

NEW TESTAMENT

MATTHEW

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Matthew

Purpose of Four Gospels

Q: Hey Bob, I was wondering if you could explain a few reasons for the differences in the 4 gospels. What are the major purposes for us having 4 different Gospels?

A: Hello Friend,

We are certainly blessed to have all four! Although they all cover the life, work and teachings our dear Lord Jesus' first advent, each gospel has different information and approaches things from a slightly different angle, even where the same incident or parable is in view. Matthew was a disciple and wrote for a Jewish audience as we know because 1) the genealogy starts from Abraham, the first Jew (whereas Luke's starts from Adam, a gentile); and 2) the genealogy goes to Joseph, not Mary, tracking His Hebrew patrimony, not His biological descent.; Mark wrote under Peter's apostolic purview as Luke did under Paul's; and John wrote last, substantially later in time than the other three – or at least the first two. Taking them together, we get a "3D" view from the synoptics and then a complete retelling with all manner of new information in the gospel of John. No other life, no other series of historical events in the ancient world is so well covered as this. Since faith in Jesus Christ is the point of entry into the family of God, it stands to reason that this body of critical information would be the "grand central station" of the Bible, so to speak – just as our Lord's earthly life, His teachings, and His death for all mankind on the cross, is the pivot point of all history, human and divine.

Matthew 3:9 (NIV)

9 And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.

(NIV SB Notes) 3:9 We have Abraham as our father. See Jn 8:39. Salvation does not come as a birthright (even for the Jews) but through faith in Christ (Ro 2:28–29; Gal 3:7, 9, 29). these stones. John may have pointed to the stones in the Jordan River. children for Abraham. The true people of God are not limited to the physical descendants of Abraham (cf. Ro 9:6–8 and notes).

*

Q: What does John mean when he says “out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham”?

A: I believe that John’s point was that none of us should think that we are anything special before God. These individuals were confident that because they were descended from Abraham they were not only saved but most beloved in God’s eyes. But God, while He does indeed honor Abraham’s descendants, looks on the heart first and foremost, and these unbelievers were withholding their hearts from Him.

Matthew 3:13 -17 (NIV)

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John.

14 But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”

15 Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness.” Then John consented.

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

17 And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

(NIV SB Notes) Jesus’ baptism marked the beginning of his Messianic ministry. There were several reasons for his baptism: (1) The first, mentioned here, was “to fulfill all righteousness.” His baptism indicated that he was consecrated to God and officially approved by him, as especially shown in the descent of the Holy Spirit (v. 16) and the words of the Father (v. 17; cf. Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). All God’s righteous requirements for the Messiah were fully met in Jesus. (2) At Jesus’ baptism John publicly announced the arrival of the Messiah and the inception of his ministry (Jn 1:31–34). (3) By his baptism Jesus completely identified himself with humanity’s sin and failure (though he himself needed no repentance or cleansing from sin), becoming our substitute (2Co 5:21). (4) His baptism was an example to his followers.

*

Q: NIV SB gives a number of reasons for our Lord's baptism, without explicitly naming the one which you consider correct - immersing in the sins of humanity, although this might be alluded to in point 3. I wanted to know your view on the four reasons for baptism given here.

A: On the four reasons, number four is the only one which should be blotted out entirely. It is not only incorrect (even John recognized by his objection that the example was questionable – if it had been an example, which it was not), but would give the false impression that water-baptism is necessary when it is not even a good thing for a Christian to do (as a purely Jewish ritual anticipating the Messiah, continuing it denies that Christ has already fulfilled those prophecies). The other three I would accept as applications.

For example, in #1, the quotation is obviously correct. And it is true that Jesus met all of God's righteous requirements. But that neither explains the baptism nor explains what "righteous requirement" was being fulfilled (the symbolism of the cross). In #2, this may be true, but it is not stated in scripture that this was the purpose (and compare Matt.4:12-19 which places the actually beginning of the active phase of Jesus' ministry after John's imprisonment). As you say, #3 is to my way of thinking the best explanation, though I phrase things differently (***the water = the sin of the world; the immersion = the spiritual death of our Lord in propitiating it; the surfacing = the resurrection***).

Matthew 3:16 (NIV)

16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him.

NIV SB Notes: 3:16 Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit came upon Jesus not to overcome sin (for he was sinless) but to equip him (see note on Jdg 3:10) for his work as the divine-human Messiah. like a dove. Either in the form of a dove or in a descent like a dove. see also note on Mk 1:10.

*

Q: You wrote: '*He immediately received a special and dramatic symbol (i.e., the Spirit descending upon Him in the form of dove) of the unction of the Holy Spirit He possessed from birth by virtue of His unique status as the Anointed One.*'

Since Jesus possessed the blessing of the Holy Spirit from birth, why did the dove come at that moment?

A: This was the moment of the commencement of our Lord's public ministry and the coming of the Spirit in the likeness of a dove demonstrated that fact as well as signifying that He was the Messiah. As John says,

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"

John 1:32-33 NIV

See the link: ["Jesus' Baptism"](#).

Matthew 3:17 (NASB)

17 and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."

NIV SB: 3:17 voice from heaven. The voice (1) authenticated Jesus' Messianic sonship, echoing Ps 2:7 ("This is my Son"), (2) identified Jesus with the suffering servant of Isa 42:1 ("with him I am well pleased"), and perhaps (3) identified Jesus with Abraham's willingness to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, echoing Ge 22:2 ("whom I love"). This word from the Father must have greatly encouraged Jesus at the very outset of his earthly ministry. my Son. See notes on 14:33; Jn 3:16.

*

Q: Could you explain why is Isaiah 42:1 associated with the suffering servant? What part of Isaiah 42 refers to suffering?

A: Isaiah 42:2: "He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (NKJV) is prophetic of our Lord's humble acceptance of the trials He was put through leading up to the cross (cf. 1Pet.2:23: "who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" NKJV; cf. v.24; cf. et Is.53:7: "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" NKJV).

Matthew 4:1-11 (NASB)

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.”

4 But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

5 Then the devil *took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,

6 and *said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written,

‘He will command His angels concerning You’;

and

‘On their hands they will bear You up,

So that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

7 Jesus said to him, “On the other hand, it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

8 Again, the devil *took Him to a very high mountain and *showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory;

9 and he said to Him, “All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me.”

10 Then Jesus *said to him, “Go, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.’”

11 Then the devil *left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

*

1. Anthropology - Fall of Man

Extremely important for every believer in Jesus Christ to understand the devil's method in his temptation of Eve because his essential tactic in tricking her is the same one which always lies behind his attacks:

Devil's main tactic: Distortion of the truth

(cf. devil's temptation of Eve in Genesis Ch. 3)

- a) **Truth** is the one essential issue for Christians (John 8:32). It is what we are all about, it is why we are here
- b) Our God is a God of **truth** (Psalm 31:5) and in **truth** we are to worship Him (John 4:24)
- c) Without faith in the **truth**, we cannot please Him (Heb.11:6), and only by listening to His **truth** can we grow close to Him and serve Him effectively (Zech.1:3-4; Mal.3:7; Jas.4:8)
- d) God's word is **truth** (Jn.14:6; cf. Jn.1:1; 1:14; 17:17)
- e) It is the word of God which Jesus, the Word of God (Jn.1:1), always emphasized (Jn.18:37b), and it is only by our acceptance of and allegiance to the living Word through the written word that we even become "believers" at all (Jas.1:18)
- f) "Believers" are those who accept and respond to the **truth** of what God has to say about His Son. The first principle of **truth** is Jesus Christ (Jn.14:6). Once we accept Him, the **truth** of what the Father and the Spirit say about Him (Jn.14:16-17), then we enter into a life of learning about Him, about what He has to say to us, about what He wants from us (1Tim.2:4).
- g) Everything that emanates from Him is **truth**, the prime example being His Son who is, in fact, "the **Truth**" (Jn.17:17).
- h) Our Christian lives involve a great many issues, activities, decisions, tests and trials, but central to everything we do and everything we are as Christians is this **truth** which comes from God.
- i) To the extent that we appropriate His **truth**, learn it, believe it, test it, rely on it, live by it and are ready to die for it, we advance, we grow, we honour Him. Apart from what He says, we can do nothing, for apart from the **truth** of God, we do not even know what to do or how to do it. No action, no thought, no word from our lips can be right, can be true, without the knowledge of, the belief in, and the commitment to God's **truth**, as Jesus' final prayer on our behalf shows so well:

I have given them Your word, and the world hated them, because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from the evil one. For they are not of the world just as I am not of the world. So make them holy **by means of Your truth – Your word is truth**. And just as you sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. I am consecrating Myself for their sake, so that they too may be made holy **through truth**.

John 17:14-19

Today, we know where to go to find the **truth**: God's **truth** is found in the Bible, "the word of God, the word of truth" (Jn.17:17; Heb.4:12).

Now Adam and Eve did not have a Bible, but instead they had personal instruction from the Lord God Himself (an epiphany, or pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ). This brings up an interesting and important point: the case of Adam and Eve is just one in a series of scriptural examples that prove beyond any doubt that lack of faith and failure to grow spiritually have nothing whatsoever to do with the form in which God has made His truth available. No vision, no sign, no dream, no epiphany, no personal appearance of God Himself, no rapture to the third heaven, nothing, in fact, will serve to turn unbelief into belief, simply because of its form. For every Paul on the road to Damascus, there are millions and billions of lost souls who would never have responded the way Paul did (as vouchsafed by the multitudes that rejected our Lord in person during His first advent, or the rebellious activities of the Exodus generation who had seen so many of God's mighty miracles first-hand). The hard heart of unbelief is more impenetrable than any material known to Man. But God is just, and faithful, and merciful, and He well knows what manner and means will reach those who truly wish to seek Him.

Similarly, there are many people who blame their lack of faith upon the form in which God's truth is currently "packaged", assuming (in ignorance) that somehow the Bible is "not quite" God's inspired Word. Unbelief always manages to find an excuse (as it did in Jesus' day), and the devil always manages to exploit this lack of trust in God and His Word (as he did in the garden). **The essence of Satan's strategy in attacking Adam and Eve was the same then as it is now, namely, to drive a wedge of deception between the believer (or potential believer) and the truth.**

The devil's strategy as employed against Eve is thus critically important for us to understand today, for his tactics remain essentially the same:

- 1) First, involve us in a "dialogue", some form of subtle temptation, verbal and otherwise, which engages our egos and our arrogance;
- 2) Second, use this dalliance with him to throw the slightest shadow of doubt upon some aspect of God's word, God's commands, or God's character;
- 3) Finally, as soon as a fracture of distrust, a fissure of failing belief, appears in our shield of faith, then slam home whatever wedge will fit the crack.

Our entire Christian experience is predicated upon an initial and an abiding faith, trust and belief in God through the Person of His Son Jesus Christ, the living Word, as expressed in His scriptures, the written word. Satan will always be lurking to sever us from this faith, and his most effective methodology in doing so can be clearly seen in his attack on Eve: that is, ***the perversion of the word of God***. It is no accident that in both the first multiple book of the Bible (the Pentateuch or Torah), and in the last book of the Bible, we are severely warned not only against subtracting anything from the Bible, but also about adding anything to it (Deut.4:2; Rev.22:18). ***Both the omission of critical truth and the addition of non-truth play right into the devil's hands***. For if he can get us to compromise on one point, anything else is possible.

It is always easier to accommodate ourselves to lower opinions of the Lord held by those with whom we may be speaking. Such was Eve's situation, and instead of properly rebuking the serpent for his lack of respect for the Lord God, Eve chose to sink to his level. ***Accommodation is often a very valuable tool in communicating with others, but the one thing that can never be compromised is God's truth.***

Truth must first be rejected before the lie can be accepted.

Ignorance, complacency and lust often combine to lead us into sin, and that was certainly what took place at the fall. Eve's relative ignorance of what God had said combined with her relative complacency about what the consequences of disobeying God might be made for a very weak shield of faith with which to meet the devil's attack. When challenged on her uncertain knowledge and assured that there would be no consequences, the prospect of "becoming god-like" was more than enough of a temptation to kindle her lust and strip away her meagre defences. This

is the way the devil always works. He observes the chinks in our armour, our ignorance of the word of God, our disbelief, our doubts, our nonchalance about following in the footsteps of Christ (in general or on particular points), and then, armed with this critical "scouting report", he attacks, providing false information, false assurances, and tempting us (or frightening us) right when and where we are at our weakest.

Although the first Adam failed when confronted by Satan's considerable deceptiveness, and although all of his progeny ever since has (with one exception) confirmed this dubious heritage, the Last Adam has left for us a stirring example of how to contend with the devil's temptations. Christ met Satan's best efforts not in a paradisiacal garden, but in a desert at the end of a forty day fast and vigil. Satan's threefold temptation of Christ was his masterpiece of deception, and only Christ could have withstood it, ***but we would do well to note how He withstood it.*** The Son of God, the Word of God Himself, met the devil's charge with the shield of the word of God, refuting Satan's words with God's words. I can think of no better brief for the importance of learning what the Bible says and means (the basis, along with belief, of Christian spiritual growth) than the example left for us by our Lord. Every subtle temptation of the devil is laid bare for the lie it is and rebuked – by scripture (Matt.4:1-11; Mk.1:12-13; Lk.4:1-13):

1a. The temptation to become distracted from God's word (STONES TO BREAD)

And the tempter approached Him and said, "**If you are the Son of God**, command these stones to become bread". But He replied, "Man's life does not depend on food only, but on every word that comes from God's mouth" (Deut.8:3).

Matthew 4:3-4 (cf. Eve's ignorance)

- It was the will of God for Christ to endure this trial (Mt.4:1; Mk.1:12; Lk.4:1)
- The hardest thing about this test was not the hunger (although for any of us after being deprived of food for 40 days would be sore pressed to resist this opportunity) but was the challenge thrown by Satan: "**If you are the Son of God**".
- Devil's implication is that the Son of God would not be deprived like this and would certainly be able to call upon God's power to supply His legitimate needs
- Christ's suffering here similar to Job's (Job's counterparts failed to understand that Job's suffering was part of God's plan and the ultimate divine compliment)
- Satan's "if" was an attempt to break down our Lord's resolve by prodding Him to "prove" the devil wrong
- ***But our Lord, instead of focusing on the words of the tempter (as Eve had done) or over-focusing on the reproach (as Job had done), gave instead his complete attention to the word of God***
- Jesus' quotation of Deuteronomy 8:3 is riveting (as is every one of His scriptural answers to the devil's challenges). He does not make Satan the issue, nor His hunger, nor the devil's challenge to His true status as God's only Son. Our Lord makes God the issue. And how does He do so? By quoting a small part of God's truth that cuts through the devil's lie like the sharpest sword. For Christ's selection of scripture proves more than that He had memorized much (if not all) of the Bible as it existed in His day (the Old Testament). Christ's absolutely appropriate choice of quotation shows that He also understood it and believed it. Unbelievers can memorize scripture. Only for believers can the Bible truly become an irresistible sword, and only to the extent that it is understood and believed.
- Our Lord's handling of the devil's temptation is the perfect model for us to follow. Christ's impeccable understanding of and absolute belief in God's word gave Him the ability to rebut this deceptive and "right sounding" suggestion of the devil.
- For Jesus understood and believed from the Bible that sometimes it is God's will for us to endure privation and hardship, in order to teach us that His word is more important than

anything else, even food. In the context of Deuteronomy 8:3 (the verse Jesus quotes), the Israelites experienced hunger that they might learn through this temporary privation to trust God, to believe that whatever His reason for bringing on their short term suffering, He had only their best interests at heart. The use of this quote shows that our Lord understood that it was necessary for Him too to put God's word and God's will first, and to "learn obedience through the things He was suffering" in order to prepare Himself to face the ultimate reproach, the reproach of the cross (Heb.5:8; cf. Heb.2:18; 4:15; 11:26; 13:13).

1b. The temptation to test God (JUMP)

Then the devil took Him to the holy city, stood Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written that 'He will command His angels concerning You', and 'They will lift You up in their hands lest You strike your foot against a stone'" (Ps.91:11-12). Jesus said to him, "It is also written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test'" (Deut.6:16).

Matthew 4:6-7 (cf. Adam arrogance)

- Satan's second temptation of Christ is very similar to the first. Once again, he is attempting to provoke Christ into disobedience by challenging Him to prove His standing as "the Son of God". But instead of inviting Christ to abuse His special powers to do something legitimate (that is, eat when hungry, but at the wrong time), this time Satan entices Him to take an ordinary human action (i.e., jumping) to do something illegitimate (that is, without authorization to put the Father in a position of having to rescue Him).
- The devil sharpens this particular arrow by giving it the cachet of apparent scriptural support. If the promise of angelic protection has ever applied to any human being, it certainly applied to our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.26:53). Indeed, immediately after Christ's successful negotiation of these temptations, the angels did minister to Him (Matt.4:11; Mk.1:13). This challenge to our Lord's standing as the Son of God is at once more direct and yet also more subtle. Only the Son of God could expect to be rescued after following this suggestion of the devil.
- For our Lord to refuse to jump might give the appearance that He lacked faith in this divine promise – to everyone except God, that is (and to those who have adopted God's point of view as Christ did perfectly).
- The living Word of God, a prodigy in the understanding of the Bible at age twelve (Lk.2:41-52), was now, after two additional decades of the most intensive study of the word of God, impervious to Satan's guileful misapplications of scripture. He would have to be. Throughout His earthly ministry He would encounter similar reproaches that would tempt Him to end His personal suffering and silence the blasphemous insinuations of those who opposed Him. Perhaps the most galling of these (very similar to Satan's taunt) would come as He hung on the cross, dying for the sins of those who were abusing Him:

"If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross!" Matthew 27:40b

1c. The temptation to give allegiance to someone or something besides God (KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD)

Then the devil took Him to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. Then he said to Him, "All these I will give to you, if you fall down and worship me". Jesus responded to him, "On your way, Satan. You shall worship the Lord your God and worship Him alone" (Deut.6:13).

Matthew 4:8-10 (cf. devil's world)

- Satan, as we have remarked before, is a shrewd observer who makes a point of gathering intelligence to use against us (cf. Job 1-2; 1Pet.5:8). The report he received on Jesus Christ, however, was most disheartening, for beyond His true status as a flesh and blood human being, there was absolutely no sin, no weakness, and, very importantly, no area of ignorance about the word of God. Nevertheless, the devil crafted a subtle strategy. He would offer our Lord something many human beings have desired, but no one has ever possessed: world rulership.
- Again, however appealing we may imagine this offer to have been, it would have been much more so to Christ, for to this He had been born (Jn.18:37), and He was well aware of the scriptures that proclaimed this as His birthright (e.g., Ps.2:8-9). This time the devil's "if" is not directed toward Christ's status as Son of God, but presents instead a condition for fulfilling the offer: the worship of Satan.
- It is one of the devil's favourite tricks to make us think that our receipt of blessings is dependent upon him, and our prior accommodation with him and his evil world system. Whenever we fail to acknowledge God as the source of all we have, we play right into Satan's hands, and so become vulnerable to his manipulation. But Christ fully understood and believed that only the Lord God is worthy of our worship, for from Him only do our blessings flow (Deut.6:13).

Eve became distracted from the word of God and opened herself up to the devil's deception (temptation #1). Adam put God to the test by throwing his lot in with Eve, vainly hoping that he would be "lifted up" before crashing to the ground (temptation #2). Both of them failed to trust God alone for blessing (provision of a wonderful life without the forbidden fruit in Eve's case, provision of a wonderful life without the woman in Adam's case), and so effectively gave Satan their allegiance in place of God through their respective sins (temptation #3). Satan's use of these same temptations on Christ failed, because the word of God pulsed through Jesus' heart, not merely as empty phrases, but as living truth, fully understood and fully believed.

We can only resist the devil by following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and taking the word of God into our hearts as He did, listening to it, learning and understanding it, believing it then acting upon it in faith (Jas.4:7).

- Eve didn't listen well enough;
- Adam listened, but didn't believe well enough.
- When push came to shove, neither of them was strong enough in faith to maintain their allegiance to God under the pressure of the devil's assault.
- ***If we are to grow up spiritually and gain some measure of safety against Satan's deceptions, we must commit ourselves to the word of God, to understanding it and to making it our own through faith, because only in this way can we hope to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and avoid the stumbling blocks that tripped up Adam and Eve***

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by this renewal of your thinking (i.e., through obedience to the word of God; cf. v.1), so that you may discern what God's will for you is, namely what it is good, well-pleasing, and correct [for you to do].

Romans 12:2

2. Christology - Temptation in Wilderness

- 40 days in the wilderness parallel Moses' receiving of the second set of tablets, also said to have fasted for forty days but in Moses cases we are not told that he was hungry (Ex.34:28; cf. Ex.24:18; Deut.9:9) as was Jesus (Matt.4:2; Lk.4:2; cf. Matt.4:11; Mk.1:13)
- Context suggests that Moses was supernaturally provided for during this special time of communion with the Lord
- Thus while Moses does represent a foreshadowing of the Messiah's experience, the critical point of comparison is not the period of the fast. For Moses' experience looks forward to the time when we shall have no need of food whatsoever in our eternal fellowship with Jesus, while our Lord's forty day fast demonstrates the exceptional degree to which He was prepared to suffer in order to carry out the Father's will.
- Rather, the true, critical point of comparison is between the commencement of Moses' ministry and that of Jesus' ministry, the latter of which would inaugurate a New Covenant through Jesus' suffering and dying for the sins of the world which would replace the Old Covenant mediated by Moses (which could only foreshadow this wonderful reality which was yet to come just as Moses as a type of Christ could only represent the Messiah, but the Messiah Himself, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, would have to come in the flesh in order for salvation to be provided in fact).
- These forty days of privation also serve to set the tone for the public ministry and further life of our Saviour, for He would know nothing but ever increasing opposition and suffering from this point forward.
- Just as the “scapegoat” which was released into the wilderness symbolically bore the sins of the people (Lev.16:8-26), so our Lord Jesus would “suffer outside the camp”, bearing the sins of the world (Heb.13:11-12), and this forty day period of genuine physical affliction (fasting and along with the extreme discomfort of exposure to the elements, insects, wild animals [cf. Mk.1:13], and the like without anything more than the clothes He wore) is symbolic of and indeed looks forward by way of anticipation to His act of supreme sacrifice, the bearing and expiating of the sins of the world in the darkness of those final three hours on the cross (not to mention the ostracism from traditional religious society that His ministry would entail).

What we should notice first of all is that after forty days of such intense privation, our Lord's responses were beyond all question reflective of ***His true inner heart***. Some of us might put up a bold front in the face of such an intense and diabolical assault if well-rested, well-fed and

otherwise under no particular pressure. It is another thing entirely to resist Satan's appeals when ill, or in danger, or in trouble, or in want (as Job's experience shows us very well, i.e., the case of a man as perfect and righteous as mortal man could be, yet eventually worn down by pressure of a similarly unique sort). In order to endure trials even approaching this extreme type, the Word of God has to be so deeply ingrained in a person's heart that instead of being a factor in the inner person ***it dominates the entire inner life***. This was certainly the case for our Saviour, who, when refined like gold in the crucible, merely reflected the exquisite quality of what was truly inside. It is also not to be overlooked that the specific form in which this shining forth of the perfection of His inner-self flawlessly developed from His youth came out as direct quotation of the scriptures, a fact which should remind us of the critical importance of the Bible in everything we do or aspire to do as Christians, followers of Jesus Christ:

***the Word of God is our spiritual life-blood just as it was for Him who is our Model
in all things.***

The 3 Temptations and Context of Responses from the Lord

2a. The temptation to put self-will over God's will (STONES TO BREAD)

Lord's Response: Deuteronomy 8:3

... “not by bread alone”, is that of the testing of Israel by the Lord **in the desert**, who Himself had deliberately and for good reason “made them hungry”, “to humble you and test you so as to know what was in your hearts, whether or not you would obey His commands” (Deut.8:2). This privation was followed – after they failed the test – by the gracious and supernatural provision of manna

2b. To reverse roles with God substituting our will for His (JUMP)

Lord's Response: Deuteronomy 6:16

... “don't put the Lord your God to the test”, is the comparison which completes the verse “like you did at Massah” **in the desert**, the place where the people tested God by demanding of His spokesman, Moses, that they be provided water, and were on the point of stoning him, asking “Is the Lord among us or not” (Ex.17:1-7). Thus the demand for water was a “testing of God”, reversing roles with Him. For it is He who tests us, not the other way around (cf. Ps.91, quoted by the devil, where the true context is that of our Lord being our dwelling place; only then will “He give His angels charge” to protect us, i.e., when we are trusting Him rather than testing Him).

2c. To put personal ambition over God's authority (KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD)

Lord's Response: Deuteronomy 6:13

... “Him only shall you serve”, is that of the Lord being the One who brought the people out of slavery **into the desert**. He is not to be forgotten but remembered as the only One who can truly give us anything of value. He is the One who prospers us if we prosper at all (cf. 1Sam.2:7; Ps.75:7).

Being God as well as a true man, Jesus **really could** turn stones into bread; He **really would** have been rescued by angels were He to have jumped; He **really was** entitled to rulership of the entire world.

But in all these things, through perfect understanding and flawless application of the truth of the Word of God, He who is the Living Word acquiesced to the Father's authority, the Father's will, and the Father's glory in carrying out His plan for the 1st Advent in all things and in all ways and at all times. Thus these three temptations serve to show as well the categories of humility perfectly

adhered to by our Lord throughout His time here on earth prior to the cross and His subsequent glorification.

Israel had spent 40 years wandering in the desert, one year for every day their scouts spent reconnoitring the promised land (Num.14:34). They failed the test of trusting in God in the wilderness (repeatedly), but our Lord Jesus Christ, though He must have been down to His very last reserves of strength after forty days of fasting in this hostile environment, demonstrated perspicuously what had been and would continue to be His pattern of behaviour until the very end, namely, the complete degree to which He relied on the Father in all things, from His necessary needs, to the confidence of His faith, to the plan for His life. In each thing and in everything, He put the truth first, and there was not a sliver of daylight between His perfect understanding of that truth and His flawless execution of it. These forty days and the testing by Satan which followed demonstrated beyond any doubt that our Lord was more than ready to put the Father's will in place of His own will during His ordeal in the desert of this world with all the forces of evil arrayed against Him, culminating in His death on the cross for all mankind.

3. Satan's World System Tactical Doctrine

Since the fall, three facts have stood at the very foundation of human experience:

- 1) Universal mortality: the reality of death for all (Gen.3:19b).
- 2) Universal depravity: the reality of sin in all (Gen.2:17 [spiritual death – see Part 3]).
- 3) Universal temptation: the reality of the devil against all (Gen.3:15).

Because of Adam's sin, we shall all die physically.

Because of Adam's sin, we are all born with the physical presence in our bodies of inherent sin, that is, the "sin nature" (which in every case – except that of the virgin-born Jesus Christ – works its way out in the practice of sin).

Because of Satan's usurpation of Adam's rule over the earth, we are all subject to the attacks of the evil one.

These three essential realities of human life, made clear even as Adam and Eve were being expelled from Eden (Gen.3:14-19), are the basis for *three all-important corollary principles* that establish the ground rules for restoring and building our relationship with God.

- 1) We need God (we cannot turn death into life).
- 2) We are not God (we cannot expiate our own sin).
- 3) God does not need us (we cannot substitute anything for His Word so as to help Him).

Nevertheless, most of humanity has in fact lived their lives as if the opposite of each of the three basic principles listed above were true. The reason for this is the system constructed by Satan to turn these essential truths of human existence on their head, and to replace them instead with a system of lies to blind mankind to the truth, a world-system designed to capture and ensnare as much of human kind as possible. Satan's kosmos is thus based on a complex system of propaganda which he and his demons foster throughout the world, a clever and elaborate network of lies that at their root are simple refutations of the basic truths.

We need God. We are not God. God does not need us.

3a. i. Lord's Testing #1: Man does not live by bread alone (STONES TO BREAD)

The most basic material need is for food, so that filling one's mouth is at the root of most of mankind's striving. And yet, no matter how much wealth one amasses, this need and desire must remain a daily concern (Eccl.6:7). But it is the Word of God that is our true bread, our true food (Deut.8:3). God humbled the children of Israel, then fed them with manna in order to teach them this lesson (Deut.8:3). And our Lord demonstrated His complete mastery of this lesson by enduring 40 days without material sustenance, then responding to the devil's temptation by replying "Man will not live by bread only, but [he will live] by every word that comes forth out of God's mouth" (Matt.4:4). ***For it is God's mouth and the words of life that come forth from it that ought to be our primary concern, not the problem of filling our own mouths.*** Testing and temptation in the area of material needs is the most basic and most common of all the trials we as human beings must undergo in the devil's world. But our Lord showed us the way. He had not chosen to go out into the wilderness and suffer this extreme privation: The Holy Spirit had led Him to do so (Matt.4:1; Mk.1:12; Lk.4:1). This was a test from the Father that not only demonstrated Christ's willingness to put the will of God before His own physical well-being, even in extreme circumstances, but also to prepare Him for the ministry ahead: there would be many times in the next three years when our Lord would often be "without" material security (cf. Matt.8:20; Lk.8:3; 9:58) – and in the midst of an intensely draining ministry and while surrounded by unprecedented opposition (Mk.8:31; Lk.2:34; Jn.15:18; 15:25). He had to be completely and perfectly ready to put the Word of God before everything material, and, in the end, even to sacrifice His life for it, for us (Rom.5:8). If we are slaves to material things, it is them that we shall serve (Rom.6:16-18), but if we follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Saviour, the living Word, we will put what God has to say first (Ps.138:2 KJV), and in so doing will never need to fear any lack of provision on His part, for He is faithful (Deut.7:9; 1Cor.10:13; 1Thes.5:24; 2Thes.3:3; 2Tim.2:13; Heb.10:23; 13:5-6).

3a. ii. Lord's Prayer #1: Give us today our daily bread.

For forty years in the wilderness, God faithfully provided the children of Israel with manna to eat. This manna came with complete regularity, relieving their hunger and fulfilling their needs. It could not be saved up (except for the double portion to be gathered on the day before the Sabbath: Ex.16:4-5). For the Exodus generation, there could be no anticipation of future need – they had to trust God every day, and He was faithful, every day. When our Lord taught us to pray this prayer, "Give us today our bread for the day to come" (Matt.6:11; cf. Lk.11:3), He was reminding us that though we may think we have resources beyond the day at hand, only God knows what will come

to pass. In God's reality, we are given only one day at a time, and we need His provision every day in the same way. Manna stored up for use beyond the day at hand rotted immediately (again, with the exception of the Sabbath portion: Ex.16:20). In the same way, all earthly wealth will rot (not immediately, perhaps, but ultimately: Jas.5:2-6; 2Pet.3:7-13). What we need, what we truly need, is not a superabundance of wealth and the physical means of life – God knows we have need of these things and freely supplies us with them on a day by day basis. ***What we need is to remember Him who is the source of all our provision.*** Moreover, as important as literal bread is for sustaining life, as followers of Jesus Christ our need for Him, the true bread of life, is greater still. Even more than food, ***we need the daily bread of the Word of God that teaches us about and brings us into ever closer fellowship with the Bread of Life Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ (Jn.6:32-58).*** God rained manna upon the children of Israel, but they did not learn to love the One who gave it (Ps.78:32). Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, but those who ate did not appreciate the One who provided the food (Jn.6:60-66). For the Maker of heaven and earth, providing for our physical life day by day is a very easy thing. Though He may need to command the ravens to bring us meat, nothing is impossible for Him (Gen.18:14; Job 42:2; Jer.32:17; Matt.19:26; Lk.1:37; 18:27). More than this, He has given us the true Bread of Life, Jesus Christ, through whom we have eternal life. What is problematic is our response. Will we learn that we need Him more than bread? Will we learn to trust Him to be faithful in fulfilling all our needs? ***Will we finally learn that spiritual sustenance is far more important than the material things of this world?***

Be labouring – not for the food that passes away – but for the food that will stay [with you] unto eternal life, [food] the Son of Man will give you.

John 6:27

Lie #1: I don't need God
Truth #1: We need God

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Analog Truth: | Yours is the power |
| Analog Lie: | Denying and doubting the power of God |
| Denial: | We shall all die (death and mortality) |
| Impetus: | Worry |
| Manifestation: | Greed |
| | Lust of the Flesh (1st John 2:16) |
| Counter-vice: | Faith in possessions |
| Counter-virtue: | Faith in God |
| Object of worship: | Things |
| Main issue: | No earthly gain solves the mortality problem |

- 1) You cannot truly give your allegiance to God while at the same time trusting in and lusting after material gain – you can't worship both God and "Mammon" at the same time (Matt.6:24; Lk.16:13).
- 2) We brought nothing into this world and will take nothing out of it (1Tim.6:7).
- 3) Lust for material gain makes us vulnerable to the devil's attacks, and threatens our salvation (1Tim.6:9).
- 4) The love of money is a source of all sorts of evils, turning us from the faith and causing us much anguish (1Tim.6:10).
- 5) Greed is essentially idolatry (Col.3:5), and its practitioners idolaters (Eph.5:5).
- 6) Covetousness lured Balaam into sacrificing his relationship with God for the sake of money, so that his actions are proverbial for the deceptiveness of wealth (2Pet.2:15; Jude 11).
- 7) Envy is the true root of acquisition lust (Eccl.4:4).
- 8) The lust for wealth can never be satisfied by any success (Eccl.5:10).
- 9) Wealth can be a severe disadvantage, keeping us from God (Lk.18:23-25).
- 10) Where your treasure is, there is your heart also (Matt.6:19-21; cf. Lk.12:32-34).
- 11) What does it profit a man to gain the world but lose his life? (Mk.8:36; Lk.9:25)
- 12) Your life does not depend upon an abundance of possessions (Lk.12:15).
- 13) Storing up material things rather than striving to be rich towards God is folly (Lk.12:21).
- 14) Discipleship requires the willingness to put God before possessions (Lk.14:33).
- 15) Wealth can distort one's perspective, choking spiritual growth (Mk.4:19).
- 16) Nothing is permanent, not even great wealth; great wealth merely subjects the possessor to greater temptation and a higher standard of judgment (Jas.5:1-6 and Lk.12:48).
- 17) Covetousness is forbidden by the 10th commandment (Ex.20:17; Deut.5:21).

3b. i. Lord's testing #2: Worship God only (KINGDOMS OF THE WORLD)

Satan's offer to Jesus of rulership over all the kingdoms of the world (provided He would worship him) was met by this response from our Lord: "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone" (Matt.4:10; cf. Deut.6:13). Our Lord was looking forward to the day when God would promote Him to world rule, just as we should look forward to the day when we will share in that rule (cf. Rev.3:21). **Desiring to promote oneself according to one's own time-table and in one's own way necessarily falls afoul of God's plan and leads inevitably to serving the devil.** Jesus would face similar tests during His years of ministry, most notable of which among those that occur in scripture is the attempt of the people (who had experienced His miraculous provision of bread and fish) to place Him at the head of a rebellion against the Roman authorities (Jn.6:15). In doing God's will, Jesus not only declined this offer of a crown, but, in the end, had to give up everything – even His life – in order to accomplish God's will. In doing so, He made it abundantly clear that He came to worship, follow and do the will of God, not to glorify Himself (Jn.12:28; 13:32; 17:1).

3b. ii. Lord's prayer #2: Forgive us our debts.

Far from being independent "demigods", we creatures of the Living God are in great need of His help, for we are in bondage to sin. Without His forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, we would be entirely and irretrievably lost. Even more important than our daily bread is God's continuing mercy and cleansing based upon what Christ did for us on the cross. If we view life and our own personal lives in truth, we understand just how desperately and completely we need Him, how dependent we are on His redemption through our Lord Jesus Christ. For God has not only created us, He has also bought us back from the power of death and hell through the sacrificial death of His only Son our Lord. When we pray this part of the Lord's prayer every day, it should call to mind our weakness and frailty, and our complete impotence to deal with sin apart from what God has done for us. **Only blind, subjective arrogance can minimize the problem of sin or trivialize God's gracious solution.**

Lie # 2: I am like God
Truth# 2: We are not God

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Analog Truth: | Yours is the glory |
| Analog Lie: | Glorification of self while denying God's blessings |
| Denial: | Our own imperfection (sin & sinfulness) |
| Impetus: | Subjective arrogance |
| Manifestation: | Rejection of God's authority Lust of the Eyes (1st John 2:16) |
| Counter-vice: | Love of self (cf. elevated self-interest and selfish ambition) |
| Counter-virtue: | Love of God |
| Object of worship: | Self |
| Main issue: | No accomplishment makes you God |

3c. i. Lord's Testing #3: Do not put God to the test (JUMP)

The devil's suggestion that our Lord throw Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple was cleverly meant to sound like a "good thing" to do. After all, as Satan pointed out, scripture promised God's deliverance for the Messiah. Doing as the devil suggested would prove 1) that God's promise was valid; 2) that Christ was indeed the Messiah; 3) that He was not afraid, but trusted in the Father's promises completely. For you or I, this would not have been much of a temptation, but for our Lord, this was a very subtle test. He most certainly did believe, as He looked down at the rocks far below Him, that His Father would rescue Him from such a fall. In fact, only someone with a complete and perfect understanding of scripture who also possessed Christ's faith would be capable of passing this test. Our Lord understood that to do as Satan asked would be unnecessarily doing a right thing in a wrong way. No one would be helped (Satan was not going to become a follower of Christ, after all). But it must have been very tempting for Christ to "prove it" to the devil, thus vindicating God (and Himself). Jesus understood the issue and was not even budged by the request. But how tempting for us, when we are asked to "prove it" on terms of someone else's making. It is important for us to follow our Lord's example, and avoid the temptation of vindicating ourselves under the guise of vindicating God. He does not need our help. We have to understand that if we "look bad" in the eyes of the world, God can and will vindicate us and Himself in His own way and at His own proper time. Christ would have to face the issue of the world's approbation (and lack of it) many times. ***He was praised when He healed them and fed them, but when He told them the truth, as He invariably did, they hated Him for it (cf. Jn.6:66), and when He died for them, they rejected Him.***

3c. ii. Lord's Prayer #3: Lead us not into temptation.

