opportune point, however, he switches gears and introduces a better way.

We are more apt to default to the thinking that principles of teamwork naturally would lend themselves to personal development and accomplishment. Indeed there would be an increased ability to share the gospel, and it has

been shown to work. If we take a lesson from the Corinthians, we can start to see that this approach will have limited success because, as they learned also, we will stumble in our best intentions. What many church workers stumble on is the difference between uniformity, which comes about by pressure from without, and unity, which comes from within. Unity is the better way, is a matter of the heart, and is a state that calls upon our highest spiritual motives.

The better way is more sustaining and fruitful. Christ identified His followers not as efficient, or numerous, or reporting positive statistics. *He identified them as having love for one another.* We need to get this before we get anywhere.

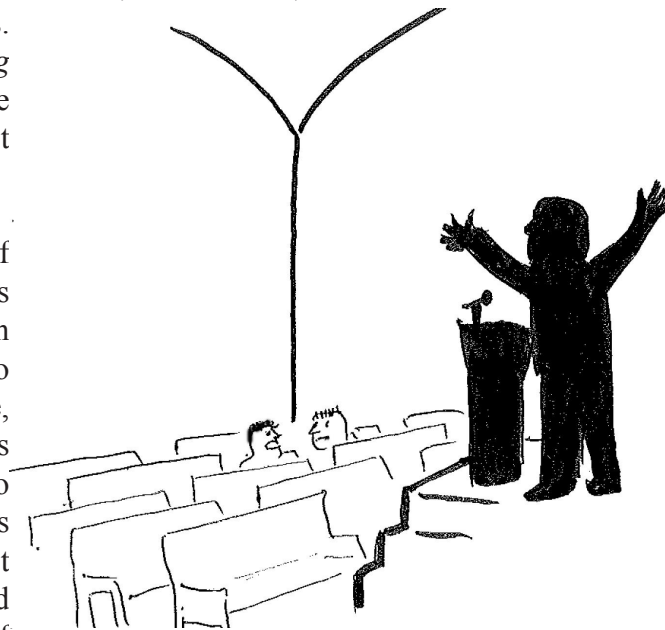
From our understanding of love as it is presented to us in 1 Corinthians 13, we learn that it does not lend itself to efficiency. To bear, endure, believe, and hope all things is not an efficient way to operate. Efficiency makes short work of people as it favors profit over losses and always chooses the lesser of two evils rather than taking the fall for the failure of others. Efficiency seeks allegiances and manipulates as required to control and favors the strong over the weak even as loyalty and favors are rewarded for the purposes of more control. It is the protection of the self.

The church of God routinely stumbles on efficiencies believing they are for the common good, responsible, and prudent. It is the aspiration for uniformity at work. Long term practice of this kind of thinking makes one become institutionalized and seems impossible to reverse. Many are the walking wounded who have identified God's church itself with these efficient practices.

Even so, an unfortunate experience with an

organization is not permission to regard all efforts of groups or organizations with disdain and withhold participation. I once encountered an individual who said he wouldn't have any part of another organized church for this reason, but such thinking is a result of succumbing to a temptation to excuse oneself from active participation. Experience sometimes skews judgment. God's people can work together in unity, and the wisdom of God must rather be sought.

Jesus Christ has shown that He is able to use unfavorable circumstances and weaknesses to achieve his will, and He is more than capable of working with scattered groups to accomplish it. It is by His design that we have not been taken out of the world. We are as stones, along with the Chief Corner Stone that is hewn in humility in an imperfect quarry, with the world full of evil and a church with false brethren. We are being jointly fit together with others in the church of God of whom we may never have heard.



"Well, I wonder if this is what Jesus meant by "little flock""

*You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ – 1 Peter 2:5*

We are being hewn in humility as so many others have in the past as part of His Spiritual Temple. Abraham did not evaluate the future out of the present: *For he (Abraham) waited for the city which has foundation, whose builder and maker is God - Hebrews 11:10*

Our focus should not be on fixing the condition of the church as a whole to one that is more acceptable to what we might feel is ideal. We should be focusing on the grace of God, the future and not the past or present.



### Thinking it through, what to do ...

What would the apostles offer us today in the way of counsel for scattered churches and brethren beyond what we have discussed already? I find 1 Peter revealing as he addresses a scattered church in Asia Minor.

Those whom he is writing are Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. They are “*pilgrims of the Dispersion*.” These opening verses describe the state of his readers, i.e., they are both dispersed sojourners and the very elect of God. This describes the true state of Christians in every age.

Just like my friend I met in southern Ontario, 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, in sanctification of the Spirit), for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ... 1:2*

Peter suggests there is 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 often has 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 leave us bewildered at times.

We should take particular note that there is not any hint of Peter having concern for their scattered state in his epistle. He does not offer them a call for unification nor encouraging hopes for their return to a former state of cohesion. He offers them something far more significant: grace and peace (v 2).

Moreover, 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 (v 3)! 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.

Peter 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 that end will be our transformation into glory. 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 his audience of the reality that is as immediate today as it was in the first century – that Christians are begotten for glory and nothing less. Peter is reflecting the same words of our savior in Luke 12:32:

*“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”*

Do not fear little flock. I am not sure of a way to truly quantify what our Lord means by little, but this is not the purpose of his message here. Perhaps He means a few, one or two dozen or a few hundred in a congregation, and thousands in a collective group of organized churches? Perhaps He means little in influence?

What is of primary interest to Him is that we do not fear, and why we should not fear in light of being either small in number, small in influence, or both. In the mind of Jesus our fears that are born out of being little in strength by virtue of our size and influence is countered by realizing the desire the Father Himself has in giving us the Kingdom. Jesus understood what our fears would be born out of, which is our own measure of what makes us acceptable and blessed. When I hear that 30% a year church growth is evidence of God blessing the work I tend to agree as long as it is not a result of attrition from other churches of God. When I hear of dwindling congregations and

splits, I have no less reason to think God is with them also. Why? Because God's reality often differs from our perceptions, and God's reality IS the reality. Countering our fear of being small is that the Father Himself is large and of ultimate influence. This is why we are not to fear, for despite disappointments in organizational churches and opposing forces within and without, God will not allow Himself to be diverted in purpose and wants us to feel the same way.

So there is no room for post mortem thinking on how to fix what went wrong and who is to blame in Peter's mind. Books and countless articles in print and in the Internet spend time ad nauseam on what happened in large organizations such as the Worldwide Church of God. Some of it comes from good intentions to promote healing and support, but even this approach is flawed if we take our lessons from the Apostle Peter. Peter's words enable and call us to focus on what is real in God's mind. Other remedies if dwelt upon for any given amount of time will become disabling.

So, if you would permit me, perhaps a message for us today would be:

*To the Angel of the Scattered Church:*

*Thus says the Son of God, with eyes a flame of fire, feet like fine brass and holding a sharp two edged sword: I know your works of, love, service, faith, patience, And you have endured persecution, Nevertheless I have this to tell you, that you being few in number and scattered have weakened your resolve. I counsel you to find strength in Me and not of yourselves,*

*And your works, the last will be more than the first. Hold fast till I come with the crown of life. And may my love prevail in your hearts forever.*

*He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the scattered churches.*



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## Don't Be Mooned By the Lunar Sabbath

After centuries of beating back against anti-Sabbath excuses, theories, and arguments, both polite and otherwise, modern seventh-day Christendom is now faced with a challenge from within. It is coming from those who are abandoning the weekly Sabbath in favor of what they call the lunar Sabbath.

The scribe hopes the readership of *Shepherd's Voice* never has to deal with it, but just in case our readers do encounter lunar Sabbatarians along their path, this article aims to prepare the readership against arguments lunar Sabbatarians may propagate.