Satan's pseudo-good is so subtle and all-pervasive in his world system, that Christ advised us to pray every day for God's guidance and protection "from the evil one" and his systematic temptation. It all started with the devil's temptation of Eve: wouldn't it be a good thing to have knowledge, to be knowing good and evil? ***The fig leaves with which Adam and Eve clothed themselves after their fall are now proverbial for this sort of arrogant "God-helping" mind-set.*** What our first parents needed was a Saviour to die for them, not a superficial cover for their sin. In all too many instances, actions which, in the fulfilment of a legitimate Christian ministry might well be truly good, are nothing more than fig leaves that cover deep and treacherous evil. Nazism, Communism, and antichrist's future political movement all put on a fine face to the world, but behind the facade lie only the bones of the dead. As Christians, we need to be particularly careful about sharing in the sins and evil of others (Eph.5:11; 1Tim.5:22;

2Jn.11), and be on the alert daily that we might be "delivered from the evil one" and his most clever trap: the snare of pseudo-good that enslaves us to his will (Matt.6:13; cf. 1Tim.3:7).

And [in hopes that God may grant them] to wake up from the devil's trap, when taken captive to do his will.

2nd Timothy 2:26

Lie #3: God needs me
Truth#3: God does not need us

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Analog Truth: | Yours is the kingdom |
| Analog Lie: | Bringing in the millennium is possible |
| Denial: | God's control of history (the existence of a sovereign God over the universe) |
| Impetus: | Objective arrogance |
| Manifestation: | Self-Righteousness Boastful Pride of Life (1st John 2:16) |
| Counter-vice: | Hope in human solutions |
| Counter-virtue: | Hope in God's deliverance |
| Object of worship: | Satan |
| Main issue: | Bringing in the kingdom only brings in Satan's kingdom: the ultimate evil |

SUMMARY #1 (Dr. Charles Johnson)

Synopsis of the devil's propaganda:

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|--|---|
| Truth: | <i>We need God.</i> | <i>We are not God.</i> | <i>God does not need us.</i> |
| Lie: | <i>I don't need God.</i> | <i>I am like God.</i> | <i>God needs me.</i> |
| Analog truth: | Yours is the power. | Yours is the glory. | Yours is the kingdom. |
| Analog lie: | Denying & doubting the power of God. | Seeking your own glory while denying God's blessings. | Bringing in the millennium is possible. |
| Denial: | Of death & mortality. | Denying & seeking to replace God's control of history. | Sin & sinfulness. |
| Impetus: | Worry. | Subjective arrogance. | Objective arrogance. |
| Manifestation: | Greed. | Rejection of God's authority. | Self-righteousness. |

Scriptural referents:

| | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| Lord's testing: | Man does not live by bread alone. | Worship God only. | Do not put God to the test. |
| Lord's prayer: | <i>Give us today our daily bread.</i> | <i>Forgive us our debts.</i> | <i>Lead us not into temptation.</i> |
| 1 st John 2:16: | Lust of the flesh | Lust of the eyes. | Boastful pride of life. |
| Counter-virtue: | <i>Faith</i> (counter: faith in possessions, not God.) | <i>Love</i> (counter: love of self in place of love of God.) | <i>Hope</i> (counter: hope in human solutions versus God's deliverance.) |
| Object of worship: | <i>Things.</i> | <i>Self.</i> | <i>Satan.</i> |
| Main issue: | No earthly gain solves the mortality problem | No accomplishment makes you God | Bringing in the kingdom only brings in Satan's kingdom: the ultimate evil. |

SUMMARY #2

| | | | |
|---------------|--------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|
| Truth: | <i>We need God.</i> | <i>We are not God.</i> | <i>God does not need us.</i> |
| Lie: | <i>I don't need God.</i> | <i>I am like God.</i> | <i>God needs me.</i> |

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|---|--|--|
| <p>Analog Truth: Yours is the power</p> <p>Analog Lie: Denying and doubting the power of God</p> <p>Denial: We shall all die (death and mortality)</p> <p>Impetus: Worry</p> <p>Manifestation: Greed</p> <p>Lust of the Flesh (1st John 2:16)</p> <p>Counter-vice: Faith in possessions</p> <p>Counter-virtue: Faith in God</p> <p>Object of worship: Things</p> <p>Main issue: No earthly gain solves the mortality problem</p> | <p>Yours is the glory</p> <p>Glorification of self while denying God's blessings</p> <p>Our own imperfection (sin & sinfulness)</p> <p>Subjective arrogance</p> <p>Rejection of God's authority</p> <p>Lust of the Eyes (1st John 2:16)</p> <p>Love of self (cf. elevated self-interest and selfish ambition)</p> <p>Love of God</p> <p>Self</p> <p>No accomplishment makes you God</p> | <p>Yours is the kingdom</p> <p>Bringing in the millennium is possible</p> <p>God's control of history (the existence of a sovereign God over the universe)</p> <p>Objective arrogance</p> <p>Self-Righteousness</p> <p>Boastful Pride of Life (1st John 2:16)</p> <p>Hope in human solutions</p> <p>Hope in God's deliverance</p> <p>Satan</p> <p>Bringing in the kingdom only brings in Satan's kingdom: the ultimate evil</p> |
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Matthew 4:12 (NASB)

12 Now when Jesus heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee;

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Q: Why did our Lord withdraw into Galilee when He heard that John had been taken in to custody?

A: I would prefer to translate "He went back" (anachoreo, with ana- often meaning "back"; cf. Latin prefix "re-" as in "returned"). Prior to this He was being tested in preparation for His public ministry. The reason that it started in Galilee was at least twofold: 1) to fulfill prophecy (Is.9:2; Matt.4:16); 2) to avoid immediate and direct confrontation with the religious establishment in Jerusalem – which would have "forced the issue" long before the intended three and a half year ministry was completed (as may be seen by the reaction He received whenever He went up to Jerusalem for the mandatory festivals).

Matthew 4:25 (NIV)

25 Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,[a] Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

Matthew 4:25 That is, the Ten Cities

*

Q: What is Decapolis?

A: This was an area of trans-Jordan in what is mostly today Syria known as the "ten cities" because they had a mutual relationship, being all Hellenistic in culture and Greek speaking.

Matthew 5:3 (NASB)

3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

NIV SB: 5:3 Blessed. The word means more than "happy," because happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances. "Blessed" here refers to the ultimate well-being and distinctive spiritual joy of those who share in the salvation of the kingdom of God.

*

Q1: Do you agree with this definition of "blessed"?

A1: The word means "blessed" and also, as a result of being blessed, "happy". Our Lord's point is that the happiness which accrues to believers in spite of the travails of this life: nothing should be able to rob a believer of the peace and the joy which is his/hers in Jesus Christ. That is true happiness.

*

Q2: What does "poor in spirit" mean?

A2: On the beatitudes generally, see the *link*:

Here is what I have posted on this before (at different link):

The "poor in spirit" of Matthew 5:3 is better translated "spiritually blessed are the poor" – i.e., the ones who are children of God are blessed even though they are poor because they are spiritually blessed.

That is, being poor is no fun (believe me), but "in their spirit" the poor, who are believers in Jesus' presentation (unbelievers are not "blessed" in any way; see the link above) are "blessed" nonetheless in all things spiritual, especially if they are taking advantage of what the Lord provides to grow, progress and produce for Him – and how much more blessed/happy shall we be when He returns for us! The rewards to come and their anticipation here and now is part of the peace and joy which the world cannot take away from us.

Matthew 5:4 (NASB)

4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

*

Q1: Could you clarify this verse? What type of mourning is meant here by Jesus?

A1: I would say it refers to any type of mourning for any type of loss; this is first and foremost for the loss of life of a dear one, but need not be restricted to that sort of loss (e.g., 1Sam.16:1; Is.66:10).

*

Q2:

NIV SB: 5:4 those who mourn. Over both personal and corporate sins (see Ezr 9:4; Ps 119:36).

Do you agree that mourning over sins is meant here?

A2: No. This passage is speaking about believers experiencing personal loss. We can be at peace and retain our happiness and joy even in the midst of grief – because we have the Spirit and anticipate the Lord's return and our deliverance in all things.

*

Q3: How do we know that this verse refers to personal loss? Should this verse be interpreted by bringing Isaiah 61 into the context?

A3: We can bring in Isaiah 61:1: "He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted". In other words, comforting those to whom He comes – including those who are mourning – is part of Messiah's prophesied package of blessings.

Matthew 5:5-12 (NASB)

5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*

Q: How are to interpret these statements from our Lord Jesus?

A: (Excerpt from this [link](#))

The first thing to understand about the beatitudes is that they are given to a corporate group of believers, namely, Israel, where the entire nation was assumed by God to be believers and treated as such (even though that was never completely the case). This corporate treatment at this point

explains also our Lord's contrasting instructions to the disciples just before His crucifixion (Lk.22:36). In applying these truths to those within this corporate group then the beatitudes are applicable to those who genuinely belong to the spiritual sub-group assumed in each case. "Blessed/happy are ye" applies to believers who are in this category; likewise "woe to ye" applies to unbelievers who are in that category. If someone is "meek" but not a believer, that person is most definitely not going to "inherit the earth". Similarly, if a person is a Christian but also happens to be materially blessed (as Abraham was, e.g.), that person is not going to be condemned on account of their riches. **All of these pronouncements are concessive. That is to say, they express spiritual truths which are true even in the face of a physical reality which may seem to contradict them.** A poor person seems to the world to be cursed, but if that person is a believer they are blessed beyond our capacity to understand it now, and in eternity will know only blessing upon blessing. A rich person may seem to the world to be blessed, but if that person is an unbeliever they are destined for the lake of fire and no amount of the very temporary material prosperity in this corrupt world can possibly compensate for the horrors to come. That is why I like to translate these verses in the following way: ***"You are happy/blessed even though (you have some physical disadvantage)", "You are destined for woe even though (you have some physical advantage):***

Be happy, even though you are poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Be happy, even though you are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

Be happy, even though you are crying now, for you shall laugh.

Be happy when people revile you and exclude you and reproach you and disparage your reputation on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice and leap for joy in [anticipation of] that [future] day, for behold, your reward in heaven is great; after all, your ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.

Luke 6:20b-23

Matthew 5:13 (NASB)

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has become tasteless, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men.

*

Q: What does our Lord mean here by salt?

A: Our Lord's remarks about salt are indeed important and of course absolutely true. As believers, we want to be "salt" and we want to have as much "savor" as we possibly can. But this is an analogy. We are not salt but human beings. Salt is either good or bad. If it becomes bad, it has no further worth. That is, it is true, a powerful incentive to never totally lose our savor. But what would that mean? It would mean to fall away from faith entirely and to become apostate. At that point, we would be cast out – because we would, by our own choice (not His), no longer belong to Him.

Unlike salt, our level of "savoriness" as believers is never static. We are either becoming more potent in our spiritual growth, progress and production or less so. When it comes to the truth, more is exponentially more and less is exponentially less; but something is better than nothing (unless that "something" is not really the truth, in which case nothing is better than that "something"). As we grow and progress, we become more useful to our Lord in all manner of ways, and, as in the case of salt, being a preservative for our neighborhoods, communities, and nation is one of those ways. But the savor is never static. Perhaps the least productive thing we can do is focus with guilt on opportunities lost or mistakes made in the past. If we do that, we are definitely handicapping our growth, progress and production today, whereas we are to use "today" for the opportunity it is (Eph.5:16; Col.4:5; cf. Matt.6:34; Phil.3:13), not looking back (except to the day Jesus died for us and we were saved), and not looking to tomorrow (except for the day of our Lord's return and our regathering to Him).

"Salt is good, but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another." Mark 9:50 NKJV

As you can see from the second sentence, in the analogy, not only are believers "salt" themselves (as in Matt.5:13), but "salt" is something we are to have within us, corresponding to the truth believed and thus available to the Spirit for guiding and empowering us. It is that truth and our attention to it through faith that determines our personal level of "savoriness" at any given time. So this salt analogy is not at all meant to make us feel despondent about our past failures (and everyone has past failures) but to encourage us to take the challenge of growth, progress and production seriously so as to become useful to our Lord – and to be a benefit to all around us because of the spiritual status we achieve through this holy process which acts as a preservative for ourselves and those around us (see the link: "[Blessing by Association](#)").

Matthew 5:14 (NASB)

14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden;

15 nor does anyone light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

*

Q: How are we to differentiate between Matt. 5:14-16 versus 6:1-4? In Chapter 5 we are told to let our deeds be shown, but in chapter 6 we are told to not do our alms before men?

A: As to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" and what our Lord says about trumpeting supposed works in the next chapter, in the first instance the believer is doing his/her job without fanfare; in the second instance the unbeliever (or carnal believer) is actively seeking glory from men as the only reason to even give the appearance of doing "good works". Good works, biblically speaking, are anything we do that is definitely in the will of God for the sake of His Church. That is to say, it comprises so much more than what the world thinks of as "charity". But even where the latter is concerned, if a believer is doing the right thing, those who are benefitted will see it. So there's no contradiction here at all. Matthew 5:14-16 is encouraging believers not to sit on their faith but to grow, progress and produce for the Lord – in the right way; Matthew 6:1-4 is entirely consistent with this good approach since it recommends genuine acts of righteousness rather those which are only done for secular advantage and recognition. ***If we are growing, if we are really walking with Jesus, if we are really helping our brothers and sisters in Christ in all the multifarious aspects of ministry that define the Church, that is "letting our light shine" – but Pharisaical "hoopla" over things which really aren't in the will of God anyway sums up, in my estimation, about 99% of what passes for charity, good works, ministry and witnessing in our lackadaisical Laodicean era. This will all be revealed "in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel." (Rom.2:25 NKJV).***

Matthew 5:17-18 (NASB)

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

18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished.

*

Q1: What does Jesus mean by "until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished"? Since our Lord came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (verse 17) and since as a result the Law of Moses is no longer to be observed, is He here referring to Old Testament prophecies referring to the end times?

A1: Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law (Rom.10:4); the Law has been fulfilled by His life and death. All other prophecies will indeed be brought to pass "before heaven and earth pass away" at the end of the Millennium, but the cross is what has accomplished this prophecy – every "jot and tittle", since He died for all of our sins.

*

Q2: Jesus said that not one jot nor tittle will pass away until all is fulfilled. What did He mean by all is fulfilled?

A2: Matthew 5:18 has two qualifiers: "*until heaven and earth pass away*" and "*until all things have come to pass*". The former "event horizon" is the end of history when the present heaven and earth will pass away to be replaced by the new heavens and the new earth "wherein righteousness dwells" (2Pet.3:13). At that future time, since there will be no more sin and no more possibility for sin or evil, since all who were to be saved shall have been saved and resurrected, since there will be no more death or any possibility of death or want or need or pain or trouble, there will be no need of any Law to govern behavior or symbolize God's plan for history. For at that future time, all creature behavior will be perfect and completely incapable of imperfection, and there will be no more history. The other limit placed by our Lord on the application of the Law is the "coming to pass of all things". The first point to understand is what the "all things" of the Law are. Jesus, in assuring His listeners in verse 17 that He has not come to "abolish" the Law but to "fulfill" the Law makes two things clear: 1) although He is the Messiah, He is not there to establish the Millennial Kingdom, and 2) all of the things written in the Law are indeed on the point of fulfillment. So this is what the "all things of the Law" are, namely, the things Jesus had come to fulfill in person during the first as opposed to the second advent, namely, the prophecies of the coming of the Messiah to take away sin (rather than rule over the sinful world).

Every aspect of the Law is to one degree or another a commentary on the issue of sin, what it is, how it is to be avoided, why it can't be completely avoided, and, most importantly, how God resolves this central problem of humanity, namely, how to save sinful and mortal creatures from eternal damnation through sacrifice. As we Christians know well, only the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross in dying for our sins, bearing them and suffering for them in the darkness on Golgotha could ever remove sin as an impediment to our salvation from eternal death and open a way instead for us unto eternal life. This sacrifice by Him is what "fulfills" the Law. For it is "impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb.10:4). These sacrifices required by the Law were symbols that pointed to and prophesied His coming sacrifice, and it is His sacrifice which fulfills all of the symbols of the Law (with which it is replete). Once Jesus had died for the sins of all human beings, the Mosaic code which was designed to teach us about this central event of all create history by foreshadowing it symbolically was indeed "brought to fulfillment" (i.e., the "all things of the Law" were now historically completed). Until that time, "not one jot or tittle" was to be overlooked, because in every respect all of the teaching therein pointed to Christ and the sacrifice He was about to make. This was a shock to the hypocritical religious crowd, because they assumed that Jesus was a "law-breaker"; in fact, they had overlooked the true meaning and purpose of the Law (to show them their sin and draw them to the mercy of God) and were merely employing it as a set of traditional rituals which they had long since leached of any true meaning or substance. But once Jesus died on Calvary for our sins, everything written in the Law had and has been fulfilled.

I believe the reason that the second boundary is present (the "until" which comes first) is that the Law is still wonderfully applicable to all sorts of things today -- it is still God's truth and as such is important for all believers to study and understand as they would all other scripture. But it is not appropriate to carry out its symbolic rituals; in fact, this is no longer allowed for Christians (the main theme of the book of Hebrews; see the links: "Who wrote Hebrews?" and "Hebrews 10:26"), because in doing so we would be saying in effect that what Jesus did was not sufficient, that these "things" (or whatever part of the "all these things" of the Law we persist in observing) are still in force because they have not yet been properly "fulfilled" -- but of course they have, fully and completely and eternally in our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Matthew 5:22 (NASB)

22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.

*

Q1: What does our Lord here mean by "court" and "supreme court"? How are these courts different from the "fiery hell"?

A1: The first two (a strange translation by the NASB) are human judgment (a local judge in the first instance, the national council in the second); "fiery hell" is the place where those who are condemned at the last judgment – for rejecting Christ – will be thrown. So this is an ascending scale used by our Lord for emphasis: these behaviors considered of no account or even justifiable are seen to be incompatible with the walk of a believer. They are sins, and all sins are punishable by eternal condemnation. Herein is the gospel: the Law cannot save, merely demonstrate the need for a Savior; but we are all saved from all our sins by the blood of Christ through faith because Christ died for every single sin.

*

Q2: One thing isn't clear to me here - how is it that our Lord moves from earthly judgments to a heavenly one?

A2: Probably because this life is where we exercise the image of God – for a brief time – in choosing our ways, and all that comes afterwards is the result of those choices we make as the clock ticks down.

Matthew 5:23-24 (NASB)

23 Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.

*

Q: Why are we to be reconciled to our brother first before coming to God in prayer for forgiveness?

A: Reconciliation: Jesus tells us that before coming to God to ask forgiveness, we need first to make sure that our brothers and sisters have nothing against us (Matt.5:23-24), and that, if we are on the receiving end of this request for forgiveness and reconciliation, we should be willing to grant it even if happens "seventy times seven times" (Matt.18:21-22). Here too what we have is not really so much a confession or admission of sins – those whom we have wronged are well aware of what we have done – but rather a request to be reconciled and to receive forgiven in human terms.

Matthew 5:29-30 (NASB)

29 If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

30 If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

*

Q: I take it these words are not to be taken literally - how should we understand them?

A1: This is covered at the link: <http://ichthys.com/mail-153fish.htm#pluck%20out%20your%20eye>

Our Lord is putting things in a way that can't possibly be ignored. Honestly, I can't even imagine a scenario where a person who plucked their eyes out would go to heaven but would not have done so if they hadn't plucked their eyes out. This hypothetical doesn't ever occur, but it does make our Lord's point for Him and very powerfully so. There is absolutely nothing we value in this life which we aren't better off losing (if God takes it away from us) or throwing overboard (if He leaves it to us to make the hard choice) if the alternative is not being saved. This applies to both believers and unbelievers.

For a believer, nothing is worth apostatizing for. Clearly, if we are compelled to keep looking at something which may result in apostasy (like an idol), then we would be better off being blind. In reality of course, the reason why this hypothetical never happens is that if a person has the willpower to blind him/herself, then surely that person has the willpower to stop looking at the offensive thing (alternatively, putting out our eyes won't take away the lust that leads to the idolatry in any case so would be useless act). That is our Lord's point: since being blinded is better than apostasy, how much more should we then not turn away from behavior which leads to apostasy? That is something which is easier to do by many magnitudes than putting one's own eyes out. Just to make it very clear, no one should seriously consider engaging in any of the self-

mutilations discussed in these and similar passages: our Lord is helping us put things into the proper value hierarchy with these remarks:

"You think it would be onerous to cut off your own hands? So it would! But wouldn't that be better than going to hell? So it would! So learn the lesson and stop doing things with those hands which may land you in hell!"

For an unbeliever this same logic shows the futility of avoiding hell by one's own efforts. Believers are saved, and while we have to maintain faith intact until the end of life, we are beyond all argument secure in Christ as long as we do maintain our faith in and faithfulness to Him – a situation which is incalculably better than that of the unbeliever. Any reasonable person in hearing these words of our Lord knows very well that cutting off the hands may slow down theft, for example, but it will not prevent it, and that putting out the eyes may slow down lust, but it will not prevent it. Since even the most drastic of physical actions is not going to conquer sin, there is therefore no human solution even for controlling sin completely – let alone for atoning for sins already committed, even if the sin nature could be completely contained (which is of course impossible). So for unbelievers these verses bring home one of the three points of natural revelation everyone comes to know at some point: we are sinful (point 1) and so when we die as we all must (point 2) we will face the impossible situation of standing before a perfectly holy and righteous God whose character and existence we cannot help but recognize from the creation in which He has placed us (point 3). In other words, for unbelievers these seemingly harsh words of our Lord are really exceptionally merciful: they serve as a very important reminder of a critical part of the universal appeal God has woven into the warp and woof of His creation as motivation to seek out and accept the gospel message:

"Since nothing you could even contemplate doing to yourself, no matter how horrible, could ever have any significant effect on sin, you'd better look to the only One who can take away your sin – otherwise you are lost!"

*

A2: The key thing to me about our Lord's examples is that no one in the world would actually do this, namely, pluck out their eye if, for example "it" lusted after a woman. In short order the entire world of men would be blind if that were common practice, whereas in the history of the world following our Lord's use of this example no one has yet done this (no one sane, in any case). So it does serve to show how impossible sinlessness is – apart from the Spirit; and it does, as you suppose very correctly, point the way all that much more emphatically to the need for help in order

to be saved – and He is our only help, the only Name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

I would add also what is explained at the link, namely that this is an emphatic way to make anyone who thinks about it realize that we have no hope apart from a Savior who will take away our sins – because even if we take the most dramatic measures we cannot be saved without God's merciful intervention at the cross.

Matthew 5:31-32 (NASB)

31 “It was said, ‘Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce’;

32 but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the reason of unchastity, makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

*

Q: My question is about marriage. What does the Bible say about marriage? Is a church divorce possible? What does the Bible say about marital intercourse? Is it obligatory in a marriage? How to understand the term marital love? Thanks for your help. I try to read and understand the Bible, but it's not so easy.

A: *See Bartek's response re Marriage and Divorce on 17.10.2016*

Adultery in this situation consists of two things - an unlawful divorce and remarriage. This means that if someone divorces their spouse, but they don't remarry, they have not committed adultery - because both conditions for their action to be qualified as adultery, as given by Jesus, have not been met - only one. They have divorced their spouse, but have not remarried - so they don't commit adultery.

It's an important point in this context, since reason the Pharisees engaged in this hypocritical procedure was to justify getting a new woman they wanted. So if they were to divorce their wives and remain unmarried after the divorce, they wouldn't be committing adultery against their wives. But of course that's not what they wanted - they wanted a new woman and were justifying getting this new woman in the way described - and our Lord condemns their conduct here.

Matthew 5:33-37 (NASB)

33 “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord.’ 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

NIV SB: 5:33–37 The OT recognized the useful role of swearing oaths in certain situations (even God swore oaths: see, e. g., Ge 22:16; Jos 5:6; Ps 89:3–4, Ps 35; Isa 45:22; Jer 22:5; Eze 26:7; see also notes on Ge 9:13; 15:17; Dt 6:13; Jer 22:5; Heb 6:13) —common profanity is not in view. Jesus urged such honesty and integrity in all human speech that swearing oaths in support of assertions or commitments would not be necessary.

*

Q: The last point regarding integrity in speech deeming oaths redundant is interesting - would agree that this is what our Lord means here?

A: I think it is more the question of humility versus "making a show" of one's own sanctity by overdoing things – along the lines of having a trumpeter announce one's contributions (as opposed to giving in secret). Both stem from the same sort of arrogance that imagines works, "something I do", as more important than the truth and than the Lord in whom we have put our faith. The life of faith versus the life of arrogant self-justification which lacks all faith and which seeks to impress God and men with superfluous actions was a characteristic of the legalistic generation of our Lord's day – just as it is today.

Matthew 5:38-42 (NASB)

38 “You have heard that it was said, ‘AN eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’

39 But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.

40 If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, let him have your coat also.

41 Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

42 Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.

NIV SB: 5:39 resist. Here it probably means in a court of law. slaps. The Greek verb used here means "slaps you with the back of the hand." It was more an insult (cf. 26:67) than an act of violence. The point is that it is better to be insulted even twice than to take the matter to court. Ancient Near Eastern society had become very litigious.

*

Q1: This sounds like a very reasonable explanation - would you agree with this note?

A1: I understand that people are uncomfortable with this verse. It is a high standard. The only thing I would say about "turning the other cheek" to mitigate it at all is that our Lord is clearly not describing a situation where our life (or the life of someone else) is in danger. If the Father's will were being done on earth – and only in the Millennium when our Lord reigns and we reign with Him will this even be close to being the case in the way people behave – then no one would "make himself a prey" by acting according to our Lord's perfect standard (Is.59:15). Please see the link:

<http://ichthys.com/mail-Freedom-Responsibility.htm> - turn the other cheek

*

Q2: I read an interesting observation by some commentators - since most people are right-handed, being struck on the right cheek means that it was a backhand slap - which clearly shows that insult is meant here rather than for example an attack on one's life. Do you think this point has some value?

A2: No. Luke 6:29 merely has "the one, the other" without regard to left or right, from which I think we would be justified in understanding that the same thing is meant here: since most people are right-handed, it's natural to start with the right in describing something to them and then move to the left. Also, the Greek has rapizo "smite" and tupto "strike" in the two respective chapters. "Slap" is an interpretation, but "punch" is equally likely – and you can equally punch a person in the left or right cheek regardless of "handedness".

*

Q3: Hi Dr. Luginbill: How do Jesus' words about turning the other cheek and loving one's enemies apply to Christians who choose to serve in the military and go to war? Are preemptive strikes forbidden to Christians by the Bible? It seems this whole Iraq thing is just such a preemptive strike. I have heard Christians compare what we are doing there to the way the Children of Israel

slaughtered their enemies in Canaan... as if God is on our side. I look forward to reading your response. Thank you. Blessings,

A3: The first observation I would make is that our Lord's instruction about "turning the other cheek" at Matt.5:39 and Lk.6:29 comes in the context of individual behavior in respect to claiming or eschewing one's rights under the Law. According to the Law, if someone hits you and damages you, they are to be hit and damaged to the same degree ("an eye for an eye"). But our Lord introduces a higher standard for believers, one that eschews retaliation and confrontation to the degree possible. In all of the examples He gives in those contexts, there is no indication that the behavior He commends and commands will result in undue further physical damage to the person who hears His words and puts them into practice, and certainly not in loss of life. In Gethsemane, it will be recalled, Jesus told the apostles that while in their previous ministries of announcing and offering the kingdom they had gone forth with a deliberate and studied lack of resources, in future after the cross they were to make prudent preparation, including whatever might be necessary for physical security and self-defense (i.e., "let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one": Lk.22:36). But again, this is talking about personal security rather than state policy or politics.

Both Peter and Paul go to rather extreme lengths to support the state's claim to authority over individuals, something that might well seem strange to Christians otherwise (Rom.13:1-5; 1Pet.2:13-15), given on the one that the Lord is our true ultimate authority, and on the other that the Roman Empire was anything but fair and impartial towards Christianity. In light of the specific reference to and justification of capital punishment (Rom.13:4), it is certain that both apostles clearly envisioned military security from external threats as a normal function of government. That is certainly the impression one comes away with when reading scripture in any case, and in both testaments. The simple fact is that without military security, there would be no nation states, and nationalism is a very important part of the plan of God since the flood (see the link: "nationalism as a restrainer of evil" in SR4). For only by compartmentalizing the human family into nations do we have an "immune system", so to speak, that prevents the devil from bringing the entire world into a state of catastrophic self-destruction all at once. One country might successfully outlaw the practice of Christianity, for example, but it is not such an easy matter for Satan to pull this off everywhere. Through the existence of nations, God has always provided safe havens throughout history for the search for the truth:

For from one man [Adam], [God] created the nations of mankind, that they might inhabit the entire face of the earth. And He predetermined both their appointed times and the

boundaries of their settlement, that they might seek God, if perhaps they might even [deign to] grope after Him and so come to find Him – for He is not far from every one of us.

Acts 17:26-27

But your point is very well taken. As you are no doubt aware, I am not at all enthusiastic about the idea of politics from a Christian point of view. Certainly, people are free to make any application they wish, and in the history of our republic very many, perhaps the great majority of Christians, have come to the conclusion that being politically active is an important or even "godly" thing. In my own study of the Bible and history, I would say that the leadership of any given country always reflects its spiritual state. God is more than capable of providing "good leadership" for the benefit of His people, wherever they may be, and more than capable of delivering out a remnant according to grace whenever and wherever a particular country passes beyond the pale of toleration and tolerable circumstances for Christians. But if the spiritual state of the country is poor, poor leadership is a natural and, I would argue, inevitable result, no matter how intense the politicking of Christian groups may become. And as far as democracy is concerned, given that we as individuals have a difficult enough time gauging what is going on in our own hearts, how in world are we supposed to evaluate others? Of course the choices we are given, choices that for all practical purposes are beyond our abilities to influence in any truly meaningful way, can often be only between demonstrably terrible and perhaps not quite as bad. But even as far as the latter is concerned, we are really only guessing. God is more than capable of delivering us even from our own bad judgment on this score if only we are proving ourselves worthy of such deliverance.

Herein lies the true nub of the issue according to my lights. It is pointless to debate politics or foreign policy as a Christian, and not only because in practical terms it is a moot point (that is, we can't really do anything about it anyway, even if we do vote and are politically involved, pace the mythical protestations of opinion makers to the contrary). It is also pointless, because unless and until we as Christians are truly devoting ourselves to spiritual growth and ministry, we cannot expect divine help and deliverance. ***One genuine prayer is worth more than a million votes. One Christian determined to grow closer to Jesus and serve Him faithfully is worth more than a perfect national slate of candidates who say the right things. One life lived for Christ has more impact on our national well-being than all the well-planned carefully thought out foreign policy and military strategies ever devised.***

So I guess I am answering this question in an indirect way. Military service is admirable and certainly not contrary to true Christian doctrine. Voting and becoming involved in politics is not anathema to the Lord. Arguing for specific military and foreign policies on a personal or political level is part of life. But none of these things are really "big picture" activities for Christians. Jesus Christ controls history, and if we would be on the right side of things, how we as individual Christians are living our lives, whether or not we are committed to personal spiritual growth through Bible study, Bible teaching, prayer and application, and whether or not we are preparing to engage and engaging with our spiritual battles, being productive on the basis of the gifts we have been given to serve the Church of Jesus Christ, are questions which are so much more important and significant even to the secular state of things – not to mention to the spiritual state of ourselves and others – that it almost seems a waste of time and energy to consider the other more mundane effects we might have.

There is a down side too to becoming too preoccupied with politics. Generally speaking, when Christians start considering and looking to political solutions, there is almost of necessity at least some diminution of the care and effort they give to the truly important spiritual solutions. On top of that, we are near the end of things. No matter what we do, the Tribulation is approaching very fast, and our role in it as a nation has already been written. The disturbing spiritual trends in the church-visible are plainly there for all to see, and nothing we do as individuals is going to stop them. But rather than being a discouragement, this set of facts ought to motivate us to intensify our efforts and personal spiritual growth and ministry. Difficult times lie ahead. How we prepare between then and now is of immense importance. For whether it be fire or water, our Lord can safely lead us through the flame and the flood, provided we are but ready and willing to be led when the time comes.

Matthew 5:43 (NASB)

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

*

Q: Leviticus 19:18 doesn't mention hating the enemy?

A: No. That is the current "interpretation" which our Lord is contradicting (analogous to the false interpretation of divorce, giving, the Sabbath, etc.). This is standard "popular morality" in the ancient Mediterranean world, but it is not godly to hate.

Matthew 5:44-45 (NASB)

44 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

*

Q1: Jesus said in Matt. 5:44, "...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." So if Christians were to be drafted because of military action, would going to war be just the opposite of what Jesus said in the above verse? A friend of mine had stated;

"Matt. 8

5 And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him,

6 And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented.

7 And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.

8 The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

9 For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it.

10 When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

With the many encounters Jesus and Peter had with military men, I never see Jesus or Peter telling them to stop serving in the military. If it were a sin, then Jesus would have approached them in the same way he did the woman at the well. Or the woman caught in adultery. Or the pharisees. But it was apparently not a concern to Jesus or Peter."

Can you help me clear up this confusion? Thanks in advance!

A1: As a former Marine, I completely agree. To add to your friend's very good point, John the baptist tells the soldiers who come to him to be baptized to refrain from extortion and false accusation and to be content with their wages, not to stop being soldiers (Lk.3:14). David was one

of the greatest believers in history, and his exceptional record as soldier is very well known. One might also add that while we are to love our enemies, and while the shedding of blood in murder is one of the worst sins, capital punishment is ordained in scripture for a number of offenses in the Old Testament and never condemned in the New. Thus there are clearly circumstances where the taking of life is necessary for the continuation of law and order and for the protection of the state which, while not necessarily godly, is definitely "of God" (Rom.13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1Pet.2:13-17).

As a practical matter, I would have no problem allowing individuals with qualms about taking another person's life serve in non-combatant roles. Army medics and Navy Corpsmen, for example, are often at even greater risk than the soldiers and Marines doing the fighting during combat operations, but are not required to take life. I do not find in scripture any prohibition against defending one's country in the military, but I would certainly not think less of a fellow believer who chooses for whatever reason to handle such a circumstance in the honorable way suggested above. Of course, at the moment, in this country the problem is academic since all military service is voluntary.

One final point, it is indeed a very good thing for anyone in military service to have respect for their enemies on the battlefield, even from a secular viewpoint. Hating the enemy is almost always counterproductive and can lead to bad decisions and faulty evaluations.

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Q2: I asked someone who was also in the military and is a Christian to get a second opinion, and he said: "When I was in the USMC hating the enemy was constantly preached. The communists (OK I'm dating myself) were an evil that needed to be destroyed to preserve and defend the American way. Then the muslim terrorists (I was in when muslims blew the barracks in Beirut) were the next evil that needed killed. Oh yeah, hate is good for warriors..."

"GOD, COUNTRY, CORPS"

Being the point of the sword of the nation's defense the Marines tend not to approach things from an "objective" viewpoint...I remember one corporal in radio school (29 Palms CA) who would have us sing "Kill, Pillage, and Burn, we're gonna KILL PILLAGE AND BURN!" Sorry if that offends any, and if it messes up any sort of "poster boy" images ya got but it's what we did. There was another one-if yer old enough ya might remember the "I am stuck on band-aid 'cause band-aid's stuck on me" commerical. Another hardcore corporal replaced "band-aid" with "napalm". After we'd find the song we'd shout "Napalm sticks to kids". Oh yeah, all this singing is done while we're runnin' our keesters off.

I won't even tell ya the other runnin' songs-I'm sure some other jarheads around would know them. There were some Christian guys (one that eventually led me to the Lord) that would just refuse to sing out on the vulgar/porno songs, but they were popular. Frankly, anything I saw of God in the USMC was in spite of it, not because of it. These two Christian guys in particular were hard-chargin', all business, poster-boy Marines. But they were definitely the minority and I rarely saw anything in the NCOs that was particularly Christ-like."

What do you think about all this? thanks in advance!