### Lunar Sabbath Defined

A lunar Sabbath is a Sabbath calculated not by adopting a seven-day week with a particular day of that week as one's rest day (e.g., the seventh day of the week). Rather, a lunar Sabbath is observed according to the cycles of the moon's 29.5 day rotation around the earth. With the new moon as the beginning of the month, lunar Sabbaths fall on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> days of the month. Under this configuration, the Sabbath could fall on any day of the week, not just on the day commonly called Saturday. (There is a minority within the lunar Sabbath keeping community that observes the 7<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 28<sup>th</sup> days of the month as the Sabbath, but for simplicity's sake we shall focus upon the lunar Sabbath theory endorsed by the majority.) Because a lunar month is either of 29 or 30 days duration, a lunar Sabbath does not always occur every seven days

One might ask, "What about the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> days of the months?" Lunar Sabbatarians are split on that issue. Some observe the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> days as Sabbaths while others consider them as leap days with the next Sabbath occurring on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the next month.



*Scribe's Square*

### Lunar Sabbatarian Proof Texts

Supporters of a lunar Sabbath use Genesis 1:14-19 and Psalm 104:19 as proof texts showing that God intended for humankind to observe its weeks according to the cycles of the moon. In Genesis 1:14 God commanded that there be lights in the sky to separate the day from the night and that these lights would be "for signs and for seasons and for days and years." In Psalm 104:19, the psalmist states that Yahweh appointed the moons for seasons.

Because the Hebrew word *moedim* "seasons" in many English Bible translations, also can refer to appointed holy times of God, lunar Sabbath proponents argue that all appointed times of God (Sabbaths and annual holy days) must be determined using astronomical observation (new moons, full moons, equinoxes, etc.)

### Lunar Sabbath Refuted

When sun-tested against scripture, history, and common sense, the lunar Sabbath theory fails miserably. Absolutely nowhere in scripture does God command his people to observe certain days of the month, namely the 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 22<sup>nd</sup> days, as weekly Sabbaths. Moreover, there is no historical evidence pointing toward any ancient



Hebrew or Christian lunar Sabbath observance, any official change from lunar Sabbath observance to "Saturday" observance, or any persecuted, hold-out lunar Sabbatarian population clinging to "the faith once delivered."

Proponents of the lunar Sabbath claim that God placed the lights in the heavens to determine the seasons. However, they are reading too much into Genesis 1 and Psalm 104. The narrator in Genesis 1 and the psalmist in Psalm 104 both describe how God placed the sun and moon in the heavens and how these lights would aid humankind in determining day from night, winter from spring, and summer from fall. These lights in no way give us license to disobey direct instructions from God on when to observe his appointed times.

In the same Psalm 104, which states that Yahweh made the moon to mark the seasons, the psalmist says that the high mountains are for the wild goats (verse 18). Does this mean that God Almighty has decreed that all goats must inhabit high mountains?

Our Savior Jesus Christ clearly stated that man shall not live by bread alone but by "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Therefore, a direct dictate from God Almighty trumps any conjectural implications drawn from verses taken out of context from the creation narrative or from a song of praise.

What does God say about when to keep the Sabbath? In Exodus 20:9-11, He says, "Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy. Six days thou shalt labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God . . . for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it."

Notice that Yahweh defines the Sabbath day as "the seventh day." God says that "the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh." There is nothing in this command about which day of the month the

Sabbath occurs. If God wanted the Sabbath to be observed according to the lunar cycles; if the sun, moon, and stars determine everything, why not simply say that the first, eighth, fifteenth, and twenty-second days of the month are Sabbaths? Or better yet, why not command that "the new moon, half moon, and full moons of each month shall be your Sabbaths?" Notice also that God says the Sabbath days come after six days of work. If the sun and the moon are to determine everything, why even mention six days of work? And why would God have to illustrate the Sabbath principle by dropping manna for the first six of seven days? If a lunar Sabbath were in effect, it would have been sufficient simply to state, "Do not expect bread on the 1<sup>st</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> days of the month." Or better still, "If you see a new moon, half-moon, or full moon in the sky, do not expect bread the next day." Finally, if the Sabbaths were determined by the phases of the moon, why even set up a seven-day week in the first place?