A2: Nobody going into service should expect to find "Sunday school". It's not for sissies, that's for sure (especially not the Marines). Soldiers, and Marines in particular, engage in bravado as a matter of course – that doesn't mean that in combat they don't develop a healthy respect for their opponents. As far as "loving one's enemies" is concerned, that is a command given to individual Christians, not to organizations which are not even Christian. It is true that going into service a Christian is going to have moments of confrontation with others whose behavior, attitudes, and lifestyle is demonstrably un-Christian in every way. But that is true of virtually every other venue in life as well. It's just that in the military it is often particularly intense because we are talking about very young men in very intense situations. That doesn't mean that a Christian can't be a Christian in the military. It is not mandatory that you go to the bars when off duty (etc.). Most of this stuff is window-dressing anyway. If a Christian is unable to hear or see anything offensive without having his/her faith collapse, that Christian hasn't been very well prepared for the challenges of the devil's world. Not that we should seek to expose ourselves to grossness, but there are times, the world being what it is, that even the most sheltered person will be exposed to the underbelly of the devil's kosmos. We don't have to allow ourselves to be influenced by it or corrupted by it, but there are times when we are going to be exposed to it in this culture, like it or not, whether or not we enter military service.

Matthew 5:48 (NASB)

48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

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A1: Excerpt from Bible Basics 1 – Theology

When firmly grasped, God's perfection – perfection in every way and according to any conceivable true standard – is a clarifying concept, *illuminating His motives*. God's perfect character will never be less than the highest, the best and the purest that the human mind can comprehend.

Summary:

God's goodness overflows with love, providing grace for sinful Man:

though evil says a loving God can't condemn,
He did condemn His Son that we might live,
redeeming us in love with the blood of Christ.

God's holiness overflows in justice, offering mercy to sinful Man:

though evil says a just God can't forgive,
He did forgive us, by condemning His own Son,
making us righteous through the blood of Christ.

God's faithfulness and truth overflow in life, producing peace with God for sinful Man:

though evil says that a God of integrity can't restore us,
He did make peace between us through His Son,
reconciling us to Himself and granting us eternal life on the basis of the blood of Christ.

*

A2: As to the grammar, the verb form here at Matthew 5:48, *esesthe* (ἔσεσθε), is in the future indicative. However, Jesus is quoting from the Old Testament:

"You must be blameless before the LORD your God." Deuteronomy 18:13 NIV

"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy." Leviticus 19:2b NIV

Greek is different from Hebrew, so the LXX translators had to make some accommodations, and one thing which they did pretty consistently was render the Hebrew imperfect as the Greek future. And, indeed, the Greek in the Septuagint version of both of the quotes above is using the future of the verb "to be" to render the Hebrew imperfect of the verb "to be" – because in Hebrew the imperfect, as it is called, does the work of both a future and a modal. This is more often seen in negative commands, as in "Thou shalt not . . ." (where we have the Hebrew imperfect with the negative adverb *lo'*, consistently rendered in the LXX with the future plus the negative adverb *ou*).

So Jesus' audience certainly knew that this was a command in spite of the fact that the verb is in the indicative, because it was clearly not only a case of Old Testament usage but a near quote (or, better, a combined quotation) of a very well-known Old Testament command.

Yours in the Perfect One whose perfection was indeed commanded to strive to emulate,

Bob L.

Matthew 6:1 (NASB)

6 "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them;

otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.

NIV SB: reward from your Father. Spiritual growth and maturity or perhaps a heavenly reward of some kind—or both.

*

Q: How should we understand the reward here?

A: We receive rewards for everything we do in the power of the Spirit:

"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

Matthew 10:42 NASB

These "specific act" rewards are no doubt of less importance than the crowns which represent much effort over long periods of time, consistently maintained – but they will be wonderful. This also helps to explain, by the way, how there can be absolute differentiation between every believer and every other believer, and how there can be three levels of reward by gate in the New Jerusalem even for those who have not earned a single crown: there will be significant variation between the highest rewarded non-crown believer and the lowest.

Matthew 6:6 (NASB)

6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

NIV SB: 6:6 Jesus' followers are not to make a show of their praying, in contrast to "the hypocrites" (v. 5). This does not mean that all prayer should be private, as the plurals "our" and "us" in vv. 9–13 indicate. room. The Greek word here probably means "storeroom," because unlike most of the rooms in the house, it had a door that could be shut.

*

Q1: Do you agree with the points that plurals "our" and "us" indicate that not all prayer should be private?

Q2: Is "storeroom" the right rendering?

A: Taking the last first, the word *staseion*, means "pantry", so that any small enclosed room is what is meant, often used to store things – just as a closet or a pantry is; the root has to do with being a household steward. As to the plurals, they indicate plurality, not anything having to do with public/private. There is a time for each; Jesus is addressing multiple disciples – that is the reason for the plural.

Matthew 6:7 (NASB)

7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

NIV SB: 6:7 babbling like pagans. They used long lists of the names of their gods in their prayers, hoping that by constantly repeating them they would call on the name of the god that could help them. Jesus is not necessarily condemning all long prayers, but meaningless verbiage in praying.

*

Q1: Do you agree that this is what our Lord means here - long lists of names? I thought that an unnecessary repetition of one intention during one prayer could also be considered "babbling" or "meaningless repetition"?

A1: I think our Lord's words speak for themselves here. The example cited may be an example of this but it does not exhaust the possible situations which might fall into this category (as you note). I think the attitude of heart is what counts. If there is no need to be saying the same thing over and over as a rote, that would seem to me to be another case (one thinks of Tibetan "prayer wheels" and other pointlessness). What comes to mind for me are people who pray long in public in order to "seem holy"; I think one can get a good idea of what Jesus means here by attending almost any Protestant (or Catholic?) church on Sunday morning and being subjected to interminably long prayers devoid of anything of much importance (not to mention being filled with doctrinally questionable pronouncements).

*

Q2: This is something which is always at the back of my mind whilst praying and I sometimes do make the mistake of repeating the same thing, albeit unintentionally. Does repetition in this context constitute day-to-day prayer of the same petitions (e.g. for an unbeliever's opening of heart to the truth?) When are we to cease praying in this case? I understand that this may be a "loaded" question where specific application ultimately comes down to the believer lead by the Spirit. Also, to whom (of the Triune God) should we direct our prayers to? I find myself offering up prayers to God our Father most of the time, done in the power of the Spirit and offered up in the Name of our Lord Jesus. When should we for example address our prayers directly to our Lord?

Matthew 6:9-13 (NASB)

9 "Pray, then, in this way:

'Our Father who is in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

10 'Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

NIV SB: your will be done. Logically follows "your kingdom come." The NIV scansion and punctuation suggest that "on earth as it is in heaven" be read with each of the three preceding petitions.

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Q1: Do you agree that "on earth as it is in heaven" relates to each of the three preceding petitions?

A1: I wouldn't necessarily distinguish (i.e., I don't see the problem), because "heaven and earth" cover every eventuality. Clearly, we believers should hallow the Father's Name now, strive to follow His will, and delight ourselves with the coming of His kingdom. Just as clearly, only after the

Father's advent to the New Jerusalem in the New Heavens and New Earth will it be the case that His Name is properly hallowed and never abused, and that His will is completely and perfectly done by all. This is the wonderful state of affairs we are to contemplate when we pray this part of the prayer, looking forward to the eternal state of things and all the blessings that will be ours on that wonderful eternal day to come.

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Q2: Should the second sentence be a part of this verse? [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.']

Matthew 6:13 Or the evil one

Matthew 6:13 This clause not found in early mss

A2: No. The doxology or ascription seems to have been imported from St. John Chrysostom; either that or he reflects the liturgical form of the prayer as it was adapted for use in the post-apostolic church. In any case, this sentence is not part of the Word of God.

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Q3: Full meaning of Lord's Prayer: <http://ichthys.com/mail-Lords%20Prayer.htm>

A3: As to the Lord's prayer, different versions of the "Lord's prayer" abound, and the trend in some places is to substitute some new version for whatever was traditional (although some groups defend their traditional version like it was the holy grail). But regardless of the version used, there are almost always "problems" with the way the pray is translated. For example, the traditional end of the prayer, "For thine is the kingdom and power and the glory forever. Amen.", is not part of the Bible: it does occur in the original Greek text but was a latter addition, no doubt on the part of some monk who felt that it ended too abruptly.

As you are no doubt aware there are two versions in the NT, one in Matthew (Matt.6:9-13) and one in Luke (Lk.11:2-4). It seems clear to me, moreover, that each author is relating a different event, with Matthew giving Jesus' teaching on this subject in conjunction with His "sermon on the mount", while Luke relates Jesus' response to a specific request for information on the subject of prayer put to Him after the sending out of the 72 evangelists.

This is an important point, because it shows definitively what we know instinctively from the study of scripture, namely, that this prayer is not meant to be some unchangeable and unalterable formula - as if one could reduce our conversation with God to a very particular set of words. For

not only are the "stanzas" somewhat different in the two versions, but the vocabulary choice is as well. Attempts to harmonize the two prayers miss the point - Jesus is showing us what sort of things we ought to ask in prayer daily, not limiting us to a set formula of how we should pray. For "how we should pray" has to do with how we should orient ourselves to the truth and the proper subject areas for prayer rather than a rote formula which we have so reduced to a mere ritual that we have stopped thinking about what the words and more importantly the truth behind the words means altogether. Your continued interest in this subject shows that you have not fallen into that trap, and I commend you for your determination to discover all the treasures that scripture contains.

To answer your two specific questions, first, "sins", "trespasses", and "debts" do have unique applications, but in terms of what our Lord has to say in the Greek, we are pretty much talking about the same thing, namely, the fact that since we owe God everything on account of His sacrifice of His own dear Son to pay off our sins, it is incredibly hypocritical for us to fail to reciprocate in kind and not forgive others as Christ forgave (and paid the price to forgive) our sins. Matthew has literally has "debts" (opheilemata); Luke literally has "sins" (hamartias). "Trespasses" comes from a tradition other than the KJV, and the word is often used in many OT translations for the Hebrew word pesh'a, which is essentially a synonym for chata`, the Hebrew word for "sin" (hamartia is usually used to translate it in the LXX). So there is not much difference in truth between a "trespass" and a "sin" - except as people have come to think about these things differently from their reaction to the different English words. "Debts" is clearly talking about personal sins as well, and it is clear from the close parallels between these two versions of the prayer that Jesus thought of them as synonyms, not exact equivalents perhaps, but referring to the same essential thing: our violation of God's will by the substitution of our own will. "Debts" focuses the issue and that attention of the attentive prayer on the fact that we owed a debt to God that could never have been paid without Jesus' sacrifice, while "sin" focuses in sharply on our own personal failings.

Both of these aspects are important, and no doubt explain at least in part why the two versions - one of the things we need to do on a daily basis is to confess our sins and appreciate as we do so 1) our utter sinfulness, 2) the fact that we could never have gotten out from under sin, sins and their penalty without Jesus, and 3) that since we have now been forgiven, we had better walk in His footsteps and forgive our brothers rather than holding grudges against them (the same exact point as is made in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matt.18:21ff.)).

Secondly, "evil" as opposed to "evil one" is best explained as a controversy by the comment of your pastor. From the Greek, it is very clear that "evil one", which you prefer, is indeed the preferred translation since the adjective, poneros, has the definite article. Now while it is certainly possible in Greek for an adjective plus the article to be acting as a concept noun, not using the neuter for this sense and with this adjective would be unusual, to say the least. So usage and common sense suggest **that the personal devil is in view here** - our Lord was certainly not shy about identifying the personal origin of evil, after all. It is uncomfortable for some people for some reason to think about sin and evil in anything but abstract and impersonal ways, but scripture identifies the source and the effluent in very concrete, earthy, and tangible ways. So while it is not indefensible to say "evil", in my view it is plainly wrong and an easy mistake to catch and avoid.

There is a lot more to say on this subject (see the link for the Satanic Rebellion series), this prayer, and prayer in general, but that must wait for another time. In any case, I hope you find this helpful.

Yours in the One through whom we have the right to bring our prayers before a merciful and loving Father, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Bob L.

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Q4: Bob, what is the meaning of "Lead us not into temptation" in the context of our individual choice and God's purity, as discussed in Harmartiology. I can feel an answer but I'd appreciate a more precise reading of what this means.

In Jesus Christ, At All Times,

A4: The Greek word peirasmon usually translated "temptation" in our Lord's prayer is the same word used for "testing" (cf. 1Cor.10:13). I'm not sure it's an issue with free will as much as it is a divinely provided help to orient our thinking (as is true of the entire prayer).

Full Meaning of our Lord's Prayer

Our Lord's stunningly beautiful prayer, perfect in its simplicity, starts by orienting us to the eternal future which we have, through our commitment to Him ("our Father who art in heaven"), placed above everything in this life ("thy Name be holy"), and which we desire more than any wealth or success on this present earth ("thy kingdom come"); and moves next to the essential attitude we should have time-ward towards our few days on this earth ("thy will be done"). If we actually listen to what we are praying and take it to heart, these first four elements of the prayer serve to focus us

on eternity and eternal rewards, and motive us to yield up our will to His for whatever may come during this short time we are spending on the transitory earth we see. After we have shaken ourselves out of being overly occupied with this world of dust and have through this prayer re-oriented ourselves to the reality, the majesty, the imminency, and the authority of our heavenly Father, Jesus next moves us along to the three essentials for believers to live life in a sanctified way: 1) basic provision for that earthly life ("daily bread"); 2) basic provision for spiritual health and life ("forgive us"); and 3) basic provision for negotiating the "combat zone" that is the devil's world ("deliver us").

Give us this day, our daily bread

Each of these three petitions has an associated element that likewise helps us to have the proper perspective as strangers in the world, helping us to avoid the trap of getting over-involved in the things of this world to the extent that we lose our spiritual focus. We ask for bread - but it is bread appropriate for that day only. Like manna, we need to get into the habit of seeing the possessions we may currently be blessed with as useless beyond today and insecure at that. We are called to live one day at a time for Jesus and to avoid the trap of over-planning (obviously, we do have to plan, but we should maintain the "one more day to eternity" perspective as we do so).

Forgive us our debts, as we have also forgiven our debtors

We ask for forgiveness - but that forgiveness does not come if we are walking in hypocrisy towards our fellow believers. We are here, after all, for Jesus, for the good of His Body, our brothers and sisters in Christ. If we are even unwilling to forgive them, what sort of shape are our personal ministries in (not to mention our personal spiritual growth and walk with Christ)? We are called to minister to others and must avoid the trap of falling into a pattern of thinking that imagines we are here for our own selfish interests.

Deliver us from the evil one

Finally, we ask for deliverance. No matter how good or careful or smart we may be, we cannot avoid coming under fire from the adversary. Indeed, the better job we are doing for the Lord, the more intense that fire is likely to be! We would not survive a moment, not the blink of an eye, if God were not the shield at our right hand, if the Lord Jesus were not our Rock and our Deliverer. We ask to be kept from things that are too tempting for us to handle in our own strength and from tests that are too difficult to endure in the weakness of our flesh (a very legitimate prayer: cf. Ps.141:4). Beyond all question, our Lord knows what we can and can't handle ahead of time (just as He knows we need forgiveness and sustenance). So we ask not for His sake but for ours. We ask so

that we may remember that apart from His protection we would swiftly be destroyed, and apart from His mercy we would easily fall into tests, with or without culpability (i.e., testing and temptation respectively) which would be impossible for us to endure. ***We ask, and we know that He hears us, and, by asking, we remember that He has made all such provision before we ever got around to asking, before we even thought to ask, before, in fact, the foundations of the world were even laid. We ask because we need to ask, not because He needs to hear but because we need to be reminded that He has already heard, and, by asking, we come to appreciate Him all the more, and grow closer to Him too as we meditate upon the sublime wonders of this simple prayer as well upon all of His marvelous truths.***

Our Father, the One in heaven,

May your Name be regarded as holy [by us].

May your Kingdom come [soon].

May your will be done as it is in heaven so also on earth [when you return].

Give us today the bread [we need] for the coming day.

And forgive us what we owe you just as we also forgive those who owe us.

And don't bring us into testing [that we can't handle] but deliver us from the evil one.

Matthew 6:9-13

In the dear Lord who bought us, our Savior Jesus Christ.

Bob L.

*

Q5: I thank you very much for your useful response. It is deeply meaningful to have a deeper understanding of the word "peirasmon." There is ultimately joy, fun, growth, and more in the "testing" of this life.

I am still interested in any additional shades of significance in the words "LEAD US," since it is we who are choosing so much and not God simply telling us what to do.

In Christ Jesus, At All Times, and With His Grace, Forever,

A5: The question is an interesting one. The Greek actually does have here the simple negative imperative format (as opposed to the repetitive one; i.e., it means "don't do it all" as opposed to "don't keep doing it"). The verb is interesting too. I don't really like the "don't lead" / "lead us not" translation, because the verb has nothing to do with "leading", and maybe that is part of what is bothering you about it. The verb is *eisphero*, a standard word for bearing / bringing / carrying with the prefix *eis* meaning "into", so that "don't bring us into testing" would be a better rendering, and I would append in brackets "[that we can't handle]". In many respects, this prayer is at the heart of what all prayer is about. After all, God knows everything and did before He made the universe. He also knows exactly what "we did" (even though we haven't done it all yet). In this part of the prayer we are asking Him for something that may seem to violate free will, but, really, we are 1) asking for it from our free will - if we are praying the prayer in the Spirit and in the knowledge of what it means; and 2) asking of the One who in His divine sovereignty can do anything He wills to do - how much more will He then not honor prayers from His own dear children in this regard; and 3) asking in complete understanding that some testing is essential for our growth and His glorification (and some will inevitably also come as a result of discipline). But perhaps the best way to zero in on precisely what this means is by considering the apodosis, that is, the "but" clause which is the positive petition that balances this negative one: "deliver us from the evil one". Many translations miss the fact that the definite article included with adjective for evil (*poneros*) rather than the noun (*poneria*) makes it virtually certain that Satan is meant rather than evil as a concept. Surely it is a valid and prudent prayer to ask God to run interference for us against the forces of evil as we navigate the world of the evil one. One could say, I suppose, that God is already doing that - it is true - but that is a valid argument against any prayer when one considers that God loves us His children and is always working out everything for good for those who love Him back the way we should (Rom.8:28). And yet we are told over and over again to be diligent in prayer (Lk.18:1-6; cf. 1Thes.5:17). This gets back to the point made in the previous e-mail, namely that God is always doing His job, whether or not we pray, but that praying is definitely good for us since we need to know and experience that He is answering our prayers. Thus by being diligent in prayer we get to experience direct response to what we ask (more and more so and more and more effectively so as we grow in Jesus Christ; cf. Jas.5:16-18). God's will will be done for us whether we pray or not - but it most definitely is His will for us to pray and consistently so, including this daily prayer of (in part) continued deliverance from the worst ambushes of the adversary. I believe that our Lord's choice of words here, i.e., "don't bring us" as opposed to something like "don't let us go into" is really more in keeping with the true biblical notion of free will. For true biblical free will is the opportunity to choose for God and God's will - or not (rather than a menu of alternatives).

"Don't let us go into", the other way one could have phrased this, really would be wrong because 1) it would be asking for our free will to be negated altogether, and 2) it would suggest that our free will has more than one possible orientation (i.e., instead of towards God or not towards God, it could be, theoretically, away from God, which is not at all how we are designed, in purpose or in function). By saying "Don't bring us", Jesus both acknowledges for us that God is the One who is directing our path, not ourselves, and that it is even more important to ask Him to help us with that direction than to worry about it ourselves as we put our feet forward. And of course we are responsible for how and where we "walk", but asking Him to steer us out of danger ahead of time is even more important since, obviously, we are seeing very little of what is truly going on around us in the spiritual realm.

In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps.

Proverbs 16:9 NIV

Here are some other treatments of prayer you may find helpful:

Corporate Prayer

Cumulative Prayer

Prayer for forgiveness

Prayer for wisdom

Persistence in prayer

Application of the Lord's Prayer

Jesus' Gethsemane Prayer

Can Prayer be Offered from Heaven?

Lifting up our eyes in prayer

Length of prayers

Posture in praying

Prayer and the Will of God

In the One who ever guides us by His good Spirit.

Bob L.

Matthew 6:16 (NASB)

16 "Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they ^[a]neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full.

Matthew 6:16 Lit distort their faces, i.e. discolor their faces with makeup

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Q: Could you explain the footnote - was it a common practice to discolor the face with makeup during fasting?

A: The verb aphanizo means, literally, to remove from sight, and can thus mean "to destroy" (that is what it means in Matt.6:19 and 6:20, as well as in Acts 13:41; at Jas.4:14 it means something more like "vanish"). In classical usage, "hide", "obscure", "disfigure", "mar", "disguise" are also found, and this seems to be the sense in our context, with the last being perhaps the best. How a person would do this, whether merely by acting sullen and gloomy, or by actually treating the face with cosmetics, is not clear, but I would come down on the side of the former rather than the latter (in the absence of further evidence). In other words, the translation is good; the footnote probably wrong.

Matthew 6:19-21 (NASB)

19 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; 21 for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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Q: Translation?

A:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal [them]. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal [them]. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Excerpt from Tribulation Part 1

A: In these closing days of the pre-tribulational history of mankind, life has become both complicated and comfortable for many believers, a potentially dangerous correlation of factors. For to the extent that one possesses all the necessities of life in abundance, even to the point of luxury (in historical terms, even though in relative terms this will always be the province of the few), the most powerful natural stimulus to Christian hope is largely removed. And to the extent that the modern lifestyle which supplies that abundance is found to be a jealous and demanding taskmaster (especially if the entertainment and delights that are part and parcel of this lifestyle be factored in), little time and energy may be expected to remain at the end of frantic days and hectic weeks for the barest consideration of such issues, let alone the diligent service of our Lord, especially in an environment where most of our friends and neighbors are caught up in focusing upon the false hopes of this ephemeral world. This challenge – of serving God in the midst of the realm of Mammon – is no easy one, and it is really no surprise that it is one which has gone widely unanswered in these last days of the Church. Just as the believers in Laodicea were spiritually poor in spite of their material prosperity, so we, the last generation of the Church and heirs to the questionable Laodicean heritage, need to take very seriously the challenge of focusing our hope on what is truly important, what is eternal, and of eschewing what is really not important, but instead destined to be reduced to dust. For without a clear vision of the hope that is before us, we stand little chance (in the face of the relative prosperity and universal apathy that surrounds us) of motivating ourselves in the Lord to the level of zeal for Him that is both appropriate and salutary. In order to be spiritually safe now, and, even more importantly, to prepare effectively for the difficult times ahead, it is absolutely imperative that we break through this all-pervasive miasma of worldly comfort set in such a demanding material lifestyle, and instead see clearly in our hearts that our true treasures are the ones we ought to be busily storing up in heaven:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal [them]. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal [them]. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Jesus is our treasure, not the things that this earthly life can provide, though they exceed our wildest dreams and expectations. We are here for Him, and only have our hope of outliving the

grave because of Him and because of what He did for us. Do we remember Him? Do we see through the deception of material prosperity and desires and fears into the true, the good, the eternal realities that lie behind this fragile and unsatisfying veil of pseudo-happiness the devil has striven so mightily to produce? If we cannot see our Lord but faintly now, what, pray tell, should we expect when the coming storm breaks upon us? No, we must not be blinded by the world and the things of this world. ***We must take advantage of every day, every opportunity, to draw closer to our God, to be more like our Savior, and to serve Him in the manner and the ministry that He has chosen for us individually one and all while we still have the light to do so, because the days of darkness are fast approaching.***

So Jesus said to them, "For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness doesn't overtake you."

John 12:35

Beyond the days of Tribulation, lie all the eternal glories that He has promised: our reward, our resurrection, the New Jerusalem, and our eternal relationship with Him. If we have but a little faith, He is faithful to bring us safely through the "fire and water" to come (Ps.66:12; Is.43:2), through the wilderness of tears that must be traversed (Ps.84:5-7; Is.58:11), through whatever the individual trials it will be our lot to face, even unto death (Ps.48:14). And on that day, when we stand with Him in resurrection and in glory on the holy mountain, we shall begin an eternity of joyful praise, thanksgiving and adoration, and know of a certainty that He was faithful to all He promised us.

And it will be said on that day, "Behold, this is our God! We put our hope in Him that He would deliver us. This is our Lord. We put our hope in Him. Let us rejoice and be glad in His deliverance!"

Isaiah 25:9

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Reward Motivation (Excerpt from Tribulation Part 6)

A: d. The Rewards: On the issue of rewards, the first thing that we should understand is that "reward motivation" in the Christian life is not only legitimate, but absolutely essential for a proper and successful running of the Christian race. We run to win, not to lose.

For whoever wishes to draw nearer to God must believe that He exists, and [must believe] that He will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:6b

Reward motivation is a quintessential means of transforming our thinking, leading us to modify our outlook on the world, to change our behavior where appropriate, and to adjust our priorities to the eternal over the temporal.

Do not store up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But store up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

Great believers in every generation of the Church from Adam and Eve to the end of the Tribulation have always had (and always will have) the desire to please God and to be rewarded by Him (albeit eternally rather than temporally) as the foundation of their thinking, motivating their entire approach to the Christian life, spurring them on in the race.

(24) By faith, Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) and chose instead to suffer maltreatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the transitory pleasures of sin, because he considered the reproach [suffered on behalf] of Christ greater riches than the treasure vaults of Egypt. (26) For he was looking to his reward.

Hebrews 11:24-26

To be rewarded at the highest level requires in turn the highest sort of diligent attention to the truth and to the application of it to one's life. Further, such a manner of life is only possible if one really believes that what is done for Jesus Christ in this life is of infinitely greater importance than anything else. Thus it is that there is nothing more important than focusing on the treasures which await those who have performed well in the Christian life (instead of focusing on the transitory treasures of this world which are in truth merely dust) – at least for all those who wish to be richly rewarded in a manner which will be pleasing to our Lord. And indeed there is no better proof of this truth and no better example of the proper way to think about this issue than the example of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ:

(1) Since then we too [like the believers of chapter 11] have such a large audience of witnesses surrounding us [both men and angels], let us put off every hindrance – especially whatever sins habitually affect us – and run with endurance the race set before us, (2) turning our gaze unto Jesus, the originator and completer of our faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the shame of the cross, treating it with despise, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

As the most successful warrior on this battlefield, our Lord has won "the Name above every Name" (Phil.2:9), and has been seated at the right hand of the glory of God to await the day of His installment as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Ps.110:1). But as the verses above demonstrate, as part of His reward He has also won for Himself a Bride, His Church. We are "the joy" or special reward with which our Lord motivated Himself to run that most difficult of all races here in the devil's world.

(20) Which [divine power] He (i.e., the Father) exercised in Christ by having raised Him from the dead and having seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly [places] (21) far above every other rulership or authority or power or lordship and [far above] every other name which may be mentioned not only in this age but also in the age to come. (22) And He (i.e., the Father) subordinated all things under [Christ's] feet and gave Him [as] Head over all things in the Church (23) which is His Body, the fullness of the One who fills up all things in all ways.

Ephesians 1:20-23

All things have fallen to Him who has won the victory of victories, and we believers have in turn come "into the joy of our Master" (Matt.25:21-23). Just as our Lord Jesus encouraged Himself with "the joy that was before Him", so we too should never let slip from our mind's eye the joy of being rewarded and commended by Him for a job well done on this earth, for that is precisely what He desires us to do.

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Excerpt from Angelology

A: The ultimate loss of life is the common heritage of all mankind, so that Jesus' words are particularly penetrating: unless some solution can be found to the overarching problem of our physical mortality, even achievement on a level unsurpassed in human history is essentially

meaningless. Indeed, one may even make the argument, that the greater the achievement, the greater the futility, on account of the correspondingly greater loss involved at death. Along with life, the poor lose only their poverty in death, but the rich, successful person loses the things esteemed most in this vain, secular world. Death thus renders all secular achievements essentially pointless:

Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him.

Psalm 49:16-17 NIV

Apart from God, nothing we do is truly original (Eccl.1:10). Nothing we do will ultimately be remembered (Eccl.1:11). Despite all our efforts, death will snatch away from us all we have gained in this life "though we had named lands after ourselves" (Ps.49:11b), and we will be oblivious to the fate of our prized possessions after our departure (Eccl.2:17-21). Nothing is secure. Nothing is forever . . . apart from God.

It is in this connection that our Lord commanded us to look beyond the hollow rewards of this life to the true rewards, eternal in the heavens, which come from God:

Don't stock up treasures for yourselves on the earth, where moth and corrosion eat them away and where thieves dig through and steal them. But stock up treasures for yourselves in heaven, where neither moth nor corrosion eat them away and where thieves neither dig through nor steal them. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:19-21

The heathen quest for "myth-happiness", that is, satisfaction in life apart from God, is vain for two primary reasons: 1) apart from God, very little can truly satisfy; 2) apart from God, security can never be guaranteed. Beyond the simple, God-given pleasures of food, family and labor, the attainment of successive plateaus of wealth, fame, power or pleasure may entertain for a brief moment, but like a feast to a man with a full belly, they quickly lose their appeal, thus spurring the myth-happiness faithful on to the next level of dubious achievement as the cycle progresses on its never-ending way:

Fame, Pleasure, Power, Wealth

Fame fades; no one can continue to capture the public eye forever; all glory is fleeting, and death eventually reduces all its remnants to dust (Eccl.1:11).

Pleasure sates easily; no experience can be savored forever, like tears in a bottle; no experience can be exactly repeated or guaranteed for the future; and though one were able to push enjoyment into areas never before experienced, even these would eventually mock the practitioner, when in the end satisfaction drains away, leaving death to bring an end to pleasure altogether.

Power is inevitably circumscribed by human limitations (among other things: Acts 17:26-27), and while its accretion may feed arrogance, arrogance' appetite is a bottomless sea that can never be satisfied; and death eventually sweeps away even the most powerful ruler.

Wealth likewise can never be sufficient; the more one has, the more obvious it becomes to the possessor that, after an initial flush, all the fame, pleasure and power it can provide do not ultimately produce lasting satisfaction; the more wealth, that universal secular solution which myth-happiness proclaims will certainly bring joy, the more frustration when joy is not achieved.

Matthew 6:22-23 (NASB)

22 "The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

*

Q: What specifically is our Lord here referring to by the eye?

A: The eye is the *perceptive faculty*. If we are looking "with open eyes", one might say, then well and good, we will see clearly, that is, obtain an objective assessment of what is seen and heard, so that we may believe the truth of it. But if our eye is "jaundiced" or if we are looking with eyes nearly shut, if our view is prejudiced against the truth, if our hearts are hardened, then even if we do see the good and hear the truth, ***we are likely not to recognize and accept it.*** This is a very important passage wherein our Lord demonstrates the reasons why truth and objective goodness in and of themselves do not benefit people; ***one has to accept goodness and truth and respond to it.*** But most people would rather walk in their own ways, and they have closed or blinded their own eyes to the truth (of natural revelation, for example, and, in this case, to the presentation of the gospel) so as not to receive it. ***The eye here is thus the portal to the***

heart and its clearness or badness is reflective of the state of the heart which has conditioned it to see things one way or the other.

Matthew 6:24 (NASB)

24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

*

A: Thus material prosperity in this present world is ultimately of little true account to those who have chosen to follow Jesus Christ. For in our trials and tribulations, whether we have material abundance or no, we have chosen to put our Master's priorities first; we have chosen God and His Son over the material prosperity which this world proclaims as its god:

No one can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or cling to the one and despise the other. No one can serve God and Mammon.

Matthew 6:24

For the unbeliever, the issue is likewise a simple one. Having rejected God (and often even having denied His existence), he is forced to place an **incorrect emphasis** and **inordinate importance** on this **present world**. Such blindness, such self-delusion, such suppression of the truth about God necessarily elevates the world and its present ruler into the realm of "god" in the unbeliever's eyes:

God's wrath is about to be revealed from heaven upon all ungodliness and unrighteousness – on men who suppress the truth [about God] in their unrighteousness. For that which can be known about God [from everyday experience] is obvious to them, because God has made it obvious. His nature, though invisible, is nevertheless plainly apparent, and has been since His foundation of the world, for it may be clearly inferred from this creation of His – [this is true of] both His eternal power and His divinity – so that they are without any excuse: they knew about God, but they neither honored Him as God nor thanked Him. Instead, they gave themselves over to [the] vanity [of this world] in their speculations, and their senseless hearts were filled with darkness. Claiming to be wise, they became foolish, for they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for images and likenesses of corruptible men, of birds and beasts and reptiles.

Romans 1:18-23

Matthew 6:27 (NASB)

²⁷And who of you by being worried can add a *single* ^[a]hour to his ^[b]life?

Matthew 6:27 Lit cubit (approx 18 in.) Matthew 6:27 Or height

*

Q1: Could you explain the footnotes - what is the correct rendering? "Hour to his life" or "cubit to his height"?

A1: The Greek says "add a cubit to his *helikia*"; the word *helikia* most often refers to maturity/age, so that one could, I suppose, by seeing cubit here as metaphorical for a "length of time" translate as NASB does (along with some other versions, such as ESV). However, the use of *helikia* for physical stature (attained at maturity) is common enough in Greek, making the NASB rendering highly doubtful. There is no question about the text here.

*

Q2: Doesn't it seem more likely that our Lord would here refer to the length of life rather than height as it's the former about which we tend to worry more?

A2: Regardless of likelihood, from a philological point of view I believe "height" has to be correct. In terms of the theology, it makes sense to me that having dealt with length of life already, our Lord would not be repeating the same thing again with no additional meaning. It makes sense to me that He would next address the issue of "where am I in the world?" Many people in fact don't spend all day worrying about death (they have learned to pretend it won't actually happen to them), but they do worry about almost everything else that happens in this life. In Luke 12:25 our Lord only mentions the cubit. I would say that expanding this by way of application to the life in general is fine; but the interpretation is the interpretation.

Matthew 6:33 (NASB)

³³But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

*

Q1: Dear Robert, I have a question. The Bible says in Matthew 6:33: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." What does "his kingdom" mean and involve? What are "these things" that will be given to us as well?

A1: "The Kingdom" I take to mean our salvation, gaining the Person of Christ, being one with Him and having a share in Him for all eternity in blessed resurrection forevermore (where we shall be part of the King's Kingdom in the New Jerusalem forever). Presently, we do not see that kingdom with our fleshly eyes. Presently, we may be experiencing all sorts of tribulation, want, testing and trial. But we can see through the eyes of faith all the blessed things that His Kingdom will bring; and we can appreciate them here and now even if we are not experiencing them here and now as we will on that great day to come. For we are blessed now in spite of any present sorrow, and we shall be blessed beyond present understanding on that great day of days. Jesus is telling us here that our salvation, our spiritual growth, and our production for Him in ministering His truth – all the elements that proclaim His Kingdom – are so much more important than anything else in life that we ought not even to take other things into consideration in the same breath. First priority: all things spiritual (for this is our salvation and our eternal reward). And then "all the other things", which I take to mean the worldly concerns that our Lord is addressing here in this parable (i.e., food, clothing, and all other temporal needs and wants), will be "added" – **if we have our priorities straight**. This means to me that if we are doing what God wants us to do (i.e., putting Him and His Word first in our lives – **in our thoughts, words, and deeds – at all times**), then we truly don't have anything to worry about at all! For God will take care of the rest. He provides for all who truly rely on Him. So we do not in fact have anything at all to worry about in this world – exactly the opposite of what the entire world screams at us and totally the opposite of what our earthly eyes see and our worldly ears hear – if we but put Jesus first in our lives: the very place He surely belongs. He is our Shepherd, and He will see to it that we have all the water, green grass, comfort and guidance we need (Ps.23). All we need to do is follow Him.

In the One in whom we do indeed have "all things" both now and in the blessed eternal future to come, our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Bob Luginbill

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Q2: Thank you so much for taking time to answer my questions. You have clarified well a number of things, although there are still some clouds. I am particularly confused by the fact that here in Africa we have many of God's precious people who have surrendered their lives to Jesus and are

seeking His Kingdom with all their ability. But many of these people are suffering acute poverty and disease. This disturbs me as to why God can't, by all means, cause other things to be added to them as He promises. It's even more disturbing when you look around and see people who are not seeking God's kingdom at all enjoying a good life, while those who are seeking the Kingdom are suffering!

Anyway, may God bless you so much and may He continue to use you.

A2: Good to hear from you again. The question "why do the wicked prosper?" is one that has always bothered many good Christians. It is an important question, so important that it is in fact addressed many times in scripture. For example, the Psalmists and prophets ask this question of God directly on more than one occasion (Jer.12:1; cf. Job 21:7; 21:13; Ps.37; Jer.5:27; Hab.1:12-2:20), but God's responses to this question show that His perspective is so far from being our perspective that it behooves us to take care lest we reflect an essential lack of true faith in the One who controls all things (cf. Mal.3:15).

"And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

Malachi 3:18 NIV

In two Psalms in particular, God makes clear the true reality behind what our eyes perceive. These are important enough to this discussion to quote in full here (and I beg your indulgence in doing so):

1 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost slipped;

I had nearly lost my foothold.

3 For I envied the arrogant

when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

4 They have no struggles;

their bodies are healthy and strong.

5 They are free from the burdens common to man;

they are not plagued by human ills.

6 Therefore pride is their necklace;
they clothe themselves with violence.

7 From their callous hearts comes iniquity ;
the evil conceits of their minds know no limits.

8 They scoff, and speak with malice;
in their arrogance they threaten oppression.

9 Their mouths lay claim to heaven,
and their tongues take possession of the earth.

10 Therefore their people turn to them
and drink up waters in abundance.

11 They say, "How can God know?
Does the Most High have knowledge?"

12 This is what the wicked are like—
always carefree, they increase in wealth.

13 Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure;
in vain have I washed my hands in innocence.