### Did God Observe the Lunar Sabbath at Creation?

New Moon Day	Working Days						Sabbath	Moon Phases
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	 1 <sup>st</sup> Qtr Waxing
	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	 Full Moon
	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	 3 <sup>rd</sup> Qtr Waning
	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	 New Moon

Perhaps the biggest problem that lunar Sabbatarians have is the fact that God did not create the moon until the fourth day of creation. If the seven-day week is based upon the moon, why did God begin His creation week without it? And if the new moon were intended to be a signal for resetting the Sabbath, why did not God rest as soon as He created the moon? If the

lunar moon people are correct then would not God have rested on the 4<sup>th</sup> rather than the 7<sup>th</sup> day?

The answer to these questions is simple. The lunar Sabbath is a fraud. The institution of the 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath is based upon the 6 previous days during which God created the earth and not upon the phases of the moon. God already had been counting days before the sun and the moon were created. If we read the scriptures for what they say, not adding anything to them, we could only arrive at understanding that Yahweh's Sabbath falls on an uninterrupted seven-day weekly cycle. There really is

no room for any other possibility. Work six days then rest. Work another six days then rest. Work another six days then rest. Work another six days then rest. The cycle thus repeats endlessly.

#### **Seven-Day Week Throughout History**

Another lunacy of the lunar Sabbath is its lack of historical support. We Christians who keep the seventh-day Sabbath can prove that humans rather than God switched the regular weekly church meeting day from the seventh day of the week to the first. We can point to seventh-day Sabbath observance by the patriarchs, the ancient Israelites, Jesus Christ Himself, and the early followers of Christ. We can point to specific decrees, edicts, and laws commanding people to switch over to Sunday observance and ordering punishment for those who "Judaize" by observing a seventh-day Sabbath. And finally, we can cite examples of faithful Christians who held out over the centuries and were persecuted for keeping the seventh-day Sabbath in a Sunday-keeping world.

Lunar Sabbatarians cannot do the same. They claim that at some point in history, the Israelites abandoned lunar time reckoning in favor of a seven-day weekly cycle. They claim that Israel abandoned Sabbath keeping for "Saturday keeping."

However, they can point to no specific time in

which this change was made. They can point to no specific decree, edict, or law commanding Israelites to switch over from lunar time reckoning to "Saturday observance." They can point to no sects, groups, or individuals who held out over the centuries or were persecuted for keeping the lunar Sabbath. In fact, there are at least four examples in the Bible in which men of God worked or traveled on the supposed lunar Sabbath. In Genesis 8:13, Noah spent a new moon day removing the covering of the ark after the flood. In Exodus 40:16-33, Moses, as commanded by God himself, "finished the work" of erecting a tabernacle on the first day of the first month. In Numbers 1:1, on the 1st day of the 2nd month, a census was taken for all of Israel. And in Ezra 7:9, the prophet Ezra journeyed on two new moons. The lack of evidence for lunar Sabbath observance over the centuries serves as strong proof that lunar Sabbath observance is a sham.

#### **Seven-day week at time of Christ and the Roman Empire**

There is no doubt that during the time Jesus Christ walked the earth the Jewish people kept a seven-day Sabbath based upon a seven-day weekly cycle with the seventh day corresponding to the Roman "Saturday." In their conquest of Jerusalem, both the Greek and Roman armies took advantage of the fact that religious Jews refused to take up arms and fight on the seventh day of the week.