14 All day long I have been plagued;
I have been punished every morning.

15 If I had said, "I will speak thus,"
I would have betrayed your children.

16 When I tried to understand all this,
it was oppressive to me

17 till I entered the sanctuary of God;
then I understood their final destiny.

18 Surely you place them on slippery ground;

you cast them down to ruin.

19 How suddenly are they destroyed,
completely swept away by terrors!

20 As a dream when one awakes,
so when you arise, O Lord,
you will despise them as fantasies.

21 When my heart was grieved
and my spirit embittered,

22 I was senseless and ignorant;
I was a brute beast before you.

23 Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.

24 You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.

25 Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

26 My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.

27 Those who are far from you will perish;
you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.

28 But as for me, it is good to be near God.

I have made the Sovereign LORD my refuge;
I will tell of all your deeds.

Psalm 73 NIV

1 Do not fret because of evil men
or be envious of those who do wrong;
2 for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.
3 Trust in the LORD and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.
4 Delight yourself in the LORD
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
5 Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him and he will do this:
6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,
the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.
7 Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when men succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.
8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath;
do not fret—it leads only to evil.
9 For evil men will be cut off,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.
10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more;
though you look for them, they will not be found.
11 But the meek will inherit the land
and enjoy great peace.
12 The wicked plot against the righteous

and gnash their teeth at them;

13 but the Lord laughs at the wicked,

for he knows their day is coming.

14 The wicked draw the sword

and bend the bow

to bring down the poor and needy,

to slay those whose ways are upright.

15 But their swords will pierce their own hearts,

and their bows will be broken.

16 Better the little that the righteous have

than the wealth of many wicked;

17 for the power of the wicked will be broken,

but the LORD upholds the righteous.

18 The days of the blameless are known to the LORD,

and their inheritance will endure forever.

19 In times of disaster they will not wither;

in days of famine they will enjoy plenty.

20 But the wicked will perish:

The LORD's enemies will be like the beauty of the fields,

they will vanish—vanish like smoke.

21 The wicked borrow and do not repay,

but the righteous give generously;

22 those the LORD blesses will inherit the land,

but those he curses will be cut off.

23 If the LORD delights in a man's way,

he makes his steps firm;

24 though he stumbles, he will not fall,

for the LORD upholds him with his hand.

25 I was young and now I am old,
yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken
or their children begging bread.

26 They are always generous and lend freely;
their children will be blessed.

27 Turn from evil and do good;
then you will dwell in the land forever.

28 For the LORD loves the just
and will not forsake his faithful ones.
They will be protected forever,
but the offspring of the wicked will be cut off;

29 the righteous will inherit the land
and dwell in it forever.

30 The mouth of the righteous man utters wisdom,
and his tongue speaks what is just.

31 The law of his God is in his heart;
his feet do not slip.

32 The wicked lie in wait for the righteous,
seeking their very lives;

33 but the LORD will not leave them in their power
or let them be condemned when brought to trial.

34 Wait for the LORD

and keep his way.

He will exalt you to inherit the land;

when the wicked are cut off, you will see it.

35 I have seen a wicked and ruthless man

flourishing like a green tree in its native soil,

36 but he soon passed away and was no more;

though I looked for him, he could not be found.

37 Consider the blameless, observe the upright;

there is a future for the man of peace.

38 But all sinners will be destroyed;

the future of the wicked will be cut off.

39 The salvation of the righteous comes from the LORD;

he is their stronghold in time of trouble.

40 The LORD helps them and delivers them;

he delivers them from the wicked and saves them,

because they take refuge in him.

Psalm 37 NIV

In the second Psalm quoted above, we see of a surety that the Lord always takes care of His own: their seed never lacks bread (Ps.37:25). On the other hand, we are also assured that the hour of the wicked will come. And we know this in our heart of hearts, do we not? For it is for the next life that we have put our faith in Jesus Christ, not for the present one. What good would it do if we were to possess the entire world for a season, if at the end of this short life we found ourselves cast into the outer darkness? But if we but maintain our faith and faithfulness firm until the end we have complete confidence that we will see the Lord in the land of the living, that resurrection and reward beyond present imagination will be ours forevermore. What should it matter to us, since these things are true, even if the wicked always were indeed left to go scot-free in this life only, and

even if the righteous were forever trod under foot in this life only? If we were wise, we would still embrace the upward calling of Jesus Christ, for we are not of this world but of the one to come.

In truth, however, the wicked more often than not do come to see with their eyes of flesh the folly of the way they have chosen, and the righteous, regardless of the trials and tribulations they must go through (and all who would lead a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted: 2Tim.3:12; see the link: Peter #25: "Personal Tribulation"), are ever blessed by the Lord, ***often experiencing the most sublime closeness to Him in the midst of the most difficult times.***

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2nd Corinthians 12:9-10 NIV

The world is not a paradise; rather, it is under the control of the evil one (see the link: in SR 4: "Strangers in the Devil's Realm"). Small wonder then that Satan attempts to give the appearance that the wicked prosper and that following God is pointless, even dangerous. This, after all, was his whole purpose in the case of Job, and that book's message too is directly applicable to this question. For Job, an exceptionally righteous man, found himself bereft of everything and sorely stricken by disease through no fault of his own. Worse to tell, his friends, instead of comforting him, blamed him for the trouble, assuming that his situation must be the result of personal sin. Even Job himself, beset by these attacks, came to doubt and blame God. But in the end God Himself put all these false opinions to the lie. We know the truth because we are blessed to have the scriptures which explain Satan's machinations behind the scene. The moral is that there is much we do not know because there is much we cannot see with these fleshly eyes. We cannot see what the devil is up to. We cannot really know what is the hearts of our fellow men. And we certainly have no idea what God is in the process of doing when it comes to specifics, testing, trying, correcting, glorifying Himself while He works everything out for our absolute best whether we realize it or not. For one thing only do we know, and that by faith: that He is unquestionably "working all things together for good for those who love Him" (Rom.8:28). This "good" may not be the specific "good" we would choose, and it may not happen in the way we would suppose or desire, and it very likely will tarry longer than at times than we may think we can endure. But even in all this God is merciful, God is faithful, and God loves us more than words can tell. Our part is to believe; He will bring it to pass in His own way in His own good time if we but continue to trust in

Him. ***For it may be that instead of a miraculous cure or financial success or temporal prosperity of any sort, the blessing God has in store for us is spiritual: deepening faith, spiritual growth, and production for our Lord Jesus Christ which will last not merely to the end of our lives but to all eternity when we receive our rewards on that great day of days.***

Can God? Of course He "can" – and He always does without fail. The real question is whether or not we will choose to see it with the eyes of faith when He does. For we walk by faith, not by sight (2Cor.4:18; 5:7). Our eyes may tell us that things are unfair, that the righteous are getting a terrible deal at the hands of the wicked. But if we could sit next to the Lord on His throne, He would show us how every wicked person has or was or would receive their just desserts, and how every righteous person was being lovingly superintended by God personally, in more detail than any individual human being could ever perceive: not a hair of our heads falls to the ground without the consent of our heavenly Father (Lk.12:7). ***We know from scripture that every single thing that has ever happened to every single human being who has ever lived on this planet has been planned, taken into account, allowed for, directed, and guided for good by the One with whom we have to do.*** And if this knowledge were not enough, we know that our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He even sent His one and only precious Son to the cross for our sakes, to die in the darkness in expiation of our sins – that we might live forever with Him and not perish in those sins. So while I have complete confidence that God is working out everything together for good for me and for all my brothers and sisters, and have learned to accept that anytime my eyes or ears tell me different, that is because they do not see or hear what my faith does, yet even so, if I were convinced that following Christ would only mean pain, misery and destruction, while followed the crooked path would bring me peace, wealth and safety – in this life – then as Jesus is my Savior I certainly hope that I would still choose to follow Him even so. For what good is the whole world to me if it costs me my eternal life?

May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be praised, who has in His great mercy caused us to be reborn to a hope which lives through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead, and to an inheritance which will never be destroyed, defiled, or dimmed, but which is being guarded in heaven for us, who are ourselves also being kept safe by God's power and our faith in Him to an ultimate deliverance ready to be unveiled at the end of time. Rejoice in this [salvation to come], even though at present it may for a time be your lot to suffer through various trials so that this validation of your faith [which results from your successful passing of these tests] may result in praise, glory and honor for you at the

revelation of Jesus Christ. For this [validation of your faith] has a greater benefit [for you] than [is true in the case of] gold, which, while it is also proved by fire, ultimately perishes.

1st Peter 1:3-7

I do understand your concern – quite well. I became interested in doing this ministry many years ago (although at that time it was a face-to-face Bible study) in large part because of the suffering of some of my fellow believers. It struck me as "unfair", and yet I knew that the answers to all these things were to be found in scripture. Over the years, I have learned, unlearned, re-learned and more deeply learned the truth of the simple proposition that "God knows best", that He is in control and working out everything according to His plan, and that our part is not to question beyond what scripture has to say but to accept and to follow in the footsteps of the One who suffered so much for us. ***What we see with our fleshly eyes is often misleading.*** Those we see as being unfairly treated may be being disciplined for causes about which we do not even suspect. On the other hand, those who we assume are being punished, may, like Job, be special to God, being used by Him to demonstrate that there are those on this planet who will stay faithful to Him even when the circumstances seem terribly unfair. Those wicked who seem to prosper may in reality be experiencing a special kind of hell on earth of which only the Lord is truly aware; they may be used by Him in time to come to bless the righteous; or they may simply be allowed to retain their wealth and power and position for a long enough time to feel the loss of it all the more when that inevitable day arrives. But in all these things, what is really important is not the fabric of life so much as the content of life. If we have the opportunity to believe in Jesus, and we do, to grow in Him through His Word, and we do, and to serve Him in the way He would have serve Him through helping our brothers and sisters in Christ do the same, then why do we complain? For in that case – and that is the case – all our sufferings are merely working out an eternal weight of glory which is not to be compared to our present trials (2Cor.4:17; cf. Rom.8:18). Things will never be perfect in this life, no matter what; and on the other hand we will never be so trodden down as to find ourselves bereft of the opportunity of glorifying Jesus Christ day by day as we pick our cross and follow Him.

I know of many Christians who assume that God wants everyone to have a "good life". That may be fine as far as it goes, but how do we define "good"? If by good we mean having the opportunity to grow closer to Jesus through the Word of God and engage in ministry to help others do likewise, then I am supremely confident that the Father not only nourishes that sort of plant but also prunes it so that it may bear more and more fruit day by day (Jn.15). But if by good we mean material comfort and well-being, beware, because this can have precisely the opposite effect. Human beings

being what they are, there are few of us who would not accept great material prosperity, excellent health, and peace and security over their opposites, given the choice. But if these former "blessings" are not in the will of God, if they are associated with sin and evil, if they would drag us down spiritually instead of building us up, then where is the profit? Lot was given the choice by Abraham to settle where he would. Instead of the dry and largely unpopulated hills of Judea, he chose the well-watered plains of Sodom and Gomorrah. The comfort and material blessing of these places appealed to him, no doubt in the same way that the contemporary U.S. appeals to many who see it from afar. Within a few short years, Lot had apparently converted his flocks to money, was living in a comfortable house, and was on the point of marrying his seed into the most degenerate pack of sinners recorded in scripture. Were it not for God's grace – which Lot and his family clearly took for a cursing – Lot himself might have been lost, his faith overwhelmed in time by the volume and intensity of the sin of that place (cf. 2Pet.2:4-10).

The end times will be swiftly upon us. There are many in this country whose faith is weak, due no doubt in large part to the comfort of this place and to the sinfulness that grows like cancer day by day. When the end begins, and when Babylon replaces what the eye presently sees, scripture predicts a great apostasy that will sweep away fully a third of those who now not only call themselves Christians but truly are (see the link: in CT 3A: "The Great Apostasy"). If that is the result of comfort, God give me discomfort. Now I have no desire to know suffering, hunger, thirst, pain, prison, persecution, or martyrdom any more than the next person. But if so wills the will of God, I am willing to accept it – especially considering that the alternative to passing these trials which test faith is the loss of faith and consequently the loss of eternal life.

Trust the Lord. Put everything in His hands. Lean not on your own understanding. We are small children being led by the hand by our loving parent down a path whose twists and turns we cannot know before we come to them. But we do not need to know or even understand the details of the journey. All we need to know and understand is the character and the faithfulness of the One whose hand we hold.

In our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One who died that we might live together forever with Him.

Bob L.

Matthew 7:1-2 (NASB)

7 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.

*

Q1: Could you explain this passage in light of the fact that God judges all righteously?

A1: God is THE Judge and certainly has the right of evaluation of all – the last judgment will be the time when all are finally and thoroughly judged for their failure to accede to His will (believers are given a judgment for reward). For more on this passage please see the link:

<http://ichthys.com/mail-Christian-Walk.htm> - *Judge not that ye be not judged*

*

Q2: In scripture, Jesus says "Judge not lest ye be judged". It seems many Christians and non-Christians like to throw that around whenever someone might say something. Would you explain exactly what Jesus meant by this? Does He say that we should not judge anyone's actions? An example of this was at work we have a very nice resident, intelligent and very successful and someone said that it was very sad that he has ruined his life with his legal drug use. Another staff said "judge not lest ye be judged" and went on to say that we should pray for him not judge him. Is this an example of what Jesus meant? The truth is that this man has indeed become dependent on morphine, methadone and a number of other drugs and his life is often spent in periods of stupor and lethargy.

A2: As to "judge not", it is pretty clear from the context of Matthew 7 (based on the illustration of the mote in the eye, for example), that Jesus is telling us not to condemn others for their behavior but to forgive them instead (cf. Lk.6:37). But we all know this principle from many passages (e.g., the parable of the ungrateful servant). Your question really deals with practical application. This passage does mean that we should not hold grudges against anyone for what they have done to us, nor go out of our way to verbally criticize others when it is none of our business to do so. It does not mean that we should refrain from a correct evaluation of the behavior of others, or that, in a supervisory or like capacity, we are not allowed to exercise proper oversight – far from it. There are numerous passages in the pastoral epistles where the function of the elders/pastors would be impossible without it (and all legitimate authority in life is dependent on the same).

What I take these "judge not" passages to mean is that we should not look down on others nor should we hold grudges against them, nor should we criticize them unduly for no other reason than our own pique (especially to third parties), but we should forgive them as we wish to be

forgiven, and pray and work for their salvation and spiritual growth along with that of everyone else in the world. This is what God wants, after all. But that does not mean, for example, that God does not punish outrageous behavior or that He will allow into heaven anyone who rejects His Son.

The same sort of dichotomy applies to us in this regard. We can pray for a criminal even as we report his behavior to the police. We can pray for a drunk even as we refuse to take a ride home with him. We can forgive a noisy neighbor even as we understand correctly that his behavior is selfish and inappropriate (doing so without allowing ourselves to linger on the matter or be angry about it but learning just to let it drop). We are allowed to separate; we are allowed to discriminate; we are allowed to evaluate; and if it is appropriate we are allowed to act in a legitimate way in response to behavior that is unacceptable (as in reporting crime or disciplining a subordinate or correcting a fellow believer out of genuine love, etc.). We can do all this in Christian love and without judgment, leaving judgment to the Lord as far as sin is concerned, and refraining from hate, anger, jealousy, retaliation, vengeance, or the like. I do understand that it is sometimes difficult, especially in the early stages of spiritual growth, for believers to separate these things out, but those of us who have been "in the Lord and in His Word" for some time should understand the distinctions made here immediately.

To respond to your specific example, if I am not going to be taking action (none of my business or the like), I do try and refrain from verbally analyzing the behavior others for the benefit of third parties; but I certainly do have my own opinions about these things, and when necessary do get involved. I do not consider this "judging" in the sense Jesus is referring to here. People like this who are "in trouble" need at the very least to be avoided by us (i.e., deliberate association with such a person who is involved in dangerous or questionable behavior out of a desire to "show I'm not judgmental" would be incredibly foolish), and sometimes they need to be dealt with – whether personally or administratively – for their own sake and for the protection of others. We are supposed to be as wise as serpents at the same time as we are as innocent as doves (Matt.10:16; cf. Rom.16:19; 1Cor.14:20; Prov.14:18). That is the standard, and it is dangerous to get out of touch with either side of it. I would say that a good Christian "default position" is to stay out of other people's business as much as humanly possible, but to remember that for reasons of law, professionalism, and even Christian love (in the case of intervening on behalf of a brother or sister who is in immediate danger) it is sometimes not only permissible but necessary to make judgments and act upon them.

One final thought in regard to the example you give. When someone proclaims, "judge not . . .", that is certainly pronouncing a verbal judgment on whatever was just said. It might in some cases

be legitimate, but more often than not it runs the risk of being just as questionable as whatever comments it may be castigating.

Yours in Jesus the Righteous Judge,

Bob L.

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A3: There is a difference, of course, between on the one hand accurately discerning another person's probable spiritual state, and on the other of committing mental (or verbal or overt) sins against them as a result. For example, if a shabbily dressed person appears on my doorstep with a similarly shabby clump of papers on a clip-board wanting me to support him/her in a magazine contest, I would do well to recognize that he/she most likely does not have my best interests at heart; and if he/she begins to look over my dwelling with more than uncommon curiosity in the process, I would do well to make sure my locks are secure and my alarm turned on before leaving for the next few days. I can be cautious in this regard without condemning the person, without determining in my heart that he/she most definitely is a con-man on the lookout also for an easy b and e. That is to say, I can recognize the principle of the ubiquitous evil in this world and the great probability of any given person having succumbed to that evil, yet at the same time avoiding particular judgment in individual cases without failing to be careful and prudent in my analysis (even being hopeful for, forgiving of, and prayerful over individuals in any given case). As with many things in scripture, there are extremes on both sides to be avoided (please see the link: "Poles of Application"). We are told to be wise as serpents, but innocent as doves (Matt.10:16; cf. Rom.16:9). Surely, Jesus intends us to have such innocence without being stupid and making ourselves vulnerable, and also to have this cunning without being judgmental in situations where our knowledge is incomplete (which is most of the time). In practical terms of your specific observation, I think it is most proper to understand the terrible trap that such individuals have fallen into, and estimate the likely state of their spirituality as nil or close to it, without at the same time hating or disliking them as individuals. The world is full of sinners (of whom we two are part); most are lost, people we like or would like, people we don't like or wouldn't, people about whom we do or would feel neutral – all regardless of their particular faults. The same goes for believers. Just because someone is a Christian doesn't mean we are going to like them, and in fact in my personal experience it often means just the opposite, so odd and bizarre has contemporary Christian behavior become in many cases through decades of lack of Bible teaching (or insipid "teaching" at best). But we are required to love all of our brothers in sisters in Jesus, even if we

don't "like them". This is the flip-side of the above. We can be loving without engaging in open-ended personal relationships; likewise we can be discerning without condemning other people to hell in our hearts.

Your observations on worry are particularly trenchant. This is "a big one" in the Christian life. Human beings seem to be built to worry just as we seem to be built to fear. Of course, both of these similar emotions come from the sin nature and are irrational – for those who belong to Jesus Christ, especially for those walking closely with Him: He is working all things out together for the good of us who truly love Him – what is there then to worry about?

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

Psalm 46:1-3 NIV

However, getting to the point of completely eliminating worry and fear from our hearts is always a substantial challenge, and I don't believe we will ever get to the point of never needing to contain these emotions by aggressive application of the truth – that is, as long as we continue to live in these bodies of sin. Our emotions are like only partially tamed (and only partially tamable) horses. Sometimes they obey our "better angels"; sometimes they don't. A big part of the process of spiritual growth involves the replacing of knee-jerk emotional reactions with reasoned application of the truths of scripture (please see the link: "Who Controls our Thoughts and Emotions"). This is easier said than done, of course. I understand in principle how to run a come-back pass pattern in an NFL playoff game, but I would probably pull a hamstring if I tried it in the backyard (and likely as not to drop a pigskin even if you just flipped it to me in the living room). In the Christian life, we are all God's "professionals", but we don't start at the top level, and most Christians are unwilling to respond and do what it takes to get to that high level of really trusting God. For those who are willing, He does use testing to refine our faith. Indeed, that is a big part of why we are still here on earth after accepting Christ. The stronger our faith becomes through learning and believing the truth of the Word, and through having what we have believed developed in the crucible of testing, the more useful to our Lord we become, and the higher the level of functioning He leads us to. Not that we will, as I say, ever be rid of the necessity to actively defend against the emotions when they are out of sync with what we should be doing, and thinking and feeling. Often, we have to remind ourselves aggressively of the truth when we are under pressure. But if we hold to the standard of

discerning what is right then doing it regardless of the consequences, in my experience and observation, the emotions will eventually follow along. If we tug on that bridle hard enough and long enough, eventually the horse will stop and obey. It's just never going to be an easy or an automatic process. Elijah, one of the greatest believers who has ever lived, a person destined to sit beside our Lord in one of the highest positions of honor, after single-handedly facing down through iron-clad faith the united strength of the Baal worshipers along with the hostile king of Israel and his bodyguard to win the great victory of Mt. Carmel, in the sequel was surprised and shocked by Jezebel's threats and allowed himself to falter out of fear. If that could happen to Elijah, and it did, then we all need to remember never to put any stock in anything we see or in anything we might "accomplish". Jesus Christ is our security. We need to remember that nothing is secure apart from Him, but that as long we have Him, then He will provide whatever we really need, be it protection or provision or whatever, and will do so whenever we need it – even if our eyes (and our emotions) may be telling us something completely different.

Matthew 7:6 (NASB)

6 “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.

NIV SB Notes: 7:6 Teaching about the kingdom should be given in accordance with the spiritual capacity of the learners. dogs. The unclean dogs of the street were held in low esteem.

*

Q1: Could you explain the relationship of this verse to the previous verses?

A1: I don't see any direct, thematic relationship; after warning His listeners off of hypocrisy and being judgmental, our Lord also treats the opposite extreme: just as we should not assume we are better than others and others worse than us, in a similar way we should also not assume that others will rejoice with the truth the way we do. We shouldn't look down on others without cause; we shouldn't assume others are "good" without cause either.

*

Q2:

NIV SB: 7:1 The Christian is not to judge hypocritically or self-righteously, as can be seen from the context (v. 5). The same thought is expressed in 23:13-39 (cf. Ro 2:1). To obey

Christ's commands in this chapter, we must first evaluate a person's character-whether one is a "dog" (v. 6) or a false prophet (v. 15), or whether one's life shows fruit (v. 16). Scripture repeatedly exhorts believers to evaluate carefully (see Jn 7:24) and choose between good and bad people and things (sexually immoral, 1Co 5:9; those who masquerade as angels of light, 2Co 11:14; dogs, Php 3:2; false prophets, 1Jn 4:1). The Christian is to "test them all" (1Th 5:21).

I'm not sure if my understanding of this note is correct, but it seems that the NIV SB may be here establishing an interesting link between Matthew 7:1-5 and 7:6 - we should evaluate someone's character before judging. Would you say it is possible that our Lord starts with denouncing hypocrisy in verses 1-5 and then tells us not to give what is holy to dogs, meaning that if we do correct someone, we should first make sure that we live up to the standard we are applying to others and secondly, that this correction is given to those who would be willing to receive it rather than those who would "trample it under foot"?

A2: I don't think verse six goes with what precedes anymore than it does with what follows, not, at least, in the sense of the passages being meant to explain each other. I think if we try to inject verses one through five into verse six we will end up missing the otherwise clear point of verse six: there are people out there who will not appreciate any truth we attempt to share with them and will in fact react negatively to our attempts to do so. If there is a connection, it would be along the lines you suggest, but to make it clear that even if we are without hypocrisy (subject problems solved) we shouldn't make it our business to "share" with everyone at any time (object problems), but only with discretion.

Matthew 7:7 (NASB)

7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

NIV SB: 7:7 Ask ... seek ... knock. Greek present imperatives are used here, indicating continual asking, seeking and knocking. Persistent prayer is being emphasized (cf. Jas 4:2-3; cf. also Ge 32:26 and note).

*

Q: Do you agree that the present tense indicate that continuous asking, seeking and knocking are meant by Jesus?

A: Generally speaking, aspect (i.e., present vs. aorist stem) is not of much significance, but it does seem that in the imperative there is sometimes a difference. Our Lord uses the present stem when He could have used the aorist; the aorist would not have ruled out multiple requests, but the present does lean that way, opening the passage up to the idea that we do sometimes need to be persistent and ask more than once; the conclusion "persistent prayer is being **emphasized**", however, strikes me as a bridge too far.

Matthew 7:13-14 (NASB)

13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

*

Salvation

Q: My question is about judgment day and how many people are saved. Is there a large difference between the number who find the right road in Matt. 7:12-14 and those who do not, or is the difference in number between those who do and those who don't extremely large? Also, what is true difference between these two groups?

A: Here is how I would state the whole matter "in a nutshell":

1) How many are saved? ANSWER: Very few indeed:

For those invited [to salvation] are many, but those chosen [for salvation] are few.

Matthew 22:14

2) How are they saved? ANSWER: By God's grace through ***faith in Jesus Christ***:

And having led [Paul and Silas] outside he said, "Sirs, what do I need to do to be saved?"

And they said, "***Believe in the Lord Jesus***, and you will be saved, you and your house[hold] too."

Acts 16:30-31

3) What is the difference between the saved and the unsaved? ANSWER: The saved are willing to repent and come to God through ***faith in His Son Jesus Christ***; the unsaved are unwilling to repent and unwilling to come to God through faith in His Son Jesus Christ:

And this is the [basis for] judgment: the Light (i.e., Jesus Christ) has come into the world, yet men loved the darkness more than the Light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone who commits detestable practices hates the Light, and does not come to the Light, lest his deeds be exposed [for what they really are]. But everyone who acts in accordance with the truth **comes to the Light** so that it becomes obvious that his deeds have been done in God (i.e., in accordance with God's will).

John 3:19-21

4) What is the difference in the eternal state of the saved and the unsaved? ANSWER: A very great difference - the difference between eternal life and the second death:

Truly, truly I say to you that an hour is coming, and is now [imminent] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will come to life. For just as the Father has life in Himself, so He has given to the Son to have life in Himself. And He has given authority to Him to render judgment, because He is the Son of Man. Do not be amazed at this [statement], that an hour will come in which all those in their tombs will hear His voice. For they shall come forth - **those who have done what is good to a resurrection of life** (i.e., those who have faithfully followed Jesus Christ), but those who have done what is worthless to a resurrection of judgment.

John 5:25-29

The differences between the saved and the unsaved are great in every way, for this is the difference between the few and the many, between the believers and the unbelievers, between those who are obedient to God and those disobedient to Him, between the living and the dead. And the fundamental basis for all these critical differences is a person's attitude to Jesus Christ. Those who follow Him in faith and obedience throughout their lives are saved and will live forever with Him in a glorious future of eternal life. Those who reject Him will not but will come into judgment instead.

Matthew 7:15-20 (NASB)

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does

not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits.

*

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 2a – The Fruit Test

You will recognize [these false prophets] from their fruit (i.e., their words, teachings, personal behaviour and modus operandi). People don't collect grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles, do they? Just so every good tree produces good [serviceable] fruit, but the rotten tree produces bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree produce good [appealing] fruit. [For] every good tree which doesn't produce good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. So then, you will recognize [those false prophets] from their fruit.

Matthew 7:16-20

The "fruit test" given to us by Jesus Himself remains the standard by which we are to judge and evaluate any and all who purport to convey the Word of God in any fashion, and we are well advised (by our Lord Himself) to do what the Ephesian era Church did and make careful use of this test before accepting the teachings, the authority, or the fellowship of any new element (individual or group) into our midst. For it is precisely this failure to be strict when it comes to the truth of God's Word that has led to the commingling of truth and falsehood that so characterizes the Church of our own Laodicean day.

It should be well noted that this standard applies to the "good trees", not the bad. Those who really are servants of the Word labor under a higher standard of judgment administered personally by Jesus Christ (i.e., if they do not produce proper fruit, they are "cut down and thrown into the fire"; cf. Jas.3:1; Rev.22:18-19; cf. Lk.20:46-47). Therefore it is not the individual Christian's place to judge the effectiveness of true ministers ("good trees") – Christ will do that, and will not be slow to discipline whenever and wherever His genuine teachers fall short. Rather it is the responsibility of the individual Christian to distinguish between "good trees" and trees which are entirely "bad". The "fruit test", therefore, is not some impossible standard to discern, but a relatively easy rule of thumb to apply in investigating the ministries of those who purport to be teaching the Word of God. For anyone of normal intellect and common sense with even a minimal familiarity with basic Bible principles, it is not difficult to discover if a particular tree belongs to the category

"generically, intrinsically and irredeemably bad", for the bad fruit of such ministries will be impossible to hide.

There is, however, a well-known contemporary saying which has some bearing on these things: "You can't cheat an honest man". While this saw may not be universally true, the point behind it deserves consideration in our present context, namely, the dishonest person is more susceptible to flimflam precisely because of his nature. In a similar way, it is much more difficult to deceive those who are energetically pursuing spiritual growth and diligently following our Master than it is those whose dedication to Him is minimal and whose Christian walk is lax. Those who are ***little interested in pursuing the truth of the Word of God are inevitably eager for something "more interesting" and hence are more vulnerable to "spicy" false teaching.*** And those who are not following the Lord closely in their personal behavior are inevitably receptive to anyone who is willing to tell them that the wrong they are doing (or the right they are failing to do) is really all right. In other words, those who verge on being "bad trees" themselves, are less likely to be able (or even willing) to recognize this trait in false teachers:

[Timothy], I [give] you [this] charge before God and Christ Jesus, the One who is about to judge the living and the dead, [charging you] by His appearance [at His Second Advent] and by His Kingdom: Proclaim the Word! Keep at it, whether circumstances are favorable or not! Reprove, rebuke, [and] encourage with all patience [in your] teaching! For the time will come when they will not put up with sound teaching, but will [instead], desiring to have their ears scratched, heap up by their own [devices] teachers to match their specific lusts. And they will turn their ears from the truth and resort instead to fictions (i.e., made up by these false teachers).

2nd Timothy 4:1-4

In the history of the Church, there has never been a lack of men who, for their own selfish interests (be it for wealth or power or fame or what have you), have been willing to tell weak Christians of the sort we are discussing here exactly what they have wanted to hear. This ***willingness to accommodate teaching to the audience's desires is a hallmark of false teachers.*** Another, seemingly opposite characteristic is the tendency of false teachers to bully, browbeat and brainwash all who come within their orbit into accepting outrageous and obviously unbiblical teachings. Far from being opposite in fact, however, both behavior patterns have in common an

utter disregard both for the genuine truth to be found in scripture and also for the welfare of those who follow them (i.e., they are of a truth wolves preying upon the sheep: cf. Zech.11:16). Indeed, both sets of behavior are often found within the same individuals, cults, and pseudo-Christian organizations, as new followers are often attracted with whatever their "itching ears" desire to hear, and only later, after the hook has been properly set, gradually enslaved by being brow-beaten into accepting any number of false teachings designed to make them more malleable for the parasites who exploit them.

The "fruit-test": So then, for those who are intent on wandering from Christ, all such "testing of spirits" is pointless, for it is only a matter of time before such individuals fall prey to the false. For those who are genuinely trying to follow Jesus Christ and be His disciples, although it is true that they are not as susceptible to false teaching, false teachers, and false-Christian groups, it is, nevertheless, imperative that they continue to apply the "fruit-test" in the way our Lord directed in the interest of spiritual safety.

1) testing the teacher: Evaluating and judging other people is always a dangerous business and one which is best avoided if unnecessary (Matt.7:1-2; Lk.6:37). However, given that serious spiritual growth is extremely difficult without in-depth teaching of the scriptures, and that this process requires the believer's acceptance of the authority of the teacher in question to some degree, at least an initial **evaluation** is advisable, therefore, when it comes to the issue of choosing whether or not to accept a particular person's teaching authority in the first place. This will mean, it is true, that the ***lifestyle and personal behavior*** of the teacher in question should be *above reproach* (cf. 1Tim.3:1-15; Tit.1:5-9), at least, that is, when a fair and accurate judgment is rendered on more than mere appearances (Jn.7:24).(13) After all, many a false teacher will go to great lengths to try and project an image of sanctity, hiding under a layer of whitewash his true nature, and thus making the issue often less than obvious (Matt.23:27-28). ***On the one hand, while charlatans are often very careful to conceal their faults, genuine teachers may, out of innocence, be less careful about hiding their own shortcomings (none of us, after all, is perfect)***. So while sanctimonious behavior trumpeted for mass consumption should put anyone on the alert, and while false teachers often have at least one "tell", or glaring fault that shines through and reveals what is really underneath, judging the source is not entirely without its difficulties. This, at least in part, accounts for the acceptance by some (who should

know better) of false teachers (based upon their polished deceptions) and the rejection by some (employing an over-legalistic standard) of true teachers (based upon patent peccadillos and minor imperfections). As in all things, the employment of careful, balanced, and sober judgment, accompanied by prayer and the aid of the Spirit, should be able to avoid both of these extremes.

2) testing the teachings: It is surely for just this reason that our Lord directs our attention in these matters not to the tree itself (which may give the appearance of being "good"), **but rather to its fruit, whose goodness and badness it is impossible to conceal.** While we may not always be able to discern the nature of the heart from what people choose to "show us" in their personal behavior, judging the quality of their production, their fruit, is an easier matter. The analogy of literal fruit is helpful in this regard. Good fruit is generally obvious upon inspection: it gives a pleasant appearance and smell. With even a small experience of particular types of fruit, it is rare that we are fooled about quality even before tasting (and we often go to great lengths at the market to judge the weight, color, luster, smell, etc.). If we do make a mistake, one bite is usually sufficient to tell us that a piece of fruit is rotten, or unripe, or otherwise deficient in quality (i.e., because of parasites or what have you). And even on those rare occasions when we partake in spite of all these factors, the physical reaction of our bodies will no doubt keep us from making such bad judgment a continuing practice (e.g., an over-indulgence in green apples is seldom repeated). As obvious as all this is in the realm of literal fruit (and our Lord has made a point of picking an analogy wherein we have no excuse and no chance to plead ignorance), is it not amazing that so many continue to persevere in indulging in bad "spiritual fruit", that is, in the lies and dissembling of false or otherwise inadequately or ill-prepared teachers? For while we may not be absolutely sure about the tree (indeed, the false teacher may be charismatic in the extreme, popular, well-spoken, even a model of aestheticism, etc.), if the **fruit/teaching is bad**, it will **stink discernibly**, it will **taste noticeably bad**, and it will **produce unmistakable spiritual dyspepsia** (to put the issue again in terms of literal fruit).

For if the teaching is false, it will arouse our spiritual suspicions immediately (like a banana bruised on the outside), will not square with the Bible upon scrutiny (like an avocado mottled on the inside), and, if we are foolish enough to "take it in" anyway, will cause sudden problems in our spiritual life (like a rotten apple eaten in spite of our better judgment), problems which should immediately warn us of our mistake.

In the realm of real fruit, a person "would have to be mad" to persevere in eating bad fruit and to continue to endure the predictable and dissipating consequences (an unheard of situation). In the realm of spiritual fruit, the believer still possessed of his/her spiritual sanity (that is, still committed to following Christ instead of what the flesh, the eyes, and ego lust for: 1Jn.2:15-17), must react in a similar manner, turning away from the source of the problem (suspicious as it was to begin with). The main difference in this analogy between bad fruit and bad teaching is that, sadly, while few human beings are willing to deliberately skew their perception of physical reality so as to call certifiably bad fruit good, hardening the heart and distorting spiritual reality to the point of calling teaching which is dangerously inadequate or intentionally deceptive good is an all too common occurrence (Eph.4:17-19). This has much to do with the spiritual battle in which we find ourselves. On the one hand, fruit trees have no hidden agenda, but false teachers (and the devil who motivates and uses them) clearly do: the exploitation of potential victims for their own selfish ends. On the other hand, any motivation we would have to eat rotten literal fruit is easily counterbalanced by the painful price to pay, but when it comes to all the hidden desires of our hearts, we human beings ***have always been most susceptible to those who are willing to tell us that what we know is wrong (but want or want to do) is really all right.*** This has been the case since the serpent told Eve that eating that most famous fruit would not only fail to produce the dire effects predicted by the Lord, but would even have positive benefits as well (Gen.3:4-5).(14)

For by giving voice to unparalleled folly, [these false teachers] entrap by fleshly lusts and sensuality those who did not flee far enough from such habitual deceivers.

2nd Peter 2:18

Choosing the "bad fruit" of false teachers is the result of spiritual myopia in the first place, and, should one persist in such damaging behavior, results in the end in complete spiritual blindness (Matt.6:22-23; 15:14; Mk.4:12; Lk.8:10b; Jn.9:34-41;12:40; Rom.1:21-32; 1Jn.2:11):

And to the degree that our gospel really is covered by a veil, it is obscured in this way only in the case of those who are perishing. For in the case of such persons, the god of this world has blinded the minds of these unbelievers, in order to prevent the shining forth unto them of the light of the gospel of Christ's glory – even Him who is the very image of God.

2nd Corinthians 4:3-4

This is why, dear friends, committed followers of Jesus Christ are seldom ensnared by the lure of "bad fruit" (even if they desire it, they maintain their spiritual "wits" and reject it), while half-

hearted and lukewarm individuals are easy targets for false teachers (being all too eager to accept the false version of reality being offered in order to indulge their various lusts, whatever these may be).

3) testing the group: No one is perfect, and so perfect behavior cannot be expected from any group, not even from a legitimate Christian church. Nevertheless, it seems obvious to say that wild or weird behavior on a mass scale should be reason enough to doubt the holiness of any would-be "Christian" church (taking into account, of course, that every organization has an occasional "loose cannon" or two: Tit.1:16). Barring any obvious and dominant trend towards immorality on the one hand or legalistic self-righteousness on the other in the behavior of the membership, there are other factors to consider as well in determining whether or not a particular self-styled group of "believers" is really following our Lord. Certain tell-tale characteristics of organizations operating for their own ends apart from God and His Word are inevitably present even in groups which (falsely) profess to be Christian. Positive indications that one is dealing with a "false group" may include (but are certainly not limited to) the fact that they . . .

- teach and practice things which are patently and easily refuted by the Bible (cf. 1Cor.15:12-19).
- discourage (or prohibit) individual Bible reading and personal Bible study (cf. Acts 17:11).
- adhere to "secret doctrines" or "oral tradition" available only from and interpreted exclusively by the leadership (cf. Col.2:18-23).
- violate hypocritically (though not openly) whatever good standards they do profess and proclaim (cf. Matt.23:27-32).
- seek to exploit their own membership for money, pleasure, or otherwise take advantage (cf. Acts 20:29-30).
- seek to control the lives and take over the decision-making of their members (cf. 2Pet.2:18-22).
- seek to isolate their members from friends, family, and society at large (cf. Gal.4:17).
- claim a superior righteousness or morality based upon their own deeds instead of Christ's work (cf. Phil.3:7-9).
- promise eternal life and salvation apart from faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ (cf. Gal.1:6-9).
- deny Jesus Christ by their teachings or their actions (cf. 2Jn.1:7).

This last standard of evaluation, the "Christ test", should really be at the heart of any evaluation of groups which purport to be Christian:

Any spirit (i.e. person, teaching, organization) which professes that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, but any spirit which does not profess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not from God.

1st John 4:2b-3a

To fulfill this requirement, there must be acknowledgment of and adherence to the following principles (taught by scripture as natural corollaries to the proposition that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh and is God"):

- that Jesus Christ is both undiminished deity and true humanity (Rom.9:5; Col.2:9; 1Jn.5:6-12).
- that He came into the world to die for all mankind (Jn.3:16; 1Pet.2:24).
- that His work was deemed acceptable by the Father (Rom.3:21-26).
- that we are saved on the basis of our faith in Him and in His work alone and not by our own works (Eph.2:8-9).
- that apart from faith in Jesus Christ, there is no way to approach the Father (Jn.14:6).
- that the true believer in Jesus Christ follows Christ and His teachings throughout his life on this earth (Matt.7:20; Jn.8:31; 1Jn.2:4; 2Jn.1:9).

So while "testing" teachers, teachings and groups may (wrongly) seem disrespectful to some, and while many if not most of the so-called "Christian" groups who need such testing inevitably discourage the practice of checking to see what the Bible says, this is one area where the Ephesian believers do come in for praise from our Lord.

Such proper "checking", moreover, is not easy. Time, thought and effort are required in order to determine that specific points of teaching or behavior or modus operandi are unbiblical (this was especially true in the 1st century when the scriptures were not universally available, nor particularly easy to use when they were). Even more difficult than the process and effort of testing to see if would-be teachers and their pronouncements and organizations are truly "of Christ" is the hard decision to separate when such people fail the test. For without the dogged determination to persistently reject from fellowship (personal or collective) any person, persons or teaching which are patently wrong and dangerously contrary to scripture, all the testing in the world is pointless. Given the attractiveness of many false teachers, their doctrines, and their organizations on the one

hand, and the extreme pressure from the world to compromise in such cases on the other, we should not be too quick to dismiss this accomplishment on the Ephesians' part which has come in here for praise from our Lord. For these 1st century post-apostolic believers kept "the false" at bay so effectively that for all intents and purposes during the Ephesian era there was little difference between the "Church visible" and the "Church actual", a claim that certainly cannot be made today in our own Laodicean era where, quite the contrary, false and true have so intermixed that the whole is a lukewarm, indistinguishable mass. Although this success on the Ephesian believers' part in excluding false teachers, false teachings, and false groups does not excuse the deficiency for which they are criticized of failing to pursue correct teaching (their "first love"), rejecting false teachers, teachings, and individuals was and remains a critical safeguard for the faith and practice of the true Church of Jesus Christ.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NASB)

21 "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

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Q: Jesus also tells them in Matthew 7:21-23 that he "never" knew them. They were always unsaved. This really confuses me.

A: Always glad to help. On this latest question, allow me to start by focusing on Matthew 7:21-23. Some of the other passages are not necessarily directly applicable in that there are other issues of interpretation going on and I don't want to confuse what I see as the primary issue here (but feel free to write back if I don't answer all your concerns). The first and most important thing to note about this passage (and the close parallel in Luke 13:24-27) is that Jesus is addressing unbelievers, and most definitely not believers:

1) they are called "those committing lawlessness" in Matthew (anomia, "lawlessness", is sin: 1Jn.3:4) and "workers of unrighteousness" in Luke (adikia = the opposite of righteousness; cf. Heb.1:9 in the original Greek ms.). Note that these are not people who "occasionally" sinned, but rather people who are sinners, doers of unrighteousness, "by profession"

(similar to the way in which believers, who do sin occasionally, are "non-sinners" by profession: cf. 1Jn.3:6).

2) they are not going into the kingdom because as it states in the previous verse only the person who "does the will of My Father in heaven" are saved / go into the kingdom (Matt.7:21), and the "will of the Father" is for everyone to believe in Jesus Christ and have eternal life (Jn.6:40).

3) as you point out He says "I never knew you" and in the Luke passage "I don't know where you're from".

So even based on the claims these people make in Matthew (i.e., even if we believe what they say, although our Lord doesn't seem to in the context), there is no indication that they ever were believers. Now if the "great things" these unbelievers claim they did were done as unbelievers, then they have no true merit with God. In the Luke passage, these people stress their familiarity with the Messiah while He was on earth, but in the Matthew passage they make some rather extraordinary claims. Even if these claims are true, however, because whatever they did will have been done not through the Spirit of God for the glory of God but through the energy of the corrupt flesh for their own personal motivations and glory, none of these so-called "good works" will count for anything before God (please see the link: "The Last Judgment"). In fact, trying to "work your way into heaven" is a gross insult to the Almighty, because it not too subtly suggests that 1) God can benefit from what you do and I may do (i.e., that He "needs us" in some way; see the link: "Satanic lie #3: 'God needs me' " and "The Distinction between Sin and Evil"), and 2) it suggests that what Jesus did on the cross wasn't good enough: you won't accept His perfect sacrifice but bring your own disgustingly foul works to lay before Him instead (just what Cain did).

Viewed in this way, I believe the question then resolves into just what these people had done. Aside from the exorcisms, they also claim to have prophesied and done miracles. Prophecy is speaking God's truth through the power of the Spirit, that is, being a direct mouth-piece for God; miracles or "powers" here are the significantly overt and undeniably supernatural kind, and while unspecified, no doubt include healing in ways that defy the natural order of things (as Jesus healed). Personally, I have my doubts about their claims. They may very well have held exorcisms (people still do this and are doing it with ever increasing frequency -- but without, so far as I can tell, any divine mandate, true spiritual gift, or actual success); they may very well have sounded off in an ecstatic state, but did they really proclaim a message from God by His Spirit?; they may very well have put their hands on the sick, but were those so ministered to really healed as a result? All

of these things and similar things "happen" today too. In fact, an entire branch of Christianity is consumed with these matters, and as far as I can tell absolutely no such miracles, prophesying, or genuine expulsion of demons is really taking place at all. Many of the people who do these things are deceivers with various levels of self-deception. Some have apparently convinced even themselves that what they are doing is legitimate, but God is never deceived. The point is that if believers can engage in such questionable practices and proclaim and perhaps even believe that what they are doing is legitimate, certainly it takes no stretch of the imagination for us to assume that many unbelievers in Jesus' day had convinced themselves that they too were "working miracles" and that these "good works" guaranteed them a place in the kingdom of heaven. But, on balance, I find nothing in the protestation of these (obvious) unbelievers to convince me that they had actually accomplished what they claim. Certainly the Bible doesn't verify their claims, and Jesus never even bothers to answer them on these terms. I would suggest that they fall into the category of those today who make similar or identical claims, without these claims, however, having a stitch of truth behind them.

But let us assume that "somehow" some of these things were real -- or that the people who were doing them really believed they were real. Jesus' words to them in that case strike like lightning and have the following essential meaning: "Even if you have truly cast out demons, prophesied God's truth, and performed miracles of healing, if for all that you have not believed on Me, then you are lost; you cannot come in to the banquet in the kingdom but are instead shut out in the darkness. Nothing you could ever do of yourselves could ever save you, even if it truly were as miraculous as you claim. Salvation comes from accepting Me and My work; anything else is not of God but of the devil".

Matthew 7:24-27 (NASB)

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

*

Q: The general meaning of this passage is clear to me, but I would like to know how specifically to understand the testing of the house ("And the rain fell, and the floods came. . ."). Should we take it to mean the testing of faith? Or temptations?

A: I think that is a good application. What is the house? If it is our edifice of faith that we have built up in spiritual growth then it will stand against all tests; if we have relied on human security instead – and for unbelievers this means not believing the words of the gospel and committing to a life of following Christ – then all expectations about anything to come in this life and the next are fallacious. So, for an unbeliever, don't believe the gospel, your house will fall (the second death); for a believer, don't grow in the Word and its application, your house will fall (spiritual decline, the sin unto death, even apostasy: Lk.8:13).

Matthew 7:28-29 (NASB)

28 When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

*

Q: In light of these words, how did the scribes teach? Did they have no authority?

A: My interpretation is that the scribes and company taught somewhat like one experiences in modern Protestant or other "churches" these days; nothing of substance and no conviction behind specific doctrinal pronouncements; lots of "doubts" on the other hand. In contrast, our Lord went right to the heart of the matter and taught with the conviction of one who knows the truth and has perfect confidence in it.

Matthew 8:4 (NASB)

4 And Jesus *said to him, "See that you tell no one; but go, show yourself to the priest and present the offering that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them."

NIV SB: 8:4 don't tell anyone. Jesus did not wish to stir up the popular, but mistaken, expectations that a wonder-working Messiah would soon arise as king of the Jews and deliver them from the Roman yoke.

*

Q1: You made the point that our Lord didn't want to make the logistical aspect of His ministry too difficult with crowds, here the NIV SB suggests another argument - what is your view?

A1: I prefer my view. In this particular case, touching a leper was something that might be wrongly construed, so our Lord gives the individual in question a way to resolve the issue of his healing without naming Jesus.

*

Q2: Should we take this verse to mean that the Law wasn't fulfilled until our Lord's sacrifice and needed to be observed until then? But then how would this correspond for example to the meaning of Sabbath being changed why Jesus was still in the course of His ministry?

A2: See previous answer; Our Lord followed the Law (the true Law) and the only "breaking" that took place was for the sake of fulfilling His purpose in completing the Law – in other words it was not a "breaking" at all. As our Lord tells us, He is "Lord of the Sabbath" so that the rules only applied to Him to the extent that He wished to comply so as not to offend (in the same way that He did not really owe the temple tax but told Peter to pay it for both of them – and gave him the means to do so). The Sabbath "was made for man, not man for the Sabbath", so that the whole idea of anyone finding fault with our Lord for doing good on the Sabbath was and is offensive.

*

Q3: What does our Lord mean by "as a testimony to them"?

A3: See previous answers; the offering would be a token that God had healed leprosy (something no doubt that these individuals doubted possible).

Matthew 8:8 (NASB)

8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed.

NIV SB: 8:8 I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. In Greek the words "I do not deserve" are the same as those used by John the Baptist in 3:11 ("I am not worthy"). The entire statement reveals how highly the centurion regarded Jesus. Or perhaps his response reflects his own sense of moral guilt in the presence of Jesus.

*

Q: Could centurion's words stem from both high regard for Jesus and sense of guilt? Can we somehow make this judgment at all?

A: The Greek actually says "sufficient" (hikanos); as a gentile who realized the holy character of our Lord as well as his own sinfulness, this is an appropriate, humble response. I wouldn't want to use the word "guilt".

Matthew 8:8-10 (NASB)

8 But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9 For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does it." 10 Now when Jesus heard this, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel.

*

Q1: Could you please explain these verses to me? Specifically, why did the centurion go on to say that he is also a man under authority with soldier under him? What point was he trying to make? Also, what was the reason that caused our Lord to marvel at his faith?

Q2: How are to reconcile this passage with Luke 7:1-10, where Luke writes that the centurion first sent Jewish elders to Jesus, and as Jesus drew closer, the centurion then sent his friends to deliver the message?

A1&2: As to your questions on Matthew, first, in the military, especially in a highly professional organization such as the Roman army, an officer has the expectation that an order given will be carried out. Indeed, there are severe penalties for failure to obey. If that is true of a human institution in the world, how much more so is it not true when it comes to the Son of God and the angelic armies who are responsible for carrying out His orders? So the centurion is reasoning from an analogy of a fortiori: if I can be sure that A will happen if I order it, then without any question whatsoever B will happen if He orders it.

Why is this a matter of great faith? Because for this reasoning to be meaningful, the centurion had to know and believe who Jesus was, the Messiah, the Son of God. And he had to believe that completely along with all of the ramifications of that truth. Today when Christians pray, how many are truly factoring into their prayers just exactly WHO God is and what He can do? The

faith of the centurion, in really believing that Jesus is who He claimed to be and could do anything because He is God is in this regard is much greater than that of many Christians today.

As to the differences between Matthew and Luke, this is not an uncommon variation as the different writers have different methods in relating events -- just as today no two people tell the same story the same way; but just as today in that no two people tell the same story the same way, that does not mean that both renditions may not be truthful. In the case of the gospels we know that they are 100% truthful as inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Matthew simplifies the story by cutting out mention of those who brought the message; but the message in Matthew is precisely the message the centurion sent via the elders. I wasn't there, but I would imagine that when Luke writes: "When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, 'This man deserves to have you do this . . .'" (Lk.7:4), that probably one elder actually took the lead and spoke rather than all of them speaking simultaneously (but since they were all entrusted with the message this is a legitimate way to put it).

I think that no one considering the reporting of an event outside of scripture would be wary of the substance or critical of the method of relating the event because of such differences -- nor should they be. The important substance is accurately preserved, and that is the point.

Matthew 8:11-12 (NASB)

11 I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

*

Q: Could you clarify this verse? How should we understand "sons of the kingdom"?

A: This means the contemporary Jews of Jesus' day (and other Jewish unbelievers of other generations) who, as sons of Abraham, were by birthright entitled to the kingdom (i.e., "sons of the kingdom" = those who are part of or belong to the kingdom; cf. "sons of surety" = "hostages" in 2Ki.14:14), but who had forsaken that birthright through their unwillingness to submit to the Father and the Son through faith.

Matthew 8:15 (NASB)

15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she got up and [a]waited on Him.

Matthew 8:15 Or served

*

Q1: Could you explain the footnote - which rendering is better? Why did Peter's mother in law wait on our Lord when He was right by her? Or did she wait for someone else?

A1: This probably means she made them a meal and served it to them.

Matthew 8:19-22 (NASB)

19 Then a scribe came and said to Him, "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go." 20 Jesus *said to him, "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." 21 Another of the disciples said to Him, "Lord, permit me first to go and bury my father." 22 But Jesus *said to him, "Follow Me, and allow the dead to bury their own dead."

NIV SB: 8:22 let the dead bury their own dead. Let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. The time of Jesus' ministry was short and demanded full attention and commitment. This statement stresses the radical demands of Jesus' discipleship, since Jews placed great importance on the duty of children to bury their parents.

*

Q1: Why does Jesus reply in verse 20 saying that the Son of man has nowhere to lay His head? Is this to indicate the commitment required to follow Him (cf. verse. 22)?

Q2: Do you agree with the NIV SB notes in verse 22?

A: Specifically, I believe that our Lord had discerned that this individual wanted to be part of the coming King's "posse", but our Lord was telling him not to look for worldly success and material blessing by following Him -- indeed, He Himself didn't even have a fixed abode. Our Lord wants us to follow Him, but for the right reasons and from the right motivation. The note is incorrect. I don't believe that the man's father was dead yet (he wouldn't have even been there to have the conversation if funeral arrangements were underway). This person was saying in effect that he had to wait until he was the head of the house before he bothered to do what the Lord wanted Him to do. But while we do have responsibilities to our families, there is no real excuse for not doing what the Lord wants us to do immediately.

Matthew 8:28 (NASB)

28 When He came to the other side into the country of the Gadarenes, two men who were demon-possessed met Him as they were coming out of the tombs. They were so extremely violent that no one could pass by that way.

NIV SB: 8:28 region of the Gadarenes. The region around the city of Gadara, six miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee. Mark and Luke identify the region by the capital city Gerasa, located about 35 miles southeast of the Sea (see note on Lk 8:26).

*

Q: Commentators see a major difficulty in reconciling Matthew's account with that of Mark and Luke as to the location of the miracle. Which reading is correct - "region of Gadarenes" or of "Gerasenes"?

A: All three of the synoptic gospels mention this place, and they all spell it slightly differently (at least in the original hand in Aleph). This is, in my opinion, much ado about nothing. When we have disciples called by different names entirely, it is not too much to understand that certain places with difficult names were variously pronounced (and spelled), according to the preference of the one doing the writing. I doubt any of the gospel writers had ever seen the place spelled in a text, so they each transliterated it into Greek as it seemed best to them. In the LXX, the town Megiddo is spelled dozens of different ways – a problem of making Hebrew names into Greek (which as we know is a problem with all Hebrew names coming into Greek, and Aramaic ones too). The point is that it is the same place, whether or not we wish to come up with a standard English transliteration – which will be different in Greek from whatever we decide is "right" – the town/region is the same in any case. No problem.

Matthew 8:29 (NASB)

29 And they cried out, saying, "[a]What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

Matthew 8:29 Lit What is to us and to you (a Heb idiom)

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Q: Since the footnote gives a Hebrew idiom, should we understand that the angels use this language?

A: This Hebrew idiom is also present in Jewish Aramaic and Jewish Greek, so there is no telling what language the man was speaking in at the time – probably Greek. It is my impression that fallen angels who possess a person would speak in that person's language – or at least in the language he/she is being addressed in (otherwise there is little point in speaking at all).

Q: Matthew 8:28-34 says that our Lord healed two demoniacs, but Mark 5:1-20 only mentions one?

A: There were two (as Matthew says) but Mark and Luke focus on the one who had the "legion". See the link: <http://ichthys.com/mail-double.htm>

Matthew 8:30 (NASB)

30 Now there was a herd of many swine feeding at a distance from them.

NIV SB: 8:30 herd of pigs. Large numbers of Gentiles lived in Galilee. Normally Jews did not raise pigs, since they were considered the most ceremonially unclean of all animals.

*

Q: I remember you saying that these animals were raised illegally, so I take it you assumed that Jews were responsible for it? Here the NIV SB suggests that the herd belonged to the Gentiles.

A: No one knows to whom the herd belonged but our Lord was sent to minister to the "lost sheep of Israel" and only otherwise ministered to non-Jews indirectly (as in the case of the Samaritan woman and the Syro-Phoenician woman), so for Him to cross the sea to this place to minister would be unusual if it were populated by gentiles only.

Matthew 8:34 (NASB)

34 And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw Him, they implored Him to leave their region.

NIV SB: 8:34 pleaded with him to leave. They were probably more concerned about their financial loss than about the deliverance of the miserable demon-possessed men (see note on Mk 5:17).

*

Q: I always assumed that fear was the main motivation here - do you agree with this note?

A: What I find most remarkable about the passage is that after witnessing the amazing power of God the people ask Jesus to leave. They are definitely in fear, but instead of reacting to this legitimate impression of the majesty of God by prostrating themselves and seeking His truth and forgiveness, they would rather be relieved of the confrontation; the financial lost is merely an irritant and a means to making this terrible choice.

Matthew 9:1-8 (NASB)

1 Getting into a boat, Jesus crossed over the sea and came to His own city.

2 And they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, "Take courage, son; your sins are forgiven." 3 And some of the scribes said to themselves, "This fellow blasphemes." 4 And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, "Why are you thinking evil in your hearts? 5 Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, and walk'? 6 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" —then He *said to the paralytic, "Get up, pick up your bed and go home." 7 And he got up and went home. 8 But when the crowds saw this, they were awestruck, and glorified God, who had given such authority to men.

*

Q1: In Matt 9:1-7, I am unsure about the question Jesus asks in the 5th passage: Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?

A1: Saying "your sins are forgiven" is only possible if they have been actually propitiated and cleansed away in the righteous judgment of God. The only way Jesus could say this was through His pledge and determination to go to the cross and die for them. He could heal the man without dying for him; He couldn't forgive him without suffering spiritual death for his sins (see the link).

*

Q2: Could you please explain:

Luke 5:24: But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up, and pick up your stretcher and go home."

In your reply regarding this passage you said that it was easier for our Lord to say 'get up', because it didn't require His sacrifice on the cross. In light of that, could you explain why does Jesus say:

'But, so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,"—He said to the paralytic—"I say to you, get up,'

Saying 'get up' doesn't require the 'authority on earth to forgive sins', why then Jesus uses this act as a demonstration ('so that you may know')?

A2: The unbelieving crowd is reasoning, "this is just a man so he can't forgive sins". Jesus of course does have the authority to forgive sins because He died for them all. The miracle He performed was the proof that He was who He said He was, and did have the authority He said He did, for God would not empower just anyone to do such a miracle, and certainly not someone who said "your sins are forgiven" if the person didn't actually have that power.

*

Q3: Regarding verse 8, Why is "men" here used in the plural, since the crowds have only witnessed Jesus performing miracles? Or should we take the expression "who had given such authority to men" as meaning "who had given such authority for the benefit of men" (Bengel's commentary)?

A3: Because Jesus was clearly a man (and not so clearly to those who saw Him, God), but was performing miracles which only God can do – which should have impelled more to draw the correct conclusion about Him. By saying "men" and not "to a man", they were able to distance themselves from identifying Him as unique.

Matthew 9:11-12 (NASB)

11 When the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax collectors and sinners?" 12 But when Jesus heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

*

Q: Jesus knew that Pharisees were "sick" also, so does He here accept Pharisees' own perception of themselves in the sense that since they do not see the need for a physician, He will not heal them?

A: He doesn't accept it, but He very wisely puts them into the position of either having to recognize that they need help too, or else to confirm themselves in their hard-hearted illusion of legalistic perfection.

Matthew 9:15-17 (NASB)

15 And Jesus said to them, "The attendants of the bridegroom cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. 16 But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results. 17 Nor do people put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."

*

Q: I understand both the point our Lord makes in verse 15 and in verses 16-17. What is unclear to me is the relationship between the two. What is the link between them?

A: They both relate to doing what is appropriate to the circumstances of one's ministry. There is a time for everything. **Figuring out the right thing to do at the right time** is a significant part of spiritual growth; the principle also has broader applications as well. For Jesus' disciples, it meant that being involved with the people they were ministering to along with Jesus was what was important at the time, not what the Pharisees thought to be important; for us today, it means **not trying to change the old when we should be serving the new** since the two have little in common in fact (e.g., trying to change the Roman Catholic church – or any traditional church – from within would, it seems to me, violate our Lord's implicit advice here).

Matthew 9:24 (NASB)

24 He said, "Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep." And they began laughing at Him.

*

Q: I'm wondering how we should understand these words spoken by our Lord. Should they be taken literally, possibly meaning that the girl had actually died, but when our Lord said that she was asleep, her life returned to her?

A: On the one hand, death can be called sleep (our Lord says the same thing about Lazarus in John's gospel); on the other hand, our Lord's genuine love and mercy is seen shining through here. What tel-evangelist today would not put up on every possible medium an announcement of a dead person brought back to life? But our Lord, partly out of a desire to preserve freedom of action for His own ministry, but also out of consideration for the girl and her family – lest they become celebrities to no good end – does what He can under the circumstances **to protect their privacy.**

Matthew 9:36-38 (NASB)

36 Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then He *said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”

*

Q: Please may you explain the meaning of this verse, specifically who our Lord is referring to regarding the harvest and the workers? In light of verse 36 where Jesus felt compassion on the people (flock), is the harvest symbolic of the body of Christ, the church of believers? And are the workers those who are ministering to the body of Christ?

A: This verse “works” for all believers at all times. There is always work to do for the Lord, there is always a harvest to be brought in. It certainly does apply to the Church Age, and those who minister the Word of God whether by evangelism or teaching are certainly important “workers” in this respect. But every believer in every age is meant to grow, progress and come into the ministry the Lord has designed for each.

Matthew 10:2 (NASB)

2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother;

*

Q: Why is "the first" put before Simon?

A: This just indicates we have a sequence, namely, the order in which our Lord called the disciples.

Matthew 10:4 (NASB)

4 Simon the [a]Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

Matthew 10:4 Or Cananaean

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Q1: Could you explain the footnote? How should Simon's name be rendered?

NIV SB: 10:4 the Zealot. Either a description of Simon's religious zeal or a reference to his membership in the party of the Zealots, a Jewish revolutionary group violently opposed to Roman rule over the Holy Land (see chart).

Q2: What is your take on this note?

A1/2: The word kananaios (and so then also kananistes) seems to mean "from Cana", but we know from Luke 6:15 and Acts 1:13 that Simon was a "Zealot", that is, a member of a political movement wishing to bring in the kingdom by force (he was thus apparently rescued from this false approach by our Lord's teaching of the truth). So scholars (notably Schürer) have derived the Greek adjective (and noun) from the Aramaic word for zeal (qan'an) – it is used thus in the Targums and other Jewish literature, notably for those who opposed the Romans. So while it is possible that Simon was a Zealot and from Cana, the translation "Zealot" here is probably correct.

Matthew 10:9-10 (NASB)

9 Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, 10 or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; for the worker is worthy of his support.

*

A: Do the last words of verse 10 mean that our Lord wanted the apostles to be fully dependent on the provisions given by people they visited?

Q: He wanted them to be totally **dependent on God**, and for the ministry thus to be seen to have both the clearly supernatural origin it did have, and also for there to be absolutely no question of a profit motive – the twelve would only use/take what they needed and would acquire nothing in the

process (setting them noticeably apart from other pseudo-ministries of that day, not to mention most in our own day).

Matthew 10:13 (NASB)

13 If the house is worthy, give it your blessing of peace. But if it is not worthy, take back your blessing of peace.

NIV SB: 10:13 If the home is deserving. That is, "If the head of the house loves peace" (Lk 10:6). let your peace return to you. Either (1) retract your blessing or (2) leave the house.

*

Q: How should we understand "take back your blessing of peace"?

A: Matthew does have the third person imperative but Luke has the future ("it will"); so our Lord is describing the blessing (peace) that will abide in a house that treats these apostles well, but notes that if on entering the house proves unworthy in not responding, then they will leave and their blessing with them.

Matthew 10:15 (NASB)

15 Truly I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city.

*

Q1: Could you explain these words? Why is the judgment on the city who rejects the apostles more severe than Sodom and Gomorrah?

Q2: Some use this passage to support the notion of there being different degrees of eternal punishment - do you agree with this?

A1/2: To take the last part first, in the Bible I find only "the second death" as being the result of refusing to accept Jesus as Lord in this life, Dante notwithstanding, and that is certainly bad enough and terrifying enough to get anyone's attention – if there is even a spark of desire to put God in front of self. The main problem I see with positing differences in hell is that it might lead some (falsely) to assume that "since I am not so bad as X, hell won't be so bad for me" – and that is

the peak of self-delusion. As to Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot is saved, but a city that completely rejects the gospel will by definition not have any who escapes condemnation.

Matthew 10:16 (NASB)

16 "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.

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Q: So, I'm reading Matthew today and come across chapter 10. It's confusing for me because it seems to mix direct commands to the apostles at the moment they were sent out, but it also seems to speak to us all (it all does, of course...), however, it's confusing as to which is intended for the apostles directly and what was to be figured out and applied in the future (us). It seems Matthew 10:16 is where the 'apostle only' instruction ends and the general begins.

A: Prophetic scripture often has more than one application and is often applicable to more than one coming situation (see the link: "Hermeneutic Issues"). Matthew 10 is, first, applicable to the 12 (and the 72: Lk.10:1ff.) who are sent out "two by two", but it is also prophetic of the 144,000 who will be sent out in the same way to "the lost sheep of Israel" (see the link). Finally, even prophetic passages which are not directly applicable in terms of the precise prophecy may have secondary application to us, and that is certainly the case with much of Matthew 10. The correct procedure is to note all commands which are clearly not "for us" (as in "go [only] to the lost sheep of Israel" – we are to share the gospel with all today), but to consider the rest applicable (since these are words of our Lord), unless there is a good reason for not doing so. Matthew 10:16, "be wise as serpents and harmless as doves", is a good example of something we should embrace as prescriptive for ourselves too even though technically speaking the words were spoken to the 12 and to the 72 (especially since scripture tells us the same essential thing elsewhere, albeit without the colorful metaphor: e.g., Rom.16:19; 1Cor.14:20).

Matthew 10:23 (NASB)

23 "But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes.

*

Q: What does Jesus mean in Matthew 10:23?

A: This verse can only be understood by realizing the prophetic parallel between the sending out of the twelve (and of the 72) and the future sending out of the 144,000 witnesses. Both ministries offer the kingdom to those of Jewish origin. The statement is true of both groups but even more significant in regard to the latter group: there will be more than enough work for the 144,000 to do before Jesus' return. As I say on this verse in CT 2B:

"Finally, the statement in Matthew 10:23 that these witnesses (i.e., the 12 and, by prophetic application, the 144,000) "will not finish [evangelizing] the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" not only confirms that this will be a worldwide ministry ("cities of Israel" meaning for the 144,000 any town with a significant Jewish community) directed at evangelizing the Jewish people, but also makes quite clear that the 144,000 will be busily employed at this task until they are martyred (well before the return of the Messiah as we shall see)."

Matthew 10:24-25 (NASB)

24 "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

*

Q: Please could you explain these verses? Why does Jesus say it is enough for the disciple to become like his teacher and slave like his master? Why does He then go on to talk about Beelzebul as head of the house? Is Jesus referring to the fact that they called Him Beelzebul, and that His disciples should also be expected to be maligned and mistreated?

A: Yes. The point is that if they were persecuting our Lord -- who is the Lord -- we can certainly expect the same treatment; and we should strive in every way to be like Him and not expect better treatment than He received. This is not an insignificant point when one considers the airs that certain clergy have put on throughout the Church Age and certainly even today and in all groups and denominations.

Matthew 10:26-27 (NASB)

26 "Therefore do not fear them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the light; and what you hear whispered in your ear, proclaim upon the housetops.

*

Q: Why does our Lord encourage His disciples by reassuring them that "there is nothing concealed that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known"? Are these words spoken for the disciples to realize that regardless of that situation on this side of heaven, everything will at some point become clear, i.e. eventually everyone will be judged?

A: Yes. That is a good way to put it. Once we truly do realize that absolutely everything that is taking place is in God's plan, that He is not being taken by surprise by any event, that He has already made perfect provision in eternity past for everything in our lives, and particularly for anything of which we might be fearful, then we can begin to relax and rest in the faith that makes these blessed truths more visible than what our eyes see and our ears hear.

Matthew 10:28 (NASB)

28 Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

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Q: Is soul here used as a synonym of spirit?

A: No. What we have here the word psyche and refers to "physical life"; if we believers are killed (i.e., if our physical life on this earth is taken away), it does not affect our eternal life (or resurrection bodies). But for those who deny the Lord, the end result is the second death rather than eternal life. Therefore God is worthy of fear but human beings are not.

Matthew 10:32-33 (NASB)

32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

*

A1: The Greek idea in "denying" someone is the same as in English. I think the formal pronouncement aspect of it is important and set out that way in scripture for a reason (i.e., "before men" is a verbal denial, not a mental process). Our Lord tells us in that same chapter in Matthew 10:17-20 that the context to which He is referring is one of being officially examined as to our loyalty to the Lord. All of this is looking forward to the Tribulation and the eventuality of believers being hauled into courts and accused of being "Christians". We are told that the Spirit will help us, giving us just the right words to say at that time. On that day, the day of our martyrdom, it will be important to witness for Christ and not deny that we know Him. Denial in a broader sense has broader sense applicability too – by which I mean we can indeed deny Him in a way other than words, namely, by losing our faith in Him (as in the case of the foolish virgins: Matt:25:1-13), or abandoning our faith in Him (as in the case of the wicked servant: Matt.24:48-51). That is the real point of the passage you cite as a parallel, 2nd Timothy 2:12 (where the Greek word is the same, arneomai): "If we disown Him (i.e., lose or throw away our faith so that we no longer believe) . . .". In short, "denying the Lord" is not some near accidental mistake we can make or a momentary lapse of focus we may experience. No such mental hiccup is capable of ruining our whole life's work for Jesus (cf. Heb.6:10: "God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name"; NASB) or destroying our eternal future – God is not like that and He doesn't work like that. God is gracious, God is merciful, God is forgiving. He sent His Son to the cross to die for every one of our sins and He wants us to be saved more than anything (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Lam.3:33; Matt.18:12-14; Jn.3:16 Jn.12:47; Acts 17:27). He is not waiting to trip us up (or waiting for us to trip up). He is helping us every second of every minute of every day so that we may reach harbor safely and spend eternity with Him. All who believe are saved. Only those who refuse to believe (or who jettison their faith and thus trample the blood of the covenant underfoot) are lost. We do have to maintain our faith in Jesus until the end, but that is not any sort of "pins and needles" salvation. We do not have to worry about some little mistake costing us our eternal lives, not for a moment. Our faith is much stronger than that, and, if we are willing to hang onto it come what may, we can sleep soundly through the storm as our Lord did on the Sea of Galilee.

However, there may come a time when we find ourselves standing before an inquisition or other evil tribunal where admitting that we love Jesus will cost us our lives. In that situation, we must indeed be prepared to tell the truth.

Finally, remember that Peter actually did deny Jesus, and the rest of the disciples ran away (which is a sort of "denial with the feet"), and yet they will have their names inscribed on the foundation stones of New Jerusalem. If we are walking with Jesus, loving Him, learning about Him and His Word, and serving Him by helping others to do the same, we will find that we have absolutely

nothing to worry about, and when the crunch comes, if it be our lot to see that day, we will do Him proud.

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Luke 12:8-9 (NASB)

8 "And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; 9 but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.

Q2: Why is our Lord here referring to His confession "before the angels of God" rather than before God Himself, as it is said in Matthew 10:32-33 (NASB): 32 "Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven."

A2: These are two ways of saying the same thing since the angels appear before the Lord (e.g., Job 1:6; Dan.7:10; Rev.5:11); the reason for the difference may be the greater focus in Matthew, a book written to a Jewish audience, on the Father as the authority figure (making it clear in this way for the benefit of this audience that our Lord Jesus is the true Son of the Father); "Father" occurs ca. 97 times in Matthew but only ca. 42 times in Luke (n.b., not all of these refs. are to the Father in either book).

*

A3: As to "whoever denies Me" (Matt.10:33), while it is true that Peter did deny Christ, three times, he also spent most of his life witnessing to the Lord and His truth:

Matthew 10:32 NIV

"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven."

Scripture (and our Lord in particular) often puts things in terms of this sort of stark contrast – for our benefit. Because, after all, if we are hewing tight to the good, we are less likely to get off into the bad ("aim small, miss small"; cf. 1Cor.9:27). But it is a blessing to remember that even if we stumble (as we all do in many ways: Jas.3:2), and even if we sin (as we all will, until the resurrection: 1Jn.1:5-10), that our Lord is gracious, that our sins have already been atoned for, and that the grace and love of God are looking to save us (and everyone else) rather than to condemn us (or anyone else). Believers are saved; unbelievers go to hell. In Matthew 10:32-33 we

find the ***perfect believer versus the consummate unbeliever***. We may not be the former (though to this we should aspire) – who can claim always on each and every occasion and opportunity to have confessed Jesus as he should have done – but we Christians are certainly not the latter (if we had consistently denied Christ at all times as our policy and way of life, we would not be believers in the first place).

Matthew 10:34 (NASB)

34 “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.

NIV SB: 10:34 At first glance this saying sounds like a contradiction of Isa 9:6 ("Prince of Peace"), Lk 2:14 ("on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests") and Jn 14:27 ("Peace I leave with you"). It is true that Christ came to bring peace-peace between the believer and God, and peace among humans. Yet the inevitable result of Christ's coming is conflict-between Christ and the antichrist, between light and darkness, between Christ's followers and the devil's followers. This conflict can occur even between members of the same family (vv. 35-36; Mk 10:29-30).

*

Q: Do you agree with how the NIV SB reconciles this verse with Isaiah 9:6, Luke 2:14 and John 14:27?

A: Anyone who has read the whole Bible will not, I think, see any contradiction, because the matters correctly brought up here by the NIV SB will be well known. This is the thing the world gets wrong and many Christians too, thinking that we are supposed to bring in the Millennium by our own devices, when in truth only Christ can bring it in, and the sword of the second advent will proceed the prophesied world peace of the Millennium.