Jewish historian Josephus records that Agatharchides, a 2nd century B.C. Greek historian, wrote that the Jewish practice of resting "on every seventh day" contributed to the defeat of Jerusalem by Alexander the Great's general Ptolemy. Concerning the Romans, the first century Roman soldier, Frontinus, in his collection of books on military strategy called *Strategemata*, wrote in A.D. 84. that Emperor Augustus Vespasian ordered an attack of the Jews "on the day of Saturn, a day on which it is sinful for them to do any business" (2.1.17). Notice the use of the words "every seventh day" and "the day of Saturn." If the Jews were keeping a lunar Sabbath at the time of Ptolemy, why would

the Greeks take note of a rest “every seventh day?” Would not the historical records state that the Jews kept a Sabbath on the 1st, 8th, 15th, and 22nd days of the month? And while Yahweh certainly does not recognize the seventh day of the week as Saturn’s day, it is still useful to note that the Romans--the enemies of the Jews-- boasted that they were able to defeat the Jews because the Jews rested on that day, the seventh day of the week. Again, the Sabbath was based on a weekly cycle and not upon observation of the moon.

In his book *Sunday* historian Craig Harlin sums up the Hebrew Sabbath keeping practice and its theological underpinnings:

It can be said that the Jewish week, unlike many weeks around the world, was not meant to be shoehorned into nature’s cycles: in other words, the seven-day Jewish week did not multiply neatly into a 29-day lunar month or a 365-day solar year, but was an artificial number deliberately imposed by the Jewish God as a sign of his superiority to nature and its pagan gods. The Jewish week therefore stood outside of nature, on purpose, unlike the planetary week. That the Jewish total of seven days happened to equal nature’s total of seven planets mattered little to the Jews: except for the Sabbath and the day before the Sabbath, called the Day of Preparation, days of the Jewish week were numbered, not named, and had nothing to do with planets. Moreover, while days and gods of the planetary week were more or less equal, the Jewish week derived virtually all of its meaning from a single day devoted entirely to their single God. (Craig Harlin, *Sunday*, page 4-5)

### **Jesus Christ, Lord of the Sabbath**

In response to proof that first century Jews observed a “Saturday” Sabbath, lunar Sabbatharians might argue that the Jews must have abandoned the lunar Sabbath sometime after the law of Moses and before the time of Christ. If this had been the case, then certainly Yeshua the Messiah, Son of God and Lord of the Sabbath, would have set everyone straight. However there is no

suggestion or evidence that Jesus kept a different Sabbath from the Jewish people of his time.

At his trial prior to his crucifixion, Jesus was accused of blasphemy, sedition, and breaking the existing Sabbath laws (John 19:7; Luke 23:2; Mark 14:57-64; John 5:18). If He had been keeping a different Sabbath then certainly his accusers would not have left out that accusation. Moreover, Jesus never contested that it was the Sabbath on those several occasions when He was accused of breaking the Sabbath or permitting others to break it (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-6; John 5:1-18). If the Jews indeed observed an incorrect Sabbath day, all Jesus needed to say was, “Today is not really the Sabbath. Today is the Roman day of Saturn. I do not observe this day. I observe the lunar Sabbath.”

It is clear that Jesus Christ kept the seventh day Sabbath. Jesus Christ was not mooned by the lunar Sabbath, and neither should we be.

### **Time for choosing**

French philosopher Frederick Bastiat once said that when the law and a person’s individual morality clash, that person has the cruel alternative of either losing his or her individual morality or losing his or her respect for the law. Lunar Sabbatharians are faced with an analogous choice. They are either going to have to live by “every word that proceeds out of the mouth of Yahweh,” or they are going to cling to their theory of time reckoning based upon astronomical observation. The evidence is clear that these two things contradict. The word of God is clear that the Sabbath day comes after six days of work and repeats in a continuous cycle irrespective of the moon. Yet lunar Sabbatharians persist in reasoning within themselves that Sabbaths and weeks ought to be aligned with the moon.

The verdict of this scribe is as follows: Those who wish to keep a lunar Sabbath have the cruel alternative of either losing their individual time reckoning theories or losing their respect for God’s law.







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