Matthew 10:37-39 (NASB)

37 “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38 And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

*

A: Ichthys translation:

Do not think that I have come to hurl peace upon the earth. I have not come to hurl peace upon the earth but a sword (of divisiveness). For I have come to divide, [so that] 'a man [will be set] against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; [with the result that] a man's enemies will be the members of his own household' (Micah 7:6). Whoever loves his father or mother above Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves his son or daughter above Me is not worthy of Me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever has found his life will lose it, and the one who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 10:34-39

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Q1: From Ichthys reader:

Hi Dr. Luginbill: Doesn't it seem odd, when you think about it, that Jesus would say, when talking about his followers living a lifestyle of self-denial, that they must each be willing to "... take up his cross daily...", when no one who was with him knew that he would die on a cross? Since we know that he did die that way, it makes sense, sort of (I am not sure I know exactly what he meant), but to his disciples and other followers, it must have seemed very strange at the time.

A1: Indeed, scripture abounds with just this sort of thing, and that is a very large part of the reason why the unbelieving world resists having anything to do with the Bible. For the Bible proclaims itself to be God's Word, and makes myriad statements that the natural mind will violently resist. One of the major Old Testament "controversies", to take but one famous example, has to do with Isaiah chapters 40-66, a section of the book which many non-believing scholars have come to call "second Isaiah" (with some even seeing a "third Isaiah" in the mix here). A primary reason for such widespread doubt even about the authorship of the book and in the absence of any external or internal evidence of any value (in my considered view) is the fact that Isaiah in these chapters clearly prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity. To the unbelieving, natural mind, that is impossible, since Isaiah himself pre-dated these events by well over a hundred years. But to us who believe in God's ability to see the future (for He has decreed every bit of it, after all), prophecy is no problem. God exists outside of time and space and independent of time and space and only created them for our benefit. In my view both of these questions fall into this category of phenomenon.

"Pick up your cross" (Matt.16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; cf. Matt.10:38; Lk.14:27): You certainly have a point here. Jesus did tell them specifically on more than one occasion that He was going to be crucified (Matt.20:19; 23:34; 26:2), but there are indications that the command "pick up your cross" and "whoever does not take up his cross and follow Me isn't worthy of Me" were given before these specific warnings. I am inclined to see these references to the cross as our Lord's way of planting the idea in the hearts of His disciples somewhat indirectly at a time when they would not have been able to bear let alone understand that the Messiah was going to be put to death in such a gruesome and humiliating way. When Peter is informed in general terms about Jesus' coming rejection and death, he takes our Lord to task and earns the rebuke, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matt.16:21-23) – how much more would the specifics of that death have been difficult for Peter and the others to bear? But as to crucifixion itself, that was in fact the primary means of Roman execution for non-Roman criminals and malefactors. Judea was a Roman protectorate, and the Romans were, apparently (although there is some scholarly debate on this point), the only ones with the power of capital punishment. Everyone in Judea would have been very well aware that if they or anyone else was going to be put to death by the authorities it would most likely be by crucifixion. And there is certainly no lack of information in Old Testament prophecy about the fact the Messiah must suffer (see especially Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12, and Psalm 22). In verse 16 of the latter reference, Psalm 22, it says "they have pierced My hands and feet" (cf. also Zech.12:10, "they will look upon Me, the One whom they have pierced"), and while one of the big problems for unbelieving Israel was then and it is now an inability and unwillingness to reconcile the glories of the Messiah with the suffering and humiliation of the Messiah, these passages are very clear and impossible to explain away. When Jesus makes reference, therefore, to us taking up our cross too, if we have (and if they had) read the pertinent scriptures with any light at all, we (and they) could at least not be in any doubt about the fact that Jesus was talking about the ultimate sacrifice of martyrdom – not that all who choose for Him will be martyred literally, but, as you suggest, that we all have to have the attitude of willingness not only to die for Him but to truly live for Him, putting Him and His Church first before any selfish consideration, and do it "daily" (Lk.9:23).

*

Q2: (Personal question) In Peter's Epistles #28 you explain angelic interest in believers who share in Christ's suffering. What is the true meaning of "taking up our cross" (Matt 10:39; 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; 14:27)? How is that manifested in the behaviour and application of our Christian walk?

From my limited understanding, I take it to be the daily commitment in walking faithfully with our Lord by reading, understanding, believing and applying His Word both to our lives and then subsequently to other people's lives according to the ministries Christ Jesus has assigned us to. Accompanied with this is daily prayer and substantive Bible teaching from well-prepared Bible teachers. As I have learnt from your studies and emails, I can understand how this spiritual investment into the Word is the only real way to spiritual maturity – for even our Lord prepared for ministry following this process (with perfect application) despite all His infinite power and wisdom (Phil 2:6-8; Luke 2:52). I also understand that after having achieved spiritual maturity (and inherited the crown of righteousness to be bestowed upon us on that wondrous Day of days) we will be tested in order to prove the genuineness of our faith. Providing we pass that testing successfully, we shall be pruned in order to produce the fruit for God's glory. Have I interpreted this "carrying our cross daily" correctly?

A2: Regarding taking up the cross, this is a metaphor used by our Lord to indicate the suffering that will come to believers who want to follow Him and are willing to do so. If we go our own way, we can expect that the road will not be "uphill" or difficult; but if we are intent upon pleasing our Lord, there will be a burden to take on, and a big part of bearing up under what that burden brings about is suffering – sharing the suffering of Christ, as scripture calls it (Rom.8:17; 2Cor.1:5; Phil.1:29-30; 3:10; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:12-13; cf. Matt.10:38; 16:24; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; 14:27; Acts 5:41; 2Cor.4:10-11; Gal.6:17; 1Thes.1:6; 2Thes.1:4-5; 2Tim.3:12). Again, I think your understanding of this as expressed here is excellent. There is a cost to biblical discipleship – which unlike the pseudo-discipleship movements in evangelicaldom means actually following Jesus Christ by doing what He wants us to do in growing by, progressing in and ministering through the Word of God.

"And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple."

Luke 14:27-33 NIV

Matthew 10:40-42 (NASB)

40 "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. 41 He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

*

Q1: How should we understand "in the name of a disciple"? Does it mean "as taught by the disciple", "acting as a disciple"?

A1: The versions which translate "because he is a disciple" have it right, I think [e.g. NIV]. Theoretically, the phrase could also apply to the giver, and in Greek through the figure of speech known as apo koinou it could go with both at the same time. The idea is that if the motivation is of a Christian helping another Christian, that is an act whose reward will not be lost.

*

A2: We receive rewards for everything we do in the power of the Spirit:

"And whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."

Matthew 10:42 NASB

These "specific act" rewards are no doubt of less importance than the crowns which represent much effort over long periods of time, consistently maintained – but they will be wonderful. This also helps to explain, by the way, how there can be absolute differentiation between every believer and every other believer, and how there can be three levels of reward by gate in the New Jerusalem even for those who have not earned a single crown: there will be significant variation between the highest rewarded non-crown believer and the lowest.

*

A3: See Reward motivation notes under *Matthew 9:6-21* (click hyperlink).

Matthew 11:2-5 (NASB)

2 Now when John, while imprisoned, heard of the works of Christ, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to Him, "Are You the Expected One, or shall we look for someone else?" 4 Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive 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.

*

A1: There are some references showing the fulfilment by our Lord of Isaiah's prophecies:

Luke 7:22 (NASB)

22 And He answered and said to them, "Go and report to John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them.

NIV SB: 7:22 report to John what you have seen and heard. In answer, Jesus pointed to his healing and life- restoring miracles. He did not give promises but clearly observable evidence-evidence that reflected the predicted ministry of the Messiah. the good news is proclaimed to the poor. In Jesus' review of his works he used an ascending scale of impressive deeds, ending with the dead raised and the good news preached to the poor. In this way Jesus reminded John that these were the things predicted of the Messiah in the Scriptures (see Isa 29:18-21; 35:5-6 and notes; 61:1; Lk 4:18 and note).

Isaiah 29:18-21 (NASB)

18 On that day the deaf will hear words of a book,
And out of their gloom and darkness the eyes of the blind will see.
19 The afflicted also will increase their gladness in the Lord,
And the needy of mankind will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.
20 For the ruthless will come to an end and the scorner will be finished,
Indeed all who are intent on doing evil will be cut off;
21 Who cause a person to be indicted by a word,
And ensnare him who adjudicates at the gate,
And defraud the one in the right with meaningless arguments.

Isaiah 35:5-6 (NASB)

5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened
And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.

6 Then the lame will leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy.
For waters will break forth in the wilderness
And streams in the Arabah.

*

Q2: Could you please tell me why in Matthew 11:2 John said "are you the One to come or should we expect someone else? I don't understand why John had to ask if Christ was the One to come since he had seen the Spirit as a dove descend upon the Lord (John 1:33-34).

A2: This was indeed a troubling thing for John to say. How much more would it not have been a difficult thing for our Lord to have to listen to from the very man who was His herald. The amount of personal suffering and disappointment Jesus had to contend with throughout His earthly life and especially during His three and a half year ministry even before His ordeal at the end is very much under-appreciated. Here, in John's case, we have the man who was His forerunner, His messenger, the one who proclaimed His ministry, who pronounced Him "the Lamb of God", now expressing open doubts. Only someone of complete dedication and absolute commitment could handle such a potentially demoralizing slap in the face from someone so important to Him - the *one person* who ought to have known better - and handle it with such grace, such restraint, such wisdom, such humility, and such truth.

John, you are right, had every reason to know that Jesus was the Messiah and that he was His herald. After all, this had been the prophecy from the birth of them both, and John would have been brought up with this knowledge. When he proclaims Jesus "the Lamb of God" in Andrew's hearing (Jn.1:29), he had, as you say, seen this remarkable miracle. Even though he may not have recognized Jesus at first without this miraculous sign - a sign he had been told about by God Himself (Jn.1:33) - they were cousins, after all, and after the fact that would have been known to John (just as we may have relatives we haven't seen since childhood, or maybe have never seen, but once we've met them it is easy enough to confirm that they are our kin). So John had 1) the prophecy of scripture; 2) the promise of the sign from God; 3) the miraculous fulfillment of the sign, and 4) the repeated reports if not personal observation of Christ's miracles over roughly a two and a half year period by this time. For this event occurs about the time of Jesus' sending out of the

twelve, an action which heralds the Messiah's year of salvation, the final year of Christ's earthly ministry, just before the death of John (Mk.6:1-13 with Mk.6:14-29; cf. Lk.9-10).

To be fair to John, he had been languishing in prison for some two years by this point, and in such straits it is at least understandable if not excusable that he fell into the trap that many of our Lord's contemporaries did, namely, he was no doubt expecting that by this time, well over two years after the miraculous sign he had witnessed, the Messiah would forcibly take control of His kingdom. In such circumstances, "a man's misery weighs heavily upon him" (Eccl.8:6), so that it would have been easy for John to doubt the reality he had seen with his eyes several years before and assume that he had been mistaken about Jesus (after all, he was still languishing in jail for what must have seemed an eternity). He might have been able to give in completely to doubt, that is, except for the fact that Jesus continued to perform the miraculous signs which all the country was talking about. The phrase in Matt.11:2 "when John heard in prison what Christ was doing" (and also Lk.7:18 compared with Lk.7:11-17) makes it clear that it is indeed these great miracles and signs which provokes John's doubting inquiry. To put it in the terms used by the Pharisees, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you really are the Christ, tell us plainly." To which Jesus replies "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in My Father's Name speak for Me." (Jn.10:24-26). When John asks whether Christ is "the One" or if they should look for someone else, he is clearly falling into the classic trap of his generation to look for a King rather than a Savior. If He were the Messiah, then why was He still humbly walking the land and not assuming regal power? But if He were not, then how could He be doing these miracles? But our Lord came to establish a kingdom greater than any earthly kingdom and to accomplish a salvation greater than any earthly deliverance. John should have had more patience (easy for me to say, not sitting in a dungeon months on end while events proceed contrary to all my expectations). After all, he did say that this Lamb "takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:22), but it was apparently still not clear to John, just as it continued to be unclear to the disciples until after that fact, that Jesus would have to suffer in the intense and humiliating way He did in order to purchase our lives and cover our sins (Mk.9:32: "but they did not understand what He meant and were afraid to ask Him about it"; cf. Mk.8:31-33).

There is a lesson here about patience and about trust. God always hears our prayers, but He does not always answer on our timetable. As to patience, for a God for whom "a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day", a month, a year, even a decade are not to be considered a negative answer - He will answer in the perfect way and at the perfect time if we do not give up (Lk.18:1-5; cf. Matt.7:7-8; Lk.11:5-10; Gal.6:9; Heb.12:3). As to trust, very often things do not turn

out the way we expect they will (that has been the theme of my life thus far). This is really a good thing, because if we truly had the power to choose in detail how our lives would develop, we would make a mess of it and would never get around to achieving for Christ what we have been called to do.

John was, in fact, fulfilling God's purpose for his life. As long as he was alive, in severe difficulty though he was, **he gave Jesus and His ministry a certain measure of "cover"** without which it might have otherwise been impossible to proceed (both from the standpoint of increased celebrity and of increased opposition). It was no accident in the divine plan that John died precisely at the beginning of the last year of ministry, the year many commentators et al. call "the year of opposition". In this final year Jesus and His ministry ran on ever more rapid and unavoidable collision course with the religious establishment of His day, culminating in their execution of Him - at the exact right time, at the conjunction of the ages, the central point and the focal point of all history (Rom.5:6; Heb.9:26).

John had a wonderful role to play in all of this, but it is a near universal human failing that we tend to focus on the unimportant and non-essential points of our lives (especially when they are causing us pain, grief, trouble, anxiety, etc.), and to forget the fact that every positive step we take in our Christian lives, and every legitimate act of ministry we accomplish, no matter how small, is working out an eternal weight of glory which cannot be compared with the greatest temporal successes (Rom.8:16; 2Cor.4:17). Would any of us have done any better than John? No doubt there are few of us who would have the nerve to claim we would have done half as well. But we can in any case learn from his mistake and make a point of remembering to patiently wait for God's deliverance from every trial, and to trust and believe in that deliverance even if everything our eyes see tells us that it is impossible - even to the point of death, for our God is a God who delivers from death, who has conquered death, and who raises the dead. And we should also make a note to trust Him even if the answers to our prayers may sometimes seem to our ignorant perspective exactly the opposite of what we need and for what we asking. For our God is a God who knows us better than we know ourselves, and will ever give His children only good things, truly good things, whether or not we have the spiritual acumen to appreciate them for what they are (Matt.7:11).

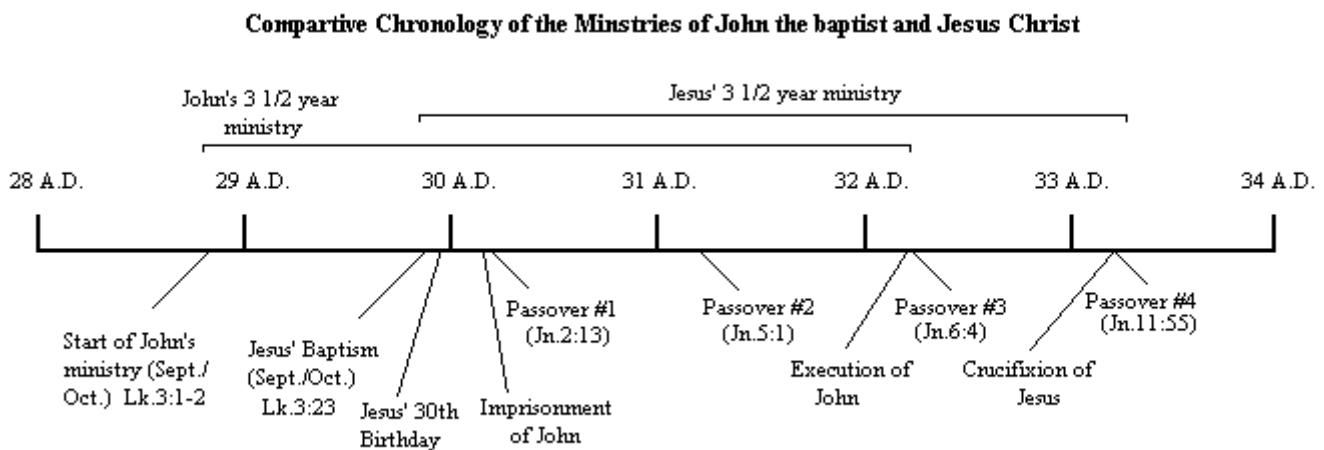
For more on the interrelationship between the ministries of John and our Lord see:

John's Baptism of Jesus

Zechariah (John's Father)

The Life of Christ.

And here is a chart from *part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series* comparing chronologically the ministries of Jesus and John:



Matthew 11:6 (NASB)

“And blessed is he who does not take offense at Me.”

Matthew 11:6 Lit whoever

Matthew 11:6 Or stumble over Me

*

Q: How should we understand "he who does take offense" (or "stumble over")? It seems that belief isn't directly implied here, but rather not dismissing Jesus?

A: That's right. Remember what Paul says: "we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1Cor.1:23). The generation of Jesus' day, a "generation" which in spiritual terms is still on the scene, was expecting a conquering, glorious Messiah, and were surprised at Jesus – how could someone who to all appearances was a mere human being be the long-hoped from liberator from the Romans (regardless of the miracles He was performing)? To believe in Him required and requires (for those with this issue) not to stumble over that particular impediment of thwarted expectations and to believe in Him even so. The blessed are those who do believe in the actual Jesus who came to suffer and die for our sins – an absolute necessity if anyone were going to be saved.

Matthew 11:7-10 (NASB)

7 As these men were going away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Those who wear soft clothing are in kings' palaces! 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet. 10 This is the one about whom it is written,

'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You,

Who will prepare Your way before You.'

*

Q: Could you explain this series of questions asked by our Lord and His reference to the reed, man in soft clothing and prophet?

A: The third question is the one to which the answer is obviously "yes!", and our Lord uses the first two to call attention to the extraordinary nature of John's ministry and his exceptional nature as a prophet (question #1 is obviously "no" because no one would seek out a common place, and question #2 is obviously "no" because no one would seek a typical celebrity "out of place").

Matthew 11:11 (NASB)

11 Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

*

Q1: Does by saying that "the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he" Jesus means that all those who are saved are, in their eternal state, greater than the greatest believer who is still on the earth?

A1: That is my understanding as well. I believe our Lord says this because it makes the dramatic point that we should all be looking ahead, not to status on this earth, for even if we were #1 on earth it couldn't be compared to being the absolute last in line at the judgment seat of Christ. For unbelievers, this makes it clear that it is better to be saved than to be the most highly sought-out celebrity in this life; for believers, this makes it clear that finishing the course is more important and better than any momentary "spiritual success" or renown, especially if it doesn't really carry any weight in God's eyes, and most especially if it leads to a diminution of faith and the danger to salvation that always entails.

*

Q2: NIV SB puts forward a different interpretation: 11:11 greater than he. John belonged to the age of the old covenant, which was preparatory to Christ. The least NT believer has a higher privilege in Christ as a part of his bride the church (Eph 5:25–27, 32) than John the Baptist, who was only a friend of the bridegroom (Jn 3:29). Another view, however, stresses the expression "whoever is least," holding that the key to its meaning is found in 18:4 —"whoever takes the lowly position of this child." Such a person, though "least," is regarded by God as even greater than John the Baptist.

A2: I don't agree with either of the above; in terms of the second one, we are talking in this verse about the objective "least" whereas Matthew 18:4 is speaking about acting in humility in spite of any actual authority one might possess; in terms of the first interpretation here, the Church consists of everyone from Adam and Eve to the last person saved during the Tribulation – so that this is what I call a "hyper-dispensationalist" interpretation. Scofield, Chafer and co. developed this set of doctrines (dispensationalism) in order to explain eschatology (primarily), but their followers have used this collective set of ideas as a hammer to pound down every rough spot in scripture with which they either don't agree or have trouble understanding. Instead of a lens used to reveal the truth, dispensationalism as currently practiced has become in many cases a means of blinding true understanding of what scripture actually says, means and teaches.

*

Q3: Does this passage again be taken to implicitly teach that eternal rewards are not equal?

A3: While it is true that there is a distinction in eternal rewards, it is also true that every believer will have a certain basic "package" which, even bereft of all additional reward, will result in unimaginable eternal bliss with no jealousy, envy, sadness or regret. However, this passage is deliberately comparing apples (things on earth) with oranges (things after the resurrection), so I don't believe it can be used for that purpose.

*

Q4: I thought I would come back to it, as I probably didn't make my question clear enough. I was referring here to our Lord's words "least in the kingdom of heaven", which could be taken that there are different level of rewards - if someone is considered "least", then there must also be those who are greater.

A4: There are most certainly different levels of reward in heaven, and, yes, I would agree that this verse can be taken as proof of that (very nice!).

Matthew 11:12 (NASB)

12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force.

NIV SB: 11:12 From the days of John the Baptist. From the beginning of Jesus' ministry.

*

Q: Do you agree that "from the days of John the Baptist" our Lord meant from the beginning of His ministry?

A: The focus of the assault is in this time period, but the principle goes back to the beginning of human history – the Church Age changes the situation as the Church moves over to the spiritual offensive (not without opposition, I should add), evidenced by the great mass of believers entering the lists for Christ and His Church during this era.

Matthew 11:14 (NASB)

14 And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.

*

A: Excerpt from Coming Tribulation 3a

For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the baptist]. And if you are willing to accept [this], he himself (i.e., John) is [typical of] Elijah who is destined to come [in the future].

Matthew 11:13-14

And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming [in the future] and will [then] **restore** all things. And I tell you that Elijah has [also] already come [in true type] and they did not acknowledge him, but did to him such [terrible] things as they desired. In the same way the Son of Man is also going to suffer at their hands".

Matthew 17:11-12 (cf. Mk.9:12-13)

In both of the above passages, our Lord confirms to His contemporaries the still future coming of the actual Elijah. His true type, however, had already come (i.e., John the baptist), just as Moses' true type was standing there among them (i.e., our Lord Himself, **the** Prophet about whom Moses spoke). The return of Elijah, the type of John, will be accompanied by the return of Moses, the type of Christ.

To help illustrate this point, a few words are in order here concerning some of the similarities between this dual set of types and antitypes.⁽⁸⁹⁾

- The two witnesses minister for three and one half years (Rev.11:3), as did John and our Lord Jesus Christ.⁽⁹⁰⁾
- John ministered "in the spirit and power of Elijah"(Lk.1:17), while Christ spoke of Moses' testimony about Himself (Jn.5:45-46; cf. Lk.24:44), and typicality to Himself (Jn.3:14).
- Elijah's extensive exile in the wilderness (1Ki.17:1-9) provides the type for John's ministry in the wilderness (Is.40:3-5), while Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai (Ex.24:15-18) is a type of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness of testing and communion with God (Matt.4:1-11).
- Elijah's persecution by Jezebel and Ahab (1Ki.19) is typical of John's persecution by Herod and execution at Herodias' behest (Matt.14:1-12), while Moses' disappearance and reappearance to His rebellious congregation (Ex.32:1) is typical of Christ's death and resurrection appearances to His doubting disciples (Jn.20:9; 20:25).
- Both John and Jesus were martyred (although this word hardly does justice to our Lord's unique sacrifice of Himself for the sins of the world), just as the two witnesses will be.
- Both Jesus and Moses are mediators of the New and Old Covenants respectively, wherein they represent man to God and God to man (Gal.3:19-20; 1Tim.2:5; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), while both John and Elijah called their countrymen to repent and adhere to these covenants (1Ki.18:21; Matt.3:1-2).
- Only Moses spoke with the Lord face to face (Ex.33:11), and only Christ has seen the Father (Jn.1:18), while both John and Elijah received special communication from our Lord Himself when they faltered in their faith (1Ki.19:9-18; Lk.7:18-28).

Matthew 11:17 (NASB)

17 and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.'

NIV SB: 11:17 played the pipe. As at a wedding. sang a dirge. As at a funeral. The latter symbolized the ministry of John, the former that of Jesus. The people of Jesus' "generation" (v. 16) were like children who refused to respond on either occasion.

*

Q1: It seems that the NIV SB interprets these words in a manner exactly opposite to yours, even though it requires to change the chronological order of "playing the flute" and "singing a dirge" - do you think that such a take is possible?

A1: I don't remember taking this verse as "Jesus/John"; I do recall explaining the next verse as John's separation vs. Jesus' engagement. I don't think it's necessary to match these up with weddings/funerals one way or the other. ***The point is that "this generation" is just looking for an excuse to reject the teaching of the truth, in a very childish way.***

*

Q2: I thought you did make the match here - flute was played to John who didn't dance, and dirge to our Lord who didn't weep:

On Luke 7:31-35, most exegetes take both of these examples as describing children at play. They mimic adult behaviors as is common in all culture. In this example, they are described as playing at a (wedding?) celebration and inviting onlookers to "have a good time" (dance), and later as playing at a funeral and inviting onlookers to "mourn". They castigate those who do not do so. This Jesus uses as an analogy against those who were "not pleased" with John (they didn't like the fact that he didn't "dance" and used his asceticism as a reason to devalue what he was saying) and yet were still "not pleased" with Jesus (they didn't like the fact that he didn't "mourn" and used his lack of similar asceticism as a reason to devalue what He was saying). Jesus makes it crystal clear with this analogy that the people who find fault with Him or John on either basis are really only "playing games" and are not serious about the message but only interested in discovering a way to find fault with the messenger.

A2: My "issue" is with the wording "symbolized the ministry"; what was at issue was only the behavior of John vs. that of Jesus – a very small detail in two ministries which were complementary in every way. It is true that John called to repentance – but so did our Lord. It is true that our Lord promised the Kingdom – but John proclaimed the coming King. I would be

hesitant in the extreme to back-characterize anything important from the facts that John lived ascetically as an example while Jesus met with people where they were (and certainly not in any sort of profligate way).

Matthew 11:19 (NASB)

19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

*

Q1: What does our Lord mean by "wisdom is vindicated by her deeds"? Are these words spoken to say that the effectiveness of both John's and Jesus' ministry proves their way of living was right? I read numerous interpretations, your clarification will be most helpful.

A1: The Greek conjunction which connects this sentence with what goes before is kai, not alla. And while kai can occasionally be adversative in biblical Greek, there are no indications that such is the case here. So what we have here is a case of faulty punctuation (there being no punctuation in the original Greek, of course). This sentence is something else that the "know-it-alls" said about Jesus, implying with these sanctimonious words that if our Lord had true wisdom, He would not be associating with this rabble or acting in a way contrary to the national expectations for a "prophet" (eating and drinking as opposed to fasting and living ascetically like John).

*

Q2: I'm still not entirely sure why our Lord says "Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds"?

A2: I guess I didn't make this one clear enough. ***Jesus didn't say this.*** This is what the Pharisees said in their self-righteousness about Him, implying that because He ate with sinners His deeds proved that He was not wise. The versions punctuate incorrectly to make it sound as if Jesus is quoting this as a proverb rather than quoting the Pharisees (which is the true case).

Matthew 11:21 (NASB)

21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

*

Q: Could you explain the reference to Tyre and Sidon?

A: Tyre and Sidon are gentile cities, so our Lord's remark casts the lack of gratitude and lack of spiritual responsiveness in these two Jewish cities in a starkly negative light.

Matthew 11:23 (NASB)

23 And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day.

*

Q: Hello Sir,

21 "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.

Matt.11:21

23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades. For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day.

Matt.11:23

Are these sentences technically called "hyperbole"?

A: I know these are "difficult sayings", but I think we should take them literally. After all, these are hypotheticals. Such miracles did not actually take place in Sodom, after all. So it is only "if they had" that there would have been such results. And it is important to add that if there had been any positive bent of mind in Sodom, the Lord would have provided the truth – for He always provides the truth for any and all who want the truth (cf. Gen.18:22ff.). Thus the comparison to Sodom is an apt one (of course). For these people of the towns in Jesus' day who were ignoring our Lord were in fact no better than those corrupt cities which were destroyed long ago. In fact, they were worse, because they were denying the truth they had seen with their own eyes, and the Messiah who had come to them personally according to prophecy (e.g., Is.9:1-2; cf. Jn.1:11).

So the "problem" is actually the other way around from what is usually understood. It is not that Sodom and Gomorrah would have repented if such had happened for them because they were not in fact interested in the truth; the truth would only have come to them (so as to fulfill this hypothetical) had they wanted it. The point is that the truth did come to these cities in Galilee and they should have been happy to get it – but in fact they wanted none of our Lord's words, which makes them worse than the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah who did not receive a similar blessing: Q.E.D.

I am certainly keeping you and yours in prayer as well, for your health and confidence, for your son's health, for your wife's spiritual growth, for your family's salvation, and for the success of your business.

Keep fighting the good fight and I will endeavor to do so as well.

Matthew 11:27 (NASB)

27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.

*

Q: What does our Lord mean by "no one knows the Son except the Father"?

A: No one was accepting the Lord for who He was - but the Father knew; further, without the Son, it's impossible to accept the Father (the verb here in both cases is epi-gignosko, not gignosko, i.e., the full-knowledge that comes only with faith).

Matthew 11:28 (NASB)

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

NIV SB: 11:28 weary and burdened. Probably a reference to the "heavy ... loads" the Pharisees placed "on other people's shoulders" by insisting on a legalistic interpretation of the law (23:4).

*

Q: Do you agree that the reference is to the heavy loads placed by pharisaical legalism?

A: I would not want to limit this wonderful passage. Sin is a heavy load, as is the consciousness thereof. Every human being becomes aware from an early age of the problem of death and imperfection – and, as Romans chapter one tells us, also of the existence, magnitude and righteousness of God. Facing death and judgment under the burden of sin is indeed a heavy load whose only relief is the salvation which comes through faith in Christ alone.

Matthew 12:8 (NASB)

8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

*

Q: Was it our Lord who gave the Law to Moses? If so, could we understand that since He is the One who gave it, He can also change it?

A1: This really is the point: the Sabbath was designed by God for the benefit of man; Jesus Christ took on true humanity and as Lord of the Sabbath made use of that day for the benefit of man – the true purpose of the Sabbath.

*

A2: Our Lord followed the Law (the true Law) and the only "breaking" that took place was for the sake of fulfilling His purpose in completing the Law – in other words it was not a "breaking" at all. As our Lord tells us, He is "Lord of the Sabbath" so that the rules only applied to Him to the extent that He wished to comply so as not to offend (in the same way that He did not really owe the temple tax but told Peter to pay it for both of them – and gave him the means to do so). The Sabbath "was made for man, not man for the Sabbath", so that the whole idea of anyone finding fault with our Lord for doing good on the Sabbath was and is offensive.

Matthew 12:9-14 (NASB)

9 Departing from there, He went into their synagogue. 10 And a man was there whose hand was withered. And they questioned Jesus, asking, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”—so that they might accuse Him. 11 And He said to them, “What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? 12 How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.” 13 Then He *said to the man, “Stretch out your hand!” He stretched it out, and it was restored to normal, like

the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against Him, as to how they might destroy Him.

*

A: (Email Response) I will not repeat all of the information available at Ichthys on this subject (you have read one or more of the postings; you have a new link above and I will give you a list below). But there are a few other matters that should be addressed now, prime among which is the question of just what is meant by "keeping the Sabbath". Rabbinic Judaism has any manner of "interesting" interpretations of this issue, of course. In Israel today the elevators in high rise apartment buildings are set to stop on every floor automatically, because pushing a button is considered "work". I am sure you are acquainted with the "Sabbath day's journey" found in scripture at Acts 1:12. Rabbinic interpretation has various lengths but this particular journey would be something under a mile. However, in Exodus we find:

"See, for the Lord hath given you the Sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day."

Exodus 16:29 KJV

According to the Rabbinic view, driving to church would be "breaking the Sabbath", and walking a mile or more would be as well (not to mention the return trip!). But the passage above states unequivocally that "Sabbath keepers" are to stay home entirely. Yet in Jesus' day, this was not the practice, of course. Observant Jews gathered for worship in the synagogue and Jesus did as well (e.g., Mk.1:21; 6:2; Lk.4:16-20). Was Jesus breaking the Sabbath in so doing? Or was He accommodating to the practices of the times for a greater spiritual purpose? He was and is "Lord of the Sabbath", and therefore entitled to do whatever needed to be done, even on the Sabbath day, in the greater interest of fulfilling every aspect of God's plan for Him perfectly (Matt.12:8; Lk.6:5). After all, Jesus was accused many times of "breaking the Sabbath" because He did God's work therein, healing the sick and casting out demons (e.g., Mk.3:2; cf. Lk.6:2). To those who looked at Him with jaundiced eye as a "Sabbath breaker", He pointed out their hypocrisy:

And He said to them, "What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:11-12 NASB

On one occasion, it was His disciples who were "caught" breaking the Sabbath, picking heads of grain and eating them as they passed through a field.

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:2-8 NIV

I agree that Jesus is the One who gives us our example, and I find in the scriptures that "doing good" and "serving God" are said and demonstrated by Him to fulfill rather than to break the command to "keep the Sabbath" (cf. Jn.7:23). If the Lord of the Sabbath served a higher spiritual reality, should His servants do less? Nor can this area of exception be limited to "church" activities, because what the disciples did in providing for their material needs and what Jesus points out any person would do in caring for their animals are not special acts, but normal acts necessary to support spiritual activity. Of all the commandments, only the fourth is thus deliberately split into spiritual and ritual components. And if that is true in Israel under the Law, how much more should we not be wary today of ignoring Hebrews chapter four and restricting our understanding of the fourth commandment to the shadows now fulfilled?

In any case, ritual Sabbath observance is now problematic in any case. Even within Judaism today there are differences in how this command is "kept", and reconstructing the precise rituals of Jesus' day is not an easy matter (and, as the "journey" makes clear, even then there were discrepancies between the Torah and the tradition). I would imagine you do not light the menorah on Friday night nor walk a short distance to synagogue on Saturday morning (and for all I know you may consider Sunday the "new Sabbath"). Simply doing something different from what most Christians do on Sunday (or Saturday) is not the same thing as "keeping the Sabbath" in the ritual fashion of Jesus' day, let alone according to what the Torah actually envisions. But all these shadows have been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ – whom we all should love with our hearts and souls and minds and might. Loving Him means indeed being loyal to the truth, for He and the Father want true worshipers, those who worship "in Spirit and in truth", not in ritual and in shadow (Jn.4:23-24).

For example, the Law commands circumcision (Gen.17:10ff.). But the council at Jerusalem ruled on this issue that gentiles were not required to fulfill this most fundamental precept of the Law (Acts 15). Paul goes on at great length on this subject in Galatians, inveighing against those legalists who were bullying the Galatians into being circumcised, stating, among other things, that if they did succumb to the pressure they would be obligated "to keep the whole Law" (Gal.5:3), that is, to go back to the entire regime of shadow worship that looked forward to the wonderful spiritual realities they were on the point of forsaking.

Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?

Galatians 3:3 NIV

Instead of a circumcision done by human hands, we now have a new spiritual reality, **the circumcision of the heart** (Deut.30:6; Col.2:11; Rom.2:28-29). Instead of a ritual day observance, we now have a **moment by moment Sabbath rest**, a wonderful spiritual reality which we are called upon to enter and in which we are called to **abide at all times in the power of the Holy Spirit** (Heb.4:1-13). If we are physically circumcised, we are obligated to follow the Law in all of its details. If we adopt the Sabbath observance of the Law, how are we not also then likewise obligated to be consistent in every respect when it comes to keeping the whole Law? And this is manifestly impossible, for there are at present no temple, no priests, no festivals, no land of promise, etc. But if you would go back to the observance of the Law in terms of the Sabbath keeping of Jesus' day, what gives you the authority to choose this one precept out of all the so many others that the Torah comprises? On what basis do you "pick and choose"? If you tell me, "the 10 commandments", I must reply that on the one hand these are certainly not represented in the Law as fundamentally separate from the rest of the Torah so as to give any leeway to ignoring any of the other commands. On the other hand, if you take the position that only the 10 are to be matters of faith and practice for the Church (though on what biblical basis it would be hard to see), then it should be pointed out that the fourth commandment is the only one which is in fact not repeated in the New Testament as mandatory for Christians to keep in the traditional sense. The commandment is, however, reapplied in the spiritual sense discussed above, and not only by Paul in Hebrews, but by our Lord Himself.

"Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."

Matthew 12:12 NIV

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6:9-10 NIV

Here is a list of the references at Ichthys which touch on this subject:

Jesus' early life and preparation for ministry (in BB 4A)

Sabbath Questions

Sabbath Observance

Should Christians honor Sunday as the new Sabbath?

Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.

True Orthodoxy and False Creeds

Keep the Sabbath (the fourth commandment: in SR 5)

Matthew 12:17-21 (NASB)

17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet:

18 "Behold, My Servant whom I have chosen;

My Beloved in whom My soul is well-pleased;

I will put My Spirit upon Him,

And He shall proclaim justice to the Gentiles.

19 "He will not quarrel, nor cry out;

Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.

20 "A battered reed He will not break off,

And a smoldering wick He will not put out,

Until He leads justice to victory.

21 "And in His name the Gentiles will hope."

Q1: Could you clarify why Matthew quotes Isaiah at this particular point and how this quotation is linked to the events presented so far in the chapter?

A1: This affirmation of our Lord as the Messiah and the fulfillment of all the Messianic promises comes after the deliberate rejection of Him by the nation's leaders. As a result, He will die for the sins of the people – and for all people – with the result that He will be the hope of all nations, the Savior of the world.

*

Q2: Could "not quarreling" nor "crying out" be matched with the fact that our Lord withdraws (verse 15) and the battered reed to be the man whom our Lord healed (verses 10-13)?

A2: I wouldn't reject that as an application. For me, verse nineteen speaks of the cross; verse twenty of His policy of mercy as a result; verse twenty-one of the results of the expansion of the gospel. So Matthew is "looking ahead" at this point and foreshadowing all that is to come at this appropriate "take off" point.

Matthew 12:19 (NASB)

19 "He will not quarrel, nor cry out;

Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets.

*

Q: Is this prophecy a reference to our Lord's humility?

A: Yes: to *His kenosis* and the uniqueness of the first advent (see the link), and in particular also to the courage with which He endured the gauntlet of suffering in order to get to the cross (cf. Is.53:7 quoted at Acts 8:32).

Matthew 12:27 (NASB)

27 If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges.

*

Q1: Does this verse mean that there were other Israelites capable of casting out demons who were not among the apostles?

A1: No. What it means is that contemporary Jews recognized that demon possession was common enough in their day and made efforts to cast them out – one would think by invoking the Name of the Lord. Those who criticized our Lord for doing something effectively which others whom they approved of were actually unable to do were thus indirectly condemning their own judgment: Jesus establishes with these words that He is doing nothing other than what Jews in very good repute were trying to do – except that He was not vainly "play acting". Clearly, criticizing Him for this (in blasphemous terms) was completely inconsistent with applauding others who vainly tried to do the same thing.

*

Q2: How should we understand our Lord's words "For this reason they will be your judges"?

A2: Since even the Pharisees' own sons are doing what Jesus is doing (although without the Spirit and therefore without effect), they bear witness to the fact that the Pharisees' objection/accusation is groundless.

Matthew 12:29 (NASB)

29 Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

*

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 6

c. Special Security Precautions for Satan: We should note here that the security measures used to sequester the devil for the duration of the Millennium are threefold and are therefore unique. First, he is locked in the Abyss (in common with all other fallen angels removed from circulation from the beginning of human history for various violations of divine ground rules; cf. Lk.8:31). Secondly the devil is placed in chains within the Abyss as a second level of security (as were those fallen angels who severely violated protocol by cohabiting with human women prior to the flood; Gen.6; 2Pet.2:14-10; Jude 1:5-7). Finally and uniquely, the Abyss is specially "sealed", indicating that throughout the Millennium there will be no access to the Abyss whatsoever (and hence no possible chance of the devil exiting until the appointed time through either accident or design). The exceptional level of precautions taken here shows very clearly the importance of a Millennium without the devil.

Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man (i.e., analogous to Satan)? Then he can rob his house (i.e., analogous to the distribution of the plunder upon conquering his kingdom: Ps.68:18; Is.33:23b; 53:12; 60:11; Lk.11:22; Eph.4:7-8).

Matthew 12:29 NIV

Matthew 12:31 (NASB)

31 “Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven.

NIV SB: 12:31 blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. The context (vv. 24, 28, 32) suggests that the unpardonable sin was attributing to Satan Christ's authenticating miracles done in the power of the Holy Spirit (see note on Mk 3:29).

*

Q1: NIV SB provides an explanation which sounds very reasonable - do you agree it's correct?

A1: Yes, as far as it goes; since the Spirit testifies to the truth of the gospel, calling the Spirit satanic is a firm rejection of the gospel; and rejection of the gospel is always thus blasphemy because it calls God a liar, impugning the truth of the message the Spirit is mediating. Thus the only unpardonable sin is rejecting the gospel, rejecting Jesus Christ: the refusal to accept Him and His sacrifice was the only sin for which Christ could not die since it is by taking on humanity and dying for sin that all are saved who accept Him and His work on the cross.

*

Q2 (email): One clarification regarding the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and Matthew 12:31. Would you say that this passage could be explained in the following way: blasphemy against the humanity of Jesus (His poverty and 'earthly' attributes) is pardonable, but blasphemy against His deity (His ministry and attributing His teaching to the devil) is the unpardonable sin and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

And the second way to define it would be, based on what you said, that this is a sin of rejecting Jesus' teaching absolutely and forever, as in order to do it one has to first get to the point whereby His teaching and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is attributed to the demon, which, as you said, is the one sin for which our Lord couldn't die. This can be opposed to a sin of ignorance (like Saul's),

whereby one can commit blasphemy against Jesus, but it's character isn't absolute and the attitude can still change.

Taken together, these two blasphemies could be defined in the following way: a) the pardonable blasphemy is a blasphemy against the humanity of Jesus, and it's character is not absolute - the one committing this sin hasn't yet reached a point whereby changing his mind is impossible; b) the unpardonable blasphemy is against the deity of Jesus and it's character is absolute - Jesus' works are attributed to demon and the one responsible for this offence has rejected salvation conclusively, hence committing the one sin, for which our Lord could not die.

Finally, I wanted to ask you about two views on this sin. Some say that this sin cannot be committed by a believer (once we believe it's impossible to reject the fact that our Lord's miracles were completed through the Holy Spirit), others say in order to actually commit this sin, one needs to 'reject the light' and Spirit's testimony, meaning that it is not a sin of complete ignorance ('not knowing the light at all') - it's a sin of consciously shutting this light out and separating oneself from it.

This is the understanding of this passage at which I have arrived, please correct wherever needed.

A2: Blasphemy against the Spirit is something that happens in the heart. The Spirit testifies to the heart of the unbeliever the truth of the gospel. If the unbeliever rejects the truth as untruthful, that is the blasphemy because it amounts to calling the Holy Spirit a liar (whether the person even knows there is a Holy Spirit). ***Blasphemy against the Spirit is rejecting the truth about Jesus Christ so as to refuse salvation.*** I am sensitive to the distinction here about unbelievers who may hear the gospel and not "take it" at that point. I am certain that this is not necessarily unpardonable. That is to say, there are unbelievers who take their time in accepting Jesus Christ. What our Lord has in mind here is the flat rejection of the truth that admits of no change – and that is unpardonable – rather than an agnostic reception or a rejection which will later change. Paul was a very adamant opponent of the gospel – he must have heard it – but did not block it out of his heart entirely and forever, otherwise he would not have kept searching the scriptures and so become responsive to the truth when our Lord appeared to him. Again, I don't mean in any of my writings on this subject to reduce "blasphemy against the Spirit" to a particular sin or a particular category. Jesus is making a point when He says this and to me the point is clear enough: if you call Jesus demon possessed, you are blaspheming the Spirit who is the real power doing the miracles, and if you have no room in your heart for the words of the Spirit about how to be saved through faith in Christ, that is something for which you cannot be forgiven, because only

through faith in Christ is there any salvation. I'm not sure I have satisfied your concerns on this one but would be happy to have another go.

Matthew 12:32 (NASB)

32 Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come.

*

Q: What does our Lord mean by "the age to come"?

A: Eternity is meant: refusing to accept Jesus as Savior results in eternal condemnation.

Matthew 12:34-37 (NASB)

34 You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. 35 The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. 36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

NIV SB: 12:36 day of judgment. At Christ's second coming; sometimes referred to as "that day" (7:22; 2Ti 1:12, 18), "the day of slaughter" (Jas 5:5; see note there).

*

Q1: How do we know that Christ's second coming is meant here rather than the final judgment?

A1: As you discern, the note is incorrect; our Lord is speaking about unbelievers here. Those who are held to account at the last judgment are unbelievers and their judgment comes at the end of history (the Great White Throne of Revelation 20 = the judgment of the goats in Matthew 25).

*

Excerpt from Hamartiology Part 3b – Sins of thought, word and deed

A2: Although overt sins, especially the exceptionally damaging and deadly ones, tend to attract most of the attention when the subject of sin comes up, we should not for that reason make the mistake of assuming that mental and verbal sins are somehow of a lesser variety – they may be of a slightly different categorical type, but sin is sin, and holy God keeps all sin at arm's length. Jesus

died for every sin of whatever size or type, and without His work on the cross *for every sin ever committed*, we would still be facing eternal condemnation instead of anticipating eternal life.

Finally, although for purposes of discussion we have differentiated between mental, verbal, and overt sins, we would not want to leave the impression that they are for that reason unrelated, or that they can somehow be separated out in practice, for they usually cannot be. When Jesus tells us that a man who looks upon a woman to lust after her has already "committed adultery in his heart" (Matt.5:27-28), it is clear in our Lord's view the distance between lustful thoughts, seductive words, and immoral acts is so small as to be non-existent for all practical purposes.

Despite the fact that this particular passage, Matthew 5:27-28, is very well-known, the degree to which thinking, speaking, and acting are inextricably inter-connected from the biblical point of view is often underappreciated. In truth, our deeds reflect our thoughts, our thinking motivates our words, and our words are so significant that they will form the basis for our future justification or condemnation (cf. Prov.23:7; Is.14:13).

You offspring of vipers! How can you say what is good when you are evil? For the mouth speaks what fills the heart. A good person brings good things out of the good he has stored up, while the evil person brings forth evil things out of the evil he has stored up. I tell you that on the day of judgment everyone will give an account for every idle word they have spoken. So it is by your words that you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

Matthew 12:34-37

Hatred, anger and arrogance may produce harsh words of slander, threats and reproaches, and these in turn are often followed by acts of violence, so that the continuum of sinful thoughts engendering sinful words and producing sinful deeds is easy enough for anyone to see. For example, kidnaping, motivated by gain and assisted by lies and conspiracy, sexual immorality originating in lust and facilitated by verbal seduction, or idolatry born of abandoning God in one's heart and accompanied by blasphemy, all clearly show that thoughts, words and deeds are essentially inseparable in practice. For deeds are seldom really ever undertaken in the absence of thoughts (be they ever so visceral and fleeting) and words (be they expressed or unexpressed):

The things that come out of a person's mouth come out of the heart, and these are the things that defile a person. For out of the heart come evil designs, acts of murder, of adultery, of sexual immorality, of theft, of false witness, [and] of blasphemy.

Matthew 15:18-19

From a purely biblical point of view, therefore, it is better to have the idea of sin as a three-headed monster rather than three separate beasts, for splitting up sinful thoughts and words and deeds is in truth impossible. In reality, they form a continuum of evil that is inevitably always of a piece. Final proof of this is to be found in the numerous biblical catalogs of sin where all three types are always intermingled as equally dangerous and equally sinful:

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush to evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

Proverbs 6:16-19 NIV

(24) Therefore God abandoned them to self-defilement in the lusts of their hearts bent upon uncleanness. (25) For they exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and they honored and served the creature over the Creator who is blessed forever, amen! (26) For this reason God abandoned them to dishonorable passions. Their females even exchanged natural [sexual] practice for that which is contrary to nature. (27) Likewise also the males abandoned natural [sexual] practice with females and became inflamed in their lust for one another – males with males – consummating their shamefulness and receiving upon themselves [as a result] the penalty their error deserved. (28) And just as they did not see fit to keep God in their hearts, God abandoned them to their unfit minds, to do things which are not fitting. (29) [For they are] filled with all [manner of] unrighteousness, evil, wickedness, greed, full of envy, murder, strife, guile, malevolence, they are rumormongers, (30) slanderers, haters of God, presumptuous, arrogant, braggarts, devisers of evil, inconsiderate of their parents, (31) unthinking, unreconcilable, uncaring, unmerciful, (32) men who though they had full knowledge of God's righteous decree, namely, that those who do such things are worthy of death, not only did [such] things themselves, but even commended those who made it their practice [to do them].

Romans 1:24-32

As it is written [in scripture]: "There is no one righteous, not a single person. There is no one who understands. There is no one who diligently seeks God. All have turned away, [and] have become worthless. There is no one who is doing what is good – there is no one, not even a single person. Their throat is an open grave, they deal craftily with their tongues, [and] vipers' venom hides behind their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Their feet [take them] swift[ly] to spill blood. In their ways are found calamity and misery, and they are not acquainted with the way of peace. There is no fear of God before their eyes.
Romans 3:10-18

Don't you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor practitioners of homosexuality nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

1st Corinthians 6:9-10

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies – and whatever is similar to all these things. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of heaven.

Galatians 5:19-21

But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse jesting – things that have no place [among you].

Thanksgiving [is what ought to be heard coming from you] instead. For of this you can be sure: no immoral, impure, or greedy person – such a man is an idolater – has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Ephesians 5:3-5

So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers; cf. chap.2) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God, possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away.

2nd Timothy 3:1-5

Outside (i.e., of the gates of New Jerusalem) are the dogs (i.e., unclean and worthless), and those who indulge in witchcraft, and the sexually immoral, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and makes use of the lie.

Revelation 22:15

The more we read and pay attention to scripture, the better we become acquainted not only with what the Bible has to say in the way of specific prohibition, but also – and just as importantly – what it teaches us about our behavior in general, both in terms of what it is expedient for a follower of Jesus Christ to do as well as what it is best to avoid (see II.9 below, "The Ten Commandments"). We are called to the highest of standards, namely, holiness (1Pet.1:15-16), and not even an encyclopedic knowledge of overt biblical prohibitions is capable of bringing us anywhere near the attainment of that standard until, instead of walking in the flesh (Rom.8:4), we are truly walking in love, walking in the Spirit, and walking in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ (Eph.5:2; Gal.5:25; 1Jn.2:6). Against such things there is no law (Gal.5:23).

Matthew 12:36-37 (NASB)

36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. 37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

*

Q: Could you please explain that, and also please explain Matthew 12:36-37 where we are told that we will "give an account" for the careless words we speak.

A: As to Matthew 12:36-37, everyone will stand before the Lord in eternity to render an account for everything they have done. As believers, we shall have passed from death unto life, so that our evaluation is not a "last judgment" per se (Jn.5:22-24; and compare Rev.20:4-6 with Rev.20:11-15). We shall "stand before Christ's judgment tribunal" and render an account for our lives, all we have done and failed to do - that is what it is to fear the Lord (Rom.4:12; 2Cor.5:10). But our evaluation, while it may in some cases be extremely embarrassing, will result in salvation, even in those cases where nearly everything the person has done has to be burned as worthless (1Cor.3:11-15). We who believe in Jesus Christ will be like the servants of Luke 19:11-27 who have at least some production for our Lord - it may be 10 minas, it may be 5, or it may only be "interest" on our "talent" (corresponding to the three crowns of glory, life, and righteousness respectively), but we will have something to show for our Christian lives. And whatever we have done that is worthless will be burned up. So we need to notice first of all that the evaluation of the believer is fundamentally different from that of the unbeliever - there may be embarrassment, there may be loss, and therefore there may be reason to fear before the fact (cf. 2Cor.5:11 with the preceding

verses), but all the promises of eternity will be ours forever, and once this judgment is completed, there will be "no more tears etc."

Unbelievers, on the other hand, have no hope in this judgment, no matter what "good" deeds they have done, and these verses you ask about, Matt.12:36-37, indicate that even through their expressed opinions it will be an easy matter to demonstrate to every unbeliever the validity and justness of their condemnation. As James makes quite clear, the tongue is in many ways diabolical and its control problematic (Jas.3:6). For the tongue is the gate through which the thoughts of the evil heart first burst forth (cf. Matt.15:18-19; Lk.19:22; cf. Jer.17:9-10). So then we shall all have to give an account to the Lord (1Pet.4:5), of our thoughts (Rom2:16), our words (Matt.12:36-37), and our deeds (Rev.20:12), but the difference is that for believers, the true "judgment" of all that is sinful has already taken place - all our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds have been nailed to the cross of Christ and have been removed as an issue for salvation - we rely on the work of Christ. That is not to say that we are not to be careful about what we say, both in terms of avoiding the ill (Eph.5:4) and cleaving to the good (Col.4:6). Nor does it mean that we will not have to have the face to face accounting with our Lord for all our misdeeds, only that this evaluation will not, can not jeopardize our salvation in anyway.

One final observation: the speaking of harsh words against God is a particularly egregious offense in scripture (compare Jude 1:15 with 1:8), and is a significant characteristic both of antichrist (Dan.7:8; 7:20; 7:25; 8:25; 11:36; 2Thes.2:4; Rev.13:5-6; 16:14; 17:13-14; 19:19) and his most zealous supporters (1Tim.4:1ff; 2Tim.3:1ff; 2Pet.3:3-7; Jude 1:8; 1:15) - facts that account in part for our Lord's emphasizing of words in His reproach of these "vipers" in the context you ask about, Matthew 12:36-37, rather than of thoughts or deeds.

We Christians are not perfect, and we have a healthy fear of the Lord to help keep us on the right path, but we need also to remain encouraged that the blessings we have as a result of our faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ, kept secure for us in the heavens, are not to be compared with all the treasuries of this temporary world.

Please also see the following link which discusses the Last Judgment and the basis for unbeliever judgment: [The Last Judgment: Revelation 20:11-15](#)

Matthew 12:38-39 (NASB)

38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.”
39 But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet;

*

A: The sign of Jonah is the analogy between his time in the belly of the great fish and the time our Lord's body was in the grave: just as Jonah came forth from what seemed like certain death, so our Lord came forth from the grave in living, bodily resurrection – and there is no greater sign that He is the Messiah:

. . . and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

Romans 1:4 ESV

Matthew 12:42-45 (NASB)

42 The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

43 “Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. 44 Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. 45 Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”

*

Q: Could you please explain the relationship between the teaching given in Matthew 12:42 and the one which follows - Matthew 12:43-45?

A: As with an earlier question, the relationship is not necessarily one of interdependent connection. Our Lord is talking in this section about the hardness of those who refuse to accept Him, and in the first part you ask about "this generation" compares unfavorably to gentile foreigners of the past who came from remote areas to hear the truth and yet our Lord's contemporaries who have the truth thrown into their laps are not interested in it. The passage about the unclean spirit makes a similar point in that our Lord has given His hearers a wonderful

blessing, the truth of the gospel, but it is of no use to them if they do not respond so as to be liberated from spiritual bondage - the end will be worse than the beginning.

Matthew 12:47 (NASB)

47 Someone said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You." [a]

Matthew 12:47 This verse is not found in early mss

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Q: Should verse 47 be a part of the scripture?

A: It's a little hard to say. It's not present in Vaticanus; Sinaiticus doesn't have it in the text per se but Aleph also accidentally omits another short phrase; both that phrase and verse 47 are in the bottom margin and appear to be in the same hand or the hand of a contemporaneous corrector. Since the omission may be explained by homoioteleuton (similar ending of a phrase causing the eye to jump forward), there are good reasons for including it. Moreover, since the sentence may be the basis for our Lord's reply in the next verse, there is much evidence to consider it original. On the other hand, these reasons also explain an inclusion of something not actually present in the original. What we can say is that Mark 3:32 and Luke 8:20 do reference the interlocutors telling our Lord about the presence of His family – so it happened like this, whether or not we ought to include the additional words here.

Matthew 13:1-9 (NASB)

1 That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea. 2 And large crowds gathered to Him, so He got into a boat and sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

3 And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, "Behold, the sower went out to sow; 4 and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. 5 Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. 6 But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. 7 Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. 8 And others fell on the good soil and *yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. 9 He who has ears, let him hear."

*

Matthew 13:18-23 (NASB)

18 "Hear then the parable of the sower. 19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is the one on whom seed was sown beside the road. 20 The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. 22 And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. 23 And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

*

A1: As to the parable of the Sower, in my understanding of the symbolism, since the seed is the Word of God (Mk.4:14) and is sown on ***four types of ground or soil which represent different types of people and their response to the Word*** (Mk.4:15; 4:16; 4:18; 4:20), then each category should be meaningful in its own right (something I can't reconcile with a levels-of-production only interpretation). It is certainly logical for the Word-seed in good soil to produce legitimate good works, but please note that only in the case of the "good soil" is "production" mentioned (Mk.4:20). Not only that, but in the first case of the hard-packed ground the Word never sprouts in the first place, and in the second case of the rocky ground it actually dies out. The third case is ambiguous, and I believe deliberately so. If we believe in Jesus, we should emulate His production and should not allow the cares of this world to choke off all of our production. Is the third case a believer? It is possible, but if so it is someone whose "works" are not legitimate and who will have all such false production incinerated at Christ's judgment seat (1Cor.3:11-15).

One other important point for me in this parable is its likely universal application. Many if not most of our Lord's general parables deal with unbelievers as well as believers. That is because the Word is available to all (and Christ came to save all), and so I would be inclined to think that this parable applies to all human beings (unless I found something therein which points decisively in another direction). All human beings are here on earth for the purpose of responding to the Word of God, and all human beings (whose intelligence is not decisively impaired or who fail to reach maturity) are, sooner or later, brought to the point of understanding that there is a God and that

He is their only hope of achieving life and avoiding death. The mechanism by which this truth is taught to all is historically called "natural revelation":

The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament tells of the work of His hands. One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). Their design has gone out into (i.e., "is visible throughout") the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens/firmament's night sky), and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalm 19:1-6

Thus the sowing of the Word is something that happens not just for believers, but it is something which only has a chance of growing and then producing in believers who respond in the appropriate way. Sadly, in the history of the world, by far the majority of people have fallen into the first category, hardening their hearts so as not to accept the Word at all, and this was even our Lord's experience among those He had come to personally.

*

A2: As to the parable of the Sower, there is much upon which we agree. However let me note from the beginning that the scripture very clearly teaches us that "the Sower sows the Word" (Mk.4:14; Lk.8:11). The plant then is indeed separate from the Word-seed which produces it, but that plant must then be whatever comes out of the combination of the person (soil) and his/her response to the Word (seed), which to me is best expressed as "**faith response**". I also entirely agree that it is possible to be saved yet largely unproductive; that possibility is summed up for me by group #3 (and, as you say, presented as a negative alternative in 1Cor.3 – I have much to say about this in the part 6 of Coming Tribulation re: the Judgment of the Church; see the link). Whether or not everyone in that third group truly believes is a moot point since anyone reading this parable and becoming concerned about it must by definition be a Christian who is or soon will "get on the stick" and begin the process of spiritual growth from which all true production flows.

I would certainly agree with what you have to say about #1. As to group #2 and #3, I think it is fair to assume that Jesus meant these four groups as teaching four different lessons. If we assume that #2 are poor believers, we have a problem because then there would be no significant difference

between the #2 and #3. Moreover, if the plant = works, then neither #2 or #3 produces anything worthwhile (i.e., for my money they would then be exactly the same in every important detail, merely expressed differently for some unknown reason). However, notice that group #3 is unproductive because while the plant does grow (I would call this faith), it is choked by weeds so that it does not produce a crop. That has two very important applications for our purposes. First, it shows that it is the fruit of the plant and not the plant itself which represents acceptable production. As an agricultural analogy that certainly makes sense. After all, if I am growing corn, what good does it do me to have a field full of wonderful green corn plants if there are no ears of corn on them? Secondly, since the plant is what does producing – or what should do the producing – the plant would seem to me to best represent the faith of the believer from which response and production flows (Phil.2:17; 1Thes.1:3; 2Thes.1:11; 1Tim.1:4; Heb.11:4ff.). ***We believe, and so we respond. The stronger our faith, the better our response.*** That makes sense from the standpoint of the first group, doesn't it? If they are the ground and the seed is the Word, the plant would be the response to the Word. It never comes for the first group, it doesn't produce for the third group, but it does result in a crop for the fourth group, the group to which we should all aspire, true believers who not only receive the Word with faith and joy, but respond throughout our lives so as to produce something with which our Lord Jesus will be pleased on that day when we stand before Him. That only leaves group number two. In them, the Word does receive an initial response of faith (i.e., a plant sprouts), but their faith does not prove strong enough to withstand the pressures of life (no question of choking production since the faith plant dies before things get to that point). They (the ground) remain, but faith (the plant) dies, so that there is not even a possibility of production (i.e., no matter whether the plot is weeded or not after the plants die). Please note what the scriptures say about this process:

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots, however, but lasts only a short time. So when tribulation or persecution occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up.

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root in themselves, but are only temporary. When tribulation or persecution because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up.

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root. They believe for a while, but in time of testing they apostatize.

Luke 8:13

In the last passage, notice the juxtaposition where the loss of faith is actually stated: "they have no root [and as a result] they believe [only] for a while". This loss of faith results in apostasy (falling away), and that to my mind settles the issue. For we can argue about what being "tripped up" might mean in Matthew and Mark (although in these passages too it is closely connected to ephemeral behavior: "[the plant] lasts only a short time" in Matt.13:21 and is "temporary" in Mk.4:17). But in Luke 8:13 this group is clearly said to apostatize (Greek *aphistantai* – "rebel – against God – the very word whence "apostasy" is derived). So it seems to me that while some contortion is necessary in order to avoid the second scenario being one of believers who fall away, accepting the above as the correct interpretation makes the whole parable flow naturally and smoothly.

*

Parable of the Sower

An Overview of Spiritual Growth: The Parable of the Sower

The parable of the sower occurs in all three of the synoptic gospels (Matt.13:1-9; Mk.4:1-9; Lk.8.4-8), and is explained by Jesus in Matt.13:18-23; Mk.4:13-20; Lk.8:11-15. Though dealing primarily with salvation, it is significant for us because it helps to explain the mechanics of spiritual growth. For just as many attitudes toward Christ are possible, but only one, that of faith, leads to salvation, so also many attitudes toward His teachings are possible, but only one, that of faith, leads to spiritual growth. In the parable, a sower goes out to sow seed in four different types of ground: hard ground (by the roadside), rocky ground, thorny ground, and good ground. The seed that falls on the hardened ground beside the road is quickly stolen away by birds; the seed that falls on the rocky ground springs up quickly, but perishes because its roots lack depth; the seed that falls on the thorny ground is choked by the weeds that grow up around it; but the seed that falls on good ground prospers and produces a bountiful crop. Jesus explains the hard ground as the person whom Satan causes to reject the gospel; the rocky ground as the person who abandons the gospel

in times of distress; the thorny ground as the person distracted from the gospel by the cares and worries of life; and the good ground as the person who actually produces fruit for God in this life.

This parable outlines for us the four basic types of responses to the gospel, only one of which results in saving faith and true spiritual growth. The common elements of its interpretation are as follows: the "seed" which is sown is the Word of God, the gospel message which proclaims Jesus as the Christ, and which tells us that salvation comes only by faith in Christ. The "plant" in each case is the faith of the person in question. The "ground" represents the heart of different kinds of people. ***It is important to note that we decide which type of ground we shall be. Whether we are hard or rocky, thorny or good, is our responsibility.***



Matthew 13:12 (NASB)

12 For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

*

Q: How should we understand this passage? Is Jesus here saying that those who have an open heart to the truth will accept it and grow ("more shall be given, and he will have an abundance") and those unwilling to receive the truth not only have got no part in it, but will draw even further away from it ("but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him")?

A: Yes! That is precisely it!

Matthew 13:33 (NIV)

12 He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

*

Q: Why did Jesus include the very specific number of 60 pounds in a parable?

A: This amount ("three dry measures" tria sata) was apparently a standard amount of flour for baking up a batch of bread. So this is analogous to a "six pack of beer" or a "dozen donuts" where no one in our culture would say "five beers" or "ten donuts". Analogously, few people would bother going through the process for one loaf of bread (that's not efficient in time, fuel or effort).

Matthew 13:24-30 (NASB)

24 Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away. 26 But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. 27 The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' 28 And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves *said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?' 29 But he *said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn."'"

*

Matthew 13:36-43 (NASB)

36 Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field." 37 And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, 38 and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; 39 and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. 40 So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send

forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, 42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

*

Parable of the Tares – Excerpt from CT Part 3A

Finally, although the parable of the wheat and the tares has its true fulfilment at the end of our Lord's millennial reign (Matt.13:24-30; 13:36-43), the principle of leaving the tares to grow in company with the wheat certainly has a direct application here. The tares or weeds among the good grain represent unbelievers mixed into the Church-visible by Satan in such a cunning way that only God is capable of discerning the good from the bad. This is certainly reflective of the situation we see today in our own Church era of Laodicea. To this moment, God has, for the most part, left the tares to grow beside the wheat so as not to judge the whole Church in a general "uprooting". Under the pressures of the Tribulation, however, it will rapidly become apparent who are of "the wheat" and who are of "the tares" as our Lord begins to make the distinction between the wicked and the righteous progressively clear (one of the Tribulation's salient characteristics as we have repeatedly seen). Viewed from this broader perspective (which takes in both believers and unbelievers in the Church-visible in one panoramic view), the process of refining, winnowing, separation, and selective harvesting of the elect initiated by the Great Apostasy will also reveal by this very separation the identity of the reprobate tares now largely hidden from our earthly eyes (Lk.3:16-17; compare also the parable of the net which gathers good and bad: Matt.13:47-50; and the parable of the wedding banquet where some who show up are not worthy: Matt.22:1-14; Lk.14:16-24).

Now the field is the world. And the good seed, these are the sons of the Kingdom. But the tares are the sons of the evil one.

Matthew 13:38

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Excerpt from CT Part 6

(24) Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. (25) But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. (26) When the wheat sprouted and formed heads,

then the weeds also appeared. (27) "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' (28) " 'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' (29) " 'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles **to be** burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.' " (36) Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." (37) He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. (40) "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. (42) They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:24-30, 13:36-43 NIV

The parable of the wheat and the tares (weeds) above presents an identical sequence of events, only somewhat more detailed. The kingdom of heaven is the Messiah's millennial kingdom (cf. Matt.13:47) wherein unbelievers (tares/weeds) grow up in close proximity to believers (wheat). The harvest is the resurrection (step one) wherein the weeds are separated from the wheat and are prepared for but not committed to the fire (step two).⁵² The righteous are gathered into the barn (step three), and the wicked are then cast into the lake of fire following the last judgment (step four). Finally, this parable adds the additional detail of showing us the righteous after the conclusion of this entire four-step process, now enjoying life everlasting in the eternal state in "the kingdom of their Father" (i.e., the New Heavens and New Earth as opposed to "the kingdom of heaven", the prior millennial kingdom). For, given that we know from our context in Revelation chapters twenty-one and twenty-two that the Father will only be present on earth after human history has concluded, "the kingdom of their Father" mentioned here as the place where the righteous will "shine like the sun" must certainly be the eternal kingdom of New Jerusalem.⁵³

Matthew 13:31-33 (NASB)

31 He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32 and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

33 He spoke another parable to them, “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

*

Parable of the Mustard Seed and Leaven

Q1: Could you briefly explain Luke 13:18-21? What are the reasons behind these specific comparisons? Is it the case of the growth of the kingdom of heaven, it's expansion linked to it now growing, as you illustriously called it, geometrically?

A1: Yes. Like a small seed or a small amount of yeast, the Kingdom of Heaven is now almost invisible to the eyes of the secular world, but a day is coming when it will fill and define the New Heavens and the New Earth. And this is a process: the patriarchal line of faith became a specific nation of faith (Israel), then a world-wide community of faith (the Church), will yet be a worldwide kingdom of faith (in the Millennium) and eventually fill the entire new cosmos to come. This is also true on the individual level, as every Christian who sets him/herself to seek the Lord discovers. ***What starts as the smallest "yes" to God in Jesus Christ, comes to dominate and define our lives in every way on this earth – and will be our life eternal with Jesus Christ forever.***

*

Q2: Most people today aren't farmers, but my parents grew up in a heavily agricultural society. Nearly every farmer will tell you that the black mustard plant is perhaps one of the nastiest weeds in existence, because once it is planted, it is nearly impossible to uproot, because every uprooting disperses its small seeds across the field.

What Christ is saying is that nobody is going to remove the kingdom of heaven, and that every attempt at persecution will only seed its future growth.

A2: It's an interesting observation. I'll be sure to include it the next time the topic comes up.

For what I have posted about it, see the link: "Parable of the Mustard Seed"

In Jesus our dear Lord,

Bob L.

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Q3: Today I have been thinking about Jesus' comparison of the kingdom of God with the mustard seed and leaven (Luke 13:19-20). My interpretation of this has always been (what I think is) the most common interpretation. As far as I understand, when Jesus speaks of the "kingdom of God", he is referring to the reign of God within one's life, not a physical kingdom, nor Heaven, nor the collective Church. With this definition of the kingdom of God, it seems to me that Christ is saying, in the case of the leaven, that when God reigns over one's life, God's dominion spreads from the entry point (whatever part of one's being first bowed down to Him) to every other part of this person's thoughts, will, and deeds. Thus, every part of the "dough" would be "all leavened".

The mustard seed has always been a bit more difficult for me to understand. I see two possible interpretations. That the kingdom of God has a very small, humble, seemingly inconsequential beginning (Christ himself, perhaps), but explodes into a gigantic entity in which all the birds of the air (believers from all nations) may dwell. I think of **Ezekiel 17:22-23**: "I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and will set it out. I will break off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, that it may bear branches and produce fruit and become a noble cedar. And under it will dwell every kind of bird; in the shade of its branches birds of every sort will nest." Or that, like the leaven, the reign of God begins as a small influence within a life, but moves throughout to infect every facet of being.

These interpretations all speak very positively of the kingdom of God. However, some people in my church all have a different interpretation of these verses. I don't understand it completely, but their interpretations result in a negative view of the kingdom of God. They say that these verses have to be interpreted in the light of the other references in the Scriptures, and in all other instances in the Bible leaven is always negative ("the leaven of the Pharisees", etc.). They also say that there is really no such thing as a "mustard tree", that mustard plants are actually bushes, so that a mustard tree is actually an unnatural monstrosity that was never meant to be.

I think that the true reign of God is incorruptible, so I don't see how their interpretation could be correct, that the kingdom of God could be used to "puff" someone up. After all, in the case of the leavened, self-aggrandizing Pharisees, it was the reign of their own ungodly greed and self-importance which puffed them up, not the true reign of God.

What do you think? Have you ever heard this interpretation before? I am thoroughly confused over my own thoughts about it, much less these other interpretations.

Also, I just read the email about the mp3's on your website, and I think they would be a great resource, albeit a ton of work. I listen to a lot of audiobooks, because I can listen to them while at work but don't get much actual reading time. I did a little research, and I don't think the issue of size would be much of a problem. Audible.com, which is the most-used downloadable audiobook website in the world, uses mp3 format at 32 kbps (versus normal 320 kbps for music). This is their highest quality of download, and sounds as good as anyone would want it. So, a six-hour audio file at 32 kbps would actually only be about 83 MB. They also have 16 kbps, which still sounds good and would cut the file size in half. When you get down to 8 kbps, it starts to sound not so good, but still acceptable. And with the capacity of most computers and mp3 players today, these file sizes are not very large at all (a normal 45-minute cd in music-quality mp3 format is about 60 MB). And encoding into all of these formats would be easy and wouldn't require any special software.

Of course I couldn't help you come up with more time in each day so that you might be able to do all that it would take to get audio on your website. I think it would be a fantastic resource for those like me who do not have time enough to sit down and study your writings in the depth that we would like to. I know that my father listens to Christian resources online all the time as well, and that he would appreciate being able to listen to yours.

Oh, one more quick thing - is modern Hebrew different from Old Testament Hebrew the way that modern Greek is different from classical Greek? I would like to learn Hebrew sometime in addition to Greek. How could I learn a language without being in school?

Thank you.

A3: I would agree with you (even in the Ezekiel parallel which has often occurred to me as well). I think the plain sense of the scripture is that the expansion is good in these parallels (whether of leaven or mustard), not bad. I have always been puzzled by those who want to interpret these two parables in a negative way, since our Lord's words seem to me to be – and seem to be designed to be – pretty straightforward for anyone wishing to give them serious consideration. I would say that they are meant to mean what you have discerned. For what Jesus tells us was true of His ministry, true of our individual Christian lives, and true of the entire kingdom of heaven as well. From the smallest of beginnings, God has wrought and is in the process of bringing about things as yet beyond comprehension. They truly will fill the whole world, and a new one of His own making in time to come at that! I have long drawn great comfort and inspiration from these words, for they

tell me that despite what our eyes may see, despite how we may (rightly) downplay our own efforts and their effects in the devil's world, in time to come we can yet not even imagine the wonders that will be revealed. The Lord's plan will indeed come to full fruition and the seed of the Word, whether in our individual hearts or in the world at large will sprout to become a tree which fills the entire cosmos (and indeed in many ways it already has, especially in regard to our Lord's victory on the cross) How wonderful to be a part of this glorious process and to anticipate the great day when all these things will be fully revealed!

As to mustard trees, I never get too excited about supposed contradictions like this. Having spent many years investigating the details of the ancient world in both my secular work and Christian ministry, I can tell you that our present knowledge is far from complete. If we had a total understanding of ancient flora and fauna, perhaps we could make such definitive judgments. As it is, I think it is pretty clear from the parable that Jesus is drawing a comparison between a small seed / large plant-tree and a small (to the eye) divine beginning with an unimaginably large result. Over-parsing these things is often counterproductive.

As to Hebrew, it's a little different situation from Greek since spoken Hebrew effectively fell into a lapse (although like Latin it continued to be spoken by some in a scholarly environment). When it was revitalized, it was essentially melded onto an Indo-European syntax, so that Modern Hebrew is in some ways closer to the ancient than Greek (vocab), but in other ways farther removed (syntax). In any case, studying Modern Hebrew was a plus for me (I did a year), but it's no substitute for BH. As to learning it on your own, I wouldn't recommend it (except for the likes of John Stuart Mill).

Thank you for comments about MP3. I don't remember if I mentioned it in that response but there are propriety issues as well, if I recall correctly. In any case, yes, I'd love to do it, but I'm barely making the progress I'd like to make now. Thanks for all your encouragement!

In Jesus,

Bob L.

Matthew 13:35 (NASB)

35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

“I will open My mouth in parables;

I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world.”

*

Q: Psalm 78:2 (NASB)

2 I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old,

Matthew 13:35 says "hidden since the foundation of the world", but Psalm 78:2 "dark sayings of old"?

A: The Greek is a closer translation of the Hebrew than the respective English versions seem to suggest: our Lord uses κεκρυμμενα to translate נִסְתָּרִים, and ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου to translate מֵרִבְרִב דָּוָר. Both of these seem to me to be essential equivalents, suggesting "not easily known" and "very old" respectively. I don't think either element is meant to have a technical meaning beyond that.

Matthew 13:52 (NASB)

52 And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

*

Q: Could you clarify this passage?

A1: To me this means that someone versed in the Law who becomes a believer in Christ will be able to draw on the store of information and truth in the Law (now correctly appreciated and understood) as well as from the new truths he has learned as a result of being born again and indoctrinated in the New Covenant.

*

A2: Even though the verse refers primarily to the Law, I agree and see it clearly in my life and life of other believers that the traits of our character find their right expression when we become believers.

Matthew 13:54-58 (NASB)

54 He came to His hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? 55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? 56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all

these things?" 57 And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.

*

Q1: I just have a question about Jesus' brothers and sisters. You know, from Matt. 13:55. Catholics like to say that word is "brethren" and can just mean "relatives", like "cousins." But I've told them that there is a perfectly good Greek word for "cousin"--*anepsios*--that Matthew could have used, if these men were actually His cousins. Also, I've found a number of other passages where the word "brethren" could ONLY mean "brothers" in the sibling sense, i.e, Matt. 20:24, Mk. 3:33, Matt. 22:25, and others.

Now, I have a Catholic who is talking about the children of Mary in Mark 15:40: "If you read (with an open mind) Mark's account of Christ's crucifixion, and who the women were, and whose Mothers they were....You will find that those brothers and sisters (named by unbelievers in Mark 6: 3) had a different Mother than the Mother of Jesus."

First of all, this guy thinks that because unbelievers in His home town of Nazareth named Jesus' brothers by name, they are unreliable witnesses, since they rejected Him as the Messiah. I told him that they got His foster father's profession correct as well as the name of His mother, yet suddenly, they had amnesia, and didn't know the names of Jesus' brothers, even though they had known Jesus His entire life? They got two facts correct, but were unreliable in the third?

But anyway, what do you think of his theory about "You will find that those brothers and sisters (named by unbelievers in Mark 6: 3) had a different Mother than the Mother of Jesus."

I find this rather silly, since the people asked "isn't His mother Mary?" HIS mother. If these men they mentioned had a different mother, then why did they call them Jesus' brothers and sisters???

What theories have you read or studied about this, if any?

Thanks. God bless.

A1: I agree with your reasoning on all points (and on the Greek terminology). Here is quote from something posted on Ichthys which gives the appropriate citations:

. . . our Lord did have siblings so that this teaching you mention is clearly false. In fact, our Lord had a number of brothers and sisters, although technically they were of course half-brothers and half-sisters, all of them being the biological seed of Joseph while our Lord was

virgin born. See: Matthew 12:46-49; Mark 3:31-34; Luke 8:19-31; 2:12; 7:3-5; 7:10; Acts 1:14; 1Cor.9:5. We don't know anything about most of them from other than the little that can be gleaned from scripture. James was Jesus' brother (Gal.1:9), this makes Jude also a brother of the Lord by blood (Jude 1:1). We know about James and Jude both from the epistles that bear their names, and about James in particular from both the book of Acts (12:17; 15:13; 21:18) and Paul's epistles (1Cor.15:9; Gal.1:19; 2:9; 2:12). Mark also mentions, in addition to James and Jude, Simon and Joses (i.e., Joseph) as brothers of Jesus (Mk.6:3).

Of course, if someone wants to think a brother is not a brother, it is difficult to see how to defend against that sort of studied denial of plain words. In the Mark 6:23 passage, two of the brothers are mentioned by name, and I know of no precedent in Greek literature where a "brother" when named might not even possibly be a brother indeed. The point that these people may be "misinformed" is mitigated by the fact that Mark, an evangelist after all, does not serve his purpose in any way that I can see by reporting this fact if it were not true (which he surely could have left out; he leaves out a lot under the guidance of the Spirit; cf. the abrupt end of the book).

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in their own towns and in their own homes are prophets without honor." And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Matthew 13:53-58 NIV

While, "brothers" is only used metaphorically in the NT to refer to "community of believers", in the passage above Jesus' skeptics are clearly not dealing in metaphor but are talking about Jesus' literal, physical family in order to "prove" that He is not the Messiah, since "no one knows where the Messiah comes from" but they know his family, his brothers and sisters ([Jn.7:27](#)). That the Messiah would have an unknown origin was the understanding of events current at the time and still prevalent in much of Judaism today (i.e., He is thought to be an angel or something of the sort – which helps to explain the necessity of the book of Hebrews). If these siblings were "made up" the argument would be nonsensical both for contemporaries and for inclusion into Matthew.

The person's point about Mark 15:40 seems to be that because there were other Marys and other Josephs that therefore the siblings mentioned in Mark 6:3 belong to that or another "set". There is no indication in Mark 6:3 of this, nor does the logic make any sense to me whatsoever. There is more than one John in scripture, but that doesn't mean that I can willy-nilly decide that all references to John are to the baptist -- or that they cannot to the baptist but to another John since there are other Johns(?). There is no necessity of making the connection suggested, and no good reason for doing so except to advance an unscriptural agenda.

Finally, the idea that Joseph had two wives is not supported or suggested by any scripture. In fact, the probability is that Mary outlived him, not the other way around. For, not only did Jesus entrust her to John on the cross (something entirely unnecessary if Joseph were still alive), but also we do not find Joseph at the wedding in Cana in John chapter 2, but rather we find Jesus acting as head of household, with the most likely explanation for both facts being that Joseph had already died by that point.

In Jesus,

Bob L.

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Q2: Thanks for your help. I still don't see why the RCC had to make Mary a virgin her entire life. Yet it's heresy to them, to deny that, and would make one "anathema" if a Catholic were to disbelieve in her perpetual virginity. I mean, once Jesus was born, what reason would Mary have for remaining a virgin? The Catholics tell me she was consecrated to the Lord, and so was her virginity, and Jesus' birth wouldn't end that, yet I can see nothing in the gospel accounts that suggest she was "consecrated" to God. Part of the problem is, they get some of this info from the "Protoevangelion of James", which is mid-second century stuff, and pretty silly, if you ask me. It has Mary pledging to be a virgin all her life, to dedicate herself to God.

Then that brings up the little word, "until" in Matthew 1:25. Catholics have told me that it can mean "never" under some circumstances. A Catholic asked me to find instances in the Bible where "until" means "up to a certain point, but no further". Well, I got out our handy-dandy Strong's, and found oodles of cases where that is the main meaning, all from the NT. I noticed that there are three different Greek words, with much the same meaning, rendered as "until" or "till." Then I looked up "never" in Strong's, and noticed that not one of the words rendered as "never" in the NT was one of the words that meant "until." I mean, the verse says that Joseph was NOT to know

Mary as His wife UNTIL after her Son was born. It doesn't say he was NEVER to know Mary as his wife.

A2: There are ways to make clear that brothers/sisters are not full but only half. Sometimes one finds "brother/sister of his/her mother/father" (where "his/her" is the half-sibling). There is also an actual word(s) for this used in the phrase *adelphos/e ouch homopatrios or homometrious*, i.e., brother-not-of-the-same-father or brother-not-of-the-same-mother, etc. So if Matthew et al. had wanted to make that point crystal clear, it certainly was possible to do so. However, it is more common in my experience just to say "brother/sister" and let people sort it out from whatever other information might be at hand. I think part of the reason for this is that in the ancient world the incidence of half-brother/sisterhood was much higher than it is today on account of 1) the high mortality rate (of women in childbirth in particular resulting in many more remarriages of men of all ages to women of child-bearing age) and 2) the high procreation rate (in a largely agricultural society where a large percentage of children never reached puberty the tendency was to have just as many as possible). So for most people in most situations, being half was as good as being whole. This is paralleled in the Jewish milieu for example when Absalom says to Tamar: "has Amnon your brother been with you?" (2Sam.13:20). For if there was ever a time to stress some distance, that was it.

On *heos hou* = "until"; yes, it means "until"; no, it can't mean anything like "forever". As in all such constructions in all languages of which I am aware, the main clause expresses an action that continues up to the point of the action referenced in the restrictive temporal "until" clause. That is the whole point of using such a clause. Otherwise, a person would just say "always" or "ever after" or "never", giving the main verb an adverbial twist of that sort. The very purpose of this clause is to specify the limit of the period in question (that is what "until abc/xyz" does -- in all languages that use this sort of clause).

I think you are probably on to something about the whole "veneration" business. There were a number of pagan goddesses who were virgins, and in the accounts of the R.C. church's martyrs, virginity always figures big. This in fact also goes back to classical times. In the Greek novels, it is very important (for quasi-religious reasons) for the heroine to be a virgin. So on the one hand there is an element of paganism here. On the other, since the R.C. church prizes virginity for its own sake (cf. the development of priests and nuns into celibate cadres), "taking this away from Mary" is a huge blow. And of course there is a certain amount of stubbornness involved as well. Whenever I have dealt with doctrinaire R.C.'s, they have always tended to be the least susceptible of all groups to even engaging in reasoned discourse. They have been well-trained in

unquestioning obedience -- which makes one wonder why they are interested in starting such conversations in the first place.

In our Lord Jesus,

Bob L.

Matthew 14:3-4 (NASB)

3 For when Herod had John arrested, he bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. 4 For John had been saying to him, "It is not lawful for you to have her."

*

Q: Why was Herod's marriage unlawful?

A: The marriage was un-LAW-ful, that is, not illegal in our sense but contrary to the Law of Moses – something the "ruler of his people" should legitimately be taken to task for by the Messiah's prophet as setting exactly the wrong example (Lev.18:16; 20:21).

Matthew 14:13 (NASB)

13 Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities.

*

Q: Why did Jesus withdraw to a solitary place? Do you agree with the following interpretation:

NIV SB: withdrew ... to a solitary place. To avoid the threat of Herod and the pressing of the crowds. Jesus' time had not yet come (see Jn 2:4 and note; cf. Jn 6:15).

A: The note is entirely wrong. Our Lord was never afraid of anything (cf. Jn.11:16), and as the sequel of feeding the masses shows, was soon engaging with the crowd again without a second thought. As the focal point for the revival and the herald of the coming of the Messiah, John supplied "cover" for the Lord and His ministry even in prison, and was only executed one year before the crucifixion. The death of John marks the beginning of the final "year of opposition" where the entire focus of then anti-God religious state now fell exclusively on our Lord and ended in the cross. This event marked the beginning therefore of the hardest part of our Lord's earthly

ministry culminating in His death for the sins of the world. For that reason, He took some precious time out to pray (cf. Matt.14:23) -- a good lesson to us all of the importance of prayer.

Matthew 14:22 (NASB)

22 Immediately He made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side, while He sent the crowds away.

*

Q: Why did Jesus not go with the disciples? Do you agree with the argument presented in NIV SB:

14:22 made. The Greek word used here means "to compel" and suggests a crisis. John records that after the miracle of the loaves and fish the crowds "intended to ... make him [Jesus] king by force" (6:15). This involved a complete misunderstanding of the mission of Jesus. The disciples may have been caught up in the enthusiasm and needed to be removed from the area quickly.

A: Mark 6:46 says that our Lord had gone up the mountain "to pray"; having some time of His own to spend in prayer to the Father was essential, and our Lord found just the right means to keep current in His prayer life – even at the cost of sleep and convenience.

Matthew 15:2 (NASB)

2 "Why do Your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread."

NIV SB: 15:2 tradition of the elders. After the Babylonian exile, the Jewish rabbis began to make meticulous rules and regulations governing the daily life of the people. These were interpretations and applications of the law of Moses, handed down from generation to generation. In Jesus' day this "tradition of the elders" was in oral form. It was not until c. AD 200 that it was put into writing in the Mishnah (see note on Ne 10:34).

*

Q: Why was it after the exile that the rabbis began to make rules and regulations?

A: Israel had fallen into gross sin resulting in exile primarily because of idolatry. Those who returned were conscientious about "keeping the Law" instead of this past pattern of bad behaviour,

but, unfortunately as often happens, after a few generations teaching and guidance meant to reinforce the truth began to take on the character of "truth itself" – which is always especially unfortunate when the suggestions and guidance are completely misinterpreted in the bargain. Herein we see the problem with most traditional Christian "churches". And it is not only the R.C. church or hyper-Calvinism which are at fault; I have seen this phenomenon develop in the very next generation after a good teacher leaves the scene for heaven-home. I certainly hope this never happens to Ichthys! The shortness of the time would seem to be likely to prevent that if nothing else; however it should be said that what is posted to this site is interpretation of the Word of God not the Word of God, and it is "good" only to the extent that 1) it is correct, and 2) it is used/understood correctly.

Matthew 15:12 (NASB)

12 Then the disciples *came and *said to Him, "Do You know that the Pharisees were [a]offended when they heard this statement?"

Matthew 15:12 Lit caused to stumble

*

Q: Would you agree that "caused to stumble" is best rendered "offended"? Is that the true meaning?

A: A skandalon is a "stumbling block" and the verb here is derived from that noun. Our English word "scandal" comes from this root directly and gives I think a good guide to the meaning: the "stumbling" is metaphorical rather than literal, so that "offense" is a good translation often ("give offense" for the verb); by the way, "offense" comes from Latin ob-fendo which means literally to "knock against" so that it too can be considered a virtual calque.

Matthew 15:13 (NASB)

13 But He answered and said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted.

*

Q: Does Jesus say that to indicate that Pharisees did not rise to prominence according to God's will?

A: Yes, as the next verse indicates as well. Just because a person is recognized by the society as a "great religious leader" does not mean that he/she is even of God in the first place. Only those planted and tended by the Lord will grow to the point of actually producing a crop blessed and rewarded by the Lord – and the same is true today as well.

Matthew 15:14 (NASB)

14 Let them alone; they are blind guides [a]of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

Matthew 15:14 Later mss add of the blind

*

Q: Should the "of the blind" be a part of this verse?

A: It is not in the original of Sinaiticus; it is in B. This is a tough call because on the one hand with the word typhlos occurring three (or four) times there is plenty of opportunity for it to have fallen out; on the other hand the addition of "of the blind" is a likely candidate for a gloss (and that would explain its absence from some parts of the manuscript tradition). The word is not necessary since our Lord immediately adds that the guides are leading the blind – in case that part was not understood. So I would prefer to leave it out. Also, adding "of the blind" detracts from the emphasis that would otherwise fall on the Pharisees as "blind guides" by sharing the characteristic of blindness with those being guided; but it is clear that the guide bears the greater responsibility for that blindness.

Matthew 15:19 (NASB)

19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders.

*

Q: Is there a reason why Jesus mentions both adulteries and fornications, which seem to mean the same thing?

A: There is certainly overlap, but while "adultery" qualifies as "fornication", not all "fornication" (pornia) is necessarily adultery, since the latter entails any sort of sinful sexual or sexually related behavior, whereas the former requires violation of the marital pledge.

Matthew 15:22 (NASB)

22 And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and began to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed."

NIV SB: 15:22 Canaanite. A term found many times in the OT but only here in the NT. In NT times there was no country known as Canaan. Some think this was the Semitic manner of referring to the people of Phoenicia at this time. Mark says the woman was "a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia" (7:26; see note there).

*

Q: How should Matthew's calling the woman "Canaanite" and Mark's calling the woman "a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia" be reconcile?

A: The two terms are synonyms as the Phoenicians were Canaanites. Matthew is writing from a Jewish perspective while Mark, writing from Rome under Peter's authority, goes out of his way in a number of places to make what he writes more accessible to gentile readers who may not be conversant to the same degree with Jewish culture and history.

Matthew 15:27 (NASB)

27 But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table."

Matthew 15:27 Lit for

*

Q: I understand how "but" seems to be more fitting here than "for", but doesn't that slightly change the tone of the sentence?

A: This is a translation problem. What we have here is actually a particle combination, kai gar; this usually introduces an emphatic response (often translated in English "in fact" or "indeed"); since the woman is picking up what our Lord has said and taking it a step farther, something like, "Yes, Lord, but don't. . . ?", might convey the idea best.

Matthew 15:36 (NASB)

36 and He took the seven loaves and the fish; and giving thanks, He broke them and started giving them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people.

*

Q: Should we also make it a practice to give thanks before meals?

A: In my opinion that is not a bad idea, but I would be very reluctant to lay that down as a necessary principle of behaviour (for then it would be bound to lose all meaning); if it becomes too ritualized, it also is likely to become a pointless exercise. The attitude of gratefulness to the Lord for what He has done and provided is the key thing (secondarily I suppose the positive witness it might provide for those who hear the prayer); but an attitude which is never expressed is a problem too. Something in the middle done from the heart could not be far wrong.

Matthew 15:39 (NASB)

39 And sending away the crowds, Jesus got into the boat and came to the region of Magadan.

NIV SB: 15:39 Magadan. Also called Magdala, the home of Mary Magdalene. In 2009 the remains of a 2,000- year- old synagogue were discovered in Magdala. Mk 8:10 has "Dalmanutha" (see note there; see also map).

*

Q: Would you say "Magadan" (or "Magdala") and "Dalmanutha" are two names for the same place, or are these two places located in close proximity?

A: I would certainly disagree with the note that the town has anything whatsoever to do with Mary Magdalene; see the link:

http://ichthys.com/4Christo.htm#1%29_To_Mary_Magdalone_%28Jn.20:11-18

Whether or not Madagan and Magdala are the same place I would not be willing to say. Contemporary identification of biblical name sites, especially less well-known ones, is a treacherous morass. As to the names themselves, they are little attested (especially Dalmanutha). They are pretty clearly the same place since our Lord's departure thence occurs directly after the feeding of the 4,000. My own guess would be that Magadan is the chief city and Dalmanutha is the region/territory, for one reason because Mark says "parts" (Greek: mere) of Dalmanutha.

Matthew 16:2-3 (NASB)

2 But He replied to them, "[a]When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' 3 And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?

Matthew 16:2 Early mss do not contain the rest of v 2 and v 3

*

Q1: Should the second part of verse 2 and verse 3 be a part of the scripture?

Q2: Could you explain what our Lord means by the prediction of the weather presented here? How is it that red sky is a sign of fair weather and a sky which is "red and threatening" is a sign of a storm? It seems that both have the same colour, yet signify opposite conditions.

A1) No (absent, e.g., in both Aleph and B).

A2) This is a longstanding truism often repeated by sailors, and apparently generally accurate where the wind normally comes from the west and move to the east (as is true in Palestine). So a red sky at morning highlighted by the sun coming up in the east indicates the reflection of the sun off clouds coming in from the west.

Matthew 16:7 (NASB)

7 They began to discuss this among themselves, saying, "He said that because we did not bring any bread."

NIV SB: 16:7 because we didn't bring any bread. Apparently the disciples took Jesus' statement about "yeast" (v. 6) to somehow relate to their being short of bread. Perhaps they thought they would be required to bake bread when they arrived at the other side of the lake and were being warned by Jesus not to use any yeast provided by the spiritually contaminated religious leaders.

*

Q: Would you agree this is what disciples' thinking was?

A: Only about the fact that, as the scripture says, they thought His mention of yeast had to do with their failure to remember to bring bread. I don't think the rest of the speculation makes much

sense. The disciples were often fixated on mundane things and thus failed to "get the message" our Lord was trying to communicate to them.

Matthew 16:16-17 (NASB)

16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

NIV SB: 16:16 Peter answered. See note on Lk 9:20. Messiah. See second NIV text note on 1:1; see also note on Jn 1:25. The Hebrew word for Messiah ("anointed one") can be used of anyone who was anointed with the holy oil, such as the priests and kings of Israel (e. g., Ex 29:7, 21; 1Sa 10:1, 6; 16:13; 2Sa 1:14, 16). The word carries the idea of being chosen by God, consecrated to his service, and endowed with his power to accomplish the assigned task. Toward the end of the OT period the word assumed a special meaning. It denoted the ideal king anointed and empowered by God to rescue his people from their enemies and establish his righteous kingdom (Da 9:25–26). The ideas that clustered around the title Messiah tended to be political and national in nature. Probably for that reason Jesus seldom used the term. When he did accept it as applied to himself, he did so with reservations (cf. Mk 8:27–30; 14:61–63).

*

Q: Since Jesus answers Peter "Blessed are you", should we understand that Peter's understanding of the word "Christ" was correct and referred to the One and only Messiah rather than "anyone who was anointed" or being political and national in nature?

A: Absolutely. Peter uses the definite article here: "the Christ/Messiah"

Matthew 16:19 (NASB)

19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven."

NIV SB: 16:19 keys. Perhaps Peter used these keys on the day of Pentecost (Ac 2) when he announced that the door of the kingdom was unlocked to Jews and converts to Judaism and later when he acknowledged that it was also opened to Gentiles (Ac 10; cf. Isa

22:22; Rev 3:7 and notes). bind ... loose. Not authority to determine, but to announce, guilt or innocence (see 18:18 and context; cf. Jn 20:23 and note; Ac 5:3, 9).

*

Q: Do you agree with the interpretation that Peter used the "keys" during Pentecost and by acknowledging the kingdom of God being opened to the Gentiles?

A: In my view, the keys are the gospel. The apostles had a special mandate and also special gifts and authority to spread the gospel to the gentiles during the incipient period of the Church or "apostolic period". Here is a link on this:

<http://ichthys.com/mail-Enoch%20and%20Gospel%20questions.htm#binding>

*

A2: On the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 16:19, we may note immediately that the binding and loosing, the proper function of keys, must certainly be connected to the keys themselves. In the preceding part of this discussion Jesus was telling Peter about the building up of the Church. Therefore these keys and their ability to bind and loose is no doubt also connected to the expansion of the Church. Since Jesus was preaching about the kingdom of heaven and entrance into it through repentance and faith in Him (Matt.4:17), it seems clear enough that the keys to the kingdom open the way for entrance into the kingdom, and that those "loosed" are free to enter, while those "bound" are not. The way we enter the kingdom of heaven is indisputably through faith in the Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Therefore the keys that give us this possibility of faith in Him must be the gospel information about His Person and work on the cross that forms the object of our belief.

This interpretation which sees the keys of the kingdom as the gospel through which one enters the kingdom conforms with everything else we know about the basic mandate of spreading the gospel which Jesus gave to His apostles (Matt.28:18-20; Lk.24:46-49; Acts 1:7-8; 9:15; 22:21; 26:15-18; cf. Matt.10:5ff.; Mk.6:8-11; Lk.9:3-5; 10:1-20). It also accords with all scripture has to say about the way in which we become Christians. ***Case in point is John chapter three where we must be "born again by water and the Spirit", with the water representing the Word of God as the refreshing life-giving substance ministered by the Spirit*** (as is often the case: e.g., Is.55:1; Jn.7:37-39; 1Cor.10:3; Eph.5:26; Tit.3:5; 1Pet.3:21; Rev.22:17), ***made real and understandable to the heart that receives the gospel message in faith and humility. This is true Christian epistemology.***

Note that the gospel is divisive. Some will receive it with joy, while others will harden their hearts by rejecting it. When the gospel is heard, therefore, some are loosed but some are bound - by their own negative response. This is similar to what we see Matt.13:19 where the devil "snatches away" the truth before it can be understood (i.e., the person is not responsive to the message so as to open up to the Spirit's ministry and accept the refreshing "drink" of the gospel). While it is true that the apostles are given these "keys" preeminently, all believers may use them. Indeed, we are all called upon to mediate the gospel of Jesus Christ, even though the work of the twelve was foundational in the building up of the Church of Christ (Eph.2:20; Rev.21:14; cf. 1Cor.3:9-11).

The "keys" metaphor is also used in a slightly different fashion at Revelation 1:17 (i.e., there they are "the keys to death and Hades"), but that passage likewise indicates the opening up of the opportunity for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Here is what I have written about those keys in Coming Tribulation part 1 Introduction:

The "keys" mentioned as being possessed by our Lord Jesus Christ refer to the fact that only through Him can a person escape our common human destiny of death and punishment (Jn.14:6). Because God in His wondrous mercy gave His Son for us and because Jesus died for us, that destiny can be changed by any and all - one needs only to turn to Him to receive this redemption from the power of sin and death (Rom.8:14; Gal.3:13; 4:5; Eph.1:7; Col.1:14; 1:20; Heb.1:3; 1Pet.1:18-19; Rev.1:5), and the grant of eternal life in its place (1Jn.5:11-13). The plural, "keys", used here is also significant. Christ Jesus is the key, but we must accept and follow Him (i.e., we must receive and utilize the key we have been graciously offered by putting our faith in Him). He has already "unlocked" and opened the door of the prison house for us all (cf. Is.42:7; 61:1), but we must still follow Him out (cf. Acts 12:9). All the merit, all the work is His (Eph.2:8-9), but we must respond to that work in order to be released (Jn.1:11-13; Rom.10:8-11). Just as our Lord told us at John 3:5 that we are saved "by water and Spirit" when we are born again (i.e., our belief in and response to the water of the Word, the gospel message, on the one hand, and God's salvation of us in Jesus through the power of the Spirit on the other: Eph.5:26; Rev.22:17), so the plural "keys" is an indication of this critically important point of truth: ***God has done absolutely the most for us in sacrificing His Son*** (Rom.5:6-8; 2Cor.9:15; Eph.2:8), ***but He will not override our free will and force us to believe in Him against our will*** (1Tim.2:4; 2Pet.3:9; cf. Rev.2:21).

Matthew 16:20 (NASB)

20 Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

*

Q: Why does our Lord warn the disciples here not to tell that He is Christ?

A: Because our Lord's divinely ordained approach – and, indeed, the plan of God generally – is designed to allow for maximum freedom of determination for the human race to choose its own eternal destiny. We live with a veil between us and eternity so that we can only see what is coming "through a glass darkly" (1Cor.13:12 KJV). That is true of unbelievers (who don't see God in His glory or their eternal fate in the lake of fire) and also for us believers – if we were able to see God in His glory and not perish, Jesus in His resurrected glory, and heaven above and the New Jerusalem, we would not be able to think about anything else (so what we choose would not be such a matter of faith). As it is, we and they see the world in its mundane material appearance and must see beyond in faith (for believers) or are able to ignore the spiritual realities which lie behind (in the case of unbelievers). For our Lord's situation, there is also the added reason that the freedom of movement He required to carry out the divine plan for His ministry necessitated refraining from being absolutely direct about His status when dealing with the ruling elite. If He had proclaimed Himself as the Messiah openly and directly in Jerusalem, that would have forced immediate action – either of worshiping Him (for He is the Messiah) or putting Him to death immediately. As it was, things ran their perfect course in their perfect time so as to accomplish all righteousness.

Matthew 16:28 (NASB)

28 "Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

*

Q1: Could you explain the meaning of this verse?

Q2: Do you agree with either of the two interpretations presented in NIV SB: 16:28 There are two main interpretations of this verse: (1) It is a prediction of the transfiguration, which happened a week later (17:1) and which demonstrated that Jesus will return "in his Father's glory" (16:27). (2) It refers to the Son of Man's authority and kingly reign in his postresurrection church. Some of his

disciples will witness—even participate in—this as described in the book of Acts. The context seems to favor the first view. See note on 2Pe 1:16.

*

A: The first NIV SB point is correct: it is the transfiguration which is in view; that is why it is only "some" whom our Lord says will see it (Peter, James and John).

Matthew 17:1 (NASB)

17 Six days later Jesus *took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and *led them up on a high mountain by themselves.

*

Q: Is there a reason Jesus chose these particular apostles? Were they the most prominent?

A: Peter and John were, along with Paul, the two disciples whose ministries to the gentile world would be the most long-lasting and most profound. Why James? John never did anything without his brother (cf. Mk.5:37; 10:35-41; 14:53; Lk.8:51; 9:54), who seems to have been the elder whose lead John followed (until his death).

Matthew 17:2 (NASB)

2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light.

*

Q: How specifically should we understand the word "transfigured"?

A: One could translate, "His appearance was changed", with the rest of the verse explaining the change. Specifically, our Lord appeared "in glory" in some similar way to how He will appear at the second advent. I would not want to invest the Greek word metamorphoo here with any special technical sense; the change is explained, and it is one of appearance only (our Lord in His humanity was not resurrected until after His death on the cross).

Matthew 17:9 (NASB)

9 As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead."

*

Q: Why didn't Jesus want anyone to know about the vision until He was risen?

A: Probably to keep the focus on the issues at hand: His crucifixion, propitiation of the sins of the world, and rising from the dead. The events on the mount have to do with the second advent, not the first.

Matthew 17:10-13 (NASB)

10 And His disciples asked Him, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" 11 And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; 12 but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." 13 Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist.

*

Q: Why did the disciples ask Jesus about the scribes saying that Elijah must come first? Is it because they had just seen Elijah alongside the Lord's transfiguration and thought the he had already come? Does this also fit in line with a lack of recognition from the disciples between our Lord's first and second advents, despite our Lord repeatedly stating that he must die for the sins of the world and rise again after three days?

A: Yes, that is it exactly.

Matthew 17:17 (NASB)

17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me."

*

Excerpt from Christology

The challenge of self-restraint:

Then Jesus replied and said, “O you unbelieving and perverse generation! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you?”

Matthew 17:17

This passage is exceptional because it is one of the few places where our Lord gives vent to legitimate and righteous indignation. Yet, as in the case of His legitimate, necessary, and mild reproofs to His earthly mother (Lk.2:49; Jn.2:4; cf. Lk.11:27-28), this correct assessment of the situation is followed by gracious and miraculous intervention, true testimonies to the incredible patience of our Lord, who on innumerable occasions had ample reason to react adversely. Unlike the rest of us, however, our Lord's testing in this area of self-restraint was indeed unique. For not only would the temptation to angry reaction and summary action in response be understandable in His case (since He was and is perfect, and as a result was always dealing with others being “in the wrong”), but also He was capable of commanding the powers of God to redress any injustice, slight, offense or attack that might come His way. This sort of behavior was not in the Fathers plan for the first advent (cf. **Lk.9:51-55**; the second will be quite another matter), but since Jesus had the power at His finger-tips, restraining Himself on this score moment by moment day by day throughout His entire earthly life was an accomplishment indeed (for which of us if invested with such power could refrain completely from self-vindication for even a single day?).

(14) After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (15) Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

John 6:14-15 NIV

Akin to the need to show perfect self-restraint in regard to rendering judgment was the similar necessity not to be swept up in the popular enthusiasm which came His way as a result of His miracles. Even Herod desired to see Him because “he hoped to see him perform some miracle” (Lk.23:8). Rather than craving celebrity as the rest of the human race does almost without exception, our Lord eschewed it as the passage above shows, and went to great lengths to avoid it as far as He possibly could (Matt.8:4; 9:30-31; 12:16; 14:13-14; Mk.1:43-45; 3:20; 8:26; 9:30; Lk.4:42-44; 5:15-16; 5:19).⁽⁵³⁾ For Jesus knew full well that the approbation of human beings is about as stable as the wind; He was looking not for human approval but to please His heavenly Father (e.g., Matt.26:42; Lk.11:2; Jn.4:34; 5:30; 6:38).

(1) Behold **my Servant** – I will support Him. My chosen One – my soul (i.e., heart) takes pleasure in Him. I have placed my Spirit upon Him. He will bring forth justice for the nations. (2) He will not cry out nor will He lift up His voice in the street.

Isaiah 42:1-2

Matthew 17:20 (NASB)

20 And He *said to them, “Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.

NIV SB: 17:20 little faith. Not so much the quantity of their faith as its quality-a faith that is bathed in prayer (see Mk 9:29). mustard seed. See 13:31-32 and notes. say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there. ' A proverbial statement meaning to remove great difficulties (cf. Isa 54:10; Zec 4:7 and note; 1Co 13:2). In this context it probably refers to removing the problems associated with the work of the kingdom.

*

Q: I'm not clear about the distinction between the quantity and quality of faith here.

A: The Bible does not distinguish between the two and trying to make such a distinction only confuses the issue. We all know what our Lord means when He says "Ye of little faith" and "Your faith is great", so we all wish to emulate the latter rather than the former.

Matthew 17:21 (NASB)

21 [But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”]

*

Q: Is Matthew 17:21 a part of the Scripture?

A: Matthew 17:21: No, it was added to some of the manuscript tradition later in order to harmonize the pericope with Mark 9:29. It was often the case in antiquity that scholarly readers who came across a passage would "gloss it" (as today when we add notes and parallel passages in our study Bibles). This passage, for example, is very close the Mark verse, but does not have the additional information. It is quite understandable that a reader with a good memory would write into the margin what else Mark had to say. But what about when the entire gospel is later recopied

by someone else? Since there was no standardized system of annotation to make it possible to distinguish whether a marginal note was an original copiest or editor's insertion of something accidentally left out (a frequent occurrence as anyone who has ever tried to manually copy a long text knows), or was instead one of these "helpful" glosses, most who recopied such mss. would write everything down as if it were original: better to err on the side of including something erroneous than excluding part of the Word (so the reasoning goes). Blessedly, we have very good text-critical resources for the NT so that it is really rare when there is serious doubt about these sorts of situations.

Matthew 17:24-27 (NASB)

24 When they came to Capernaum, those who collected the two-drachma tax came to Peter and said, "Does your teacher not pay the two-drachma tax?" 25 He *said, "Yes." And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect customs or poll-tax, from their sons or from strangers?" 26 When Peter said, "From strangers," Jesus said to him, "Then the sons are exempt. 27 However, so that we do not offend them, go to the sea and throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up; and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to them for you and Me."

*

Q: Is my understanding of Matthew 17:24-27 correct: Because Jesus is the Son of God, he should not be paying the temple tax, as it should only be collected from 'others', but pays it not to cause offence?

I'm aware that not only do I ask a lot of questions, but I also do it frequently. As always professor, I ask you to answer these whenever is convenient for you, I don't want to bother you and the frequency of my letter certainly can be bothering. Reading your studies helps me understand more and more, but many questions still occur to me and continuing the study is much easier if everything is clear and understood.

A: Yes indeed. That is my take on the verse as well. Just as the king's son did not pay the king's tax, so the Son of the King was not obligated to pay for the support of the temple which spoke of Him and His coming sacrifice. But Jesus allowed Peter to pay (and saw to it that he had the means to do so) in order not to give offense on an otherwise unimportant point (unimportant, that is, for all who truly understand that He is the Son of God).

Matthew 18:3-4 (NASB)

3 and said, "Truly I say to you, unless you are converted and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Whoever then humbles himself as this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

*

Q1: Why does our Lord use the example of a little child after being asked the question by the disciples of who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (v.1)? It seems to me that whilst the disciples had a concept of an elevated status of grandeur, the Lord counteracted this view with an example of a child's humility and accepting obedience. Does this also link in with Matthew 23:12? Is it also the fact that humility leads us to recognise our imperfection and consequently points us towards our need for a Saviour? Moreover, could it be added that post-salvation, it is daily humility that leads us to picking up our cross daily and losing our life for the sake of Christ and feeding the flock? This would in turn lead to eternal rewards, making a distinction even between believers in eternity.

A1: Again, you are right on the point. Humility is not only an important virtue but a critical one. Some people have physical courage, but no one can have the necessary moral courage to persevere in all of the things that may happen in life -- and especially the things that are going to happen in the Tribulation -- without humility. That is because humility recognizes our utter dependence on the Lord and accepts His complete trustworthiness, looking to Him instead of to ourselves and relying on Him and not our own talents, abilities or resources. Humility is seeing things as they *actually* are and our completely tentative position in this world, dependent as we are on Him for absolutely everything, more than we know. That is why Paul says, "when I am weak, then I am strong" (2Cor.12:10).

*

A2: We have to approach this like little children, as Jesus told us. When we were very young, we didn't always know where our parents were taking us when they led us by the hand - but we trusted them, because we knew instinctively that they loved us and were there to care for us. We usually obeyed them too. And when we listened to their words, we did so with a very simple and genuine lack of subtlety, not imagining or pretending that we knew better. As we grew older, we tended to be more disobedient, tended to doubt they knew what they were talking about, tended to think that we knew better what was right for us. As we reached a more mature adulthood, however,

we reflected and considered that they had done all right after all, and that we had been headstrong and suffering from the arrogance of youth in many of these adolescent assumptions.

Now everyone's experience is different, and no human parents are perfect either, but as we look through the human family generally and through time, these are pretty typical trends and experiences. Our heavenly Father, of course, is perfect, and knows perfectly well what is good for us - in fact He is working out everything in our lives for the good, especially for those of us who truly do love Him and Jesus beyond everything else in life, and want to do so more and more day by day (Rom.8:28). ***For every question, He will provide an answer, and for every problem, a solution.*** It may not be the one we want, or the one we expected, or come at the time we anticipated it, but we have to learn to trust Him like a child trusting His loving parents when it is yet impossible for him to understand completely what is going on.

Now the one other thing about this comparison our Lord makes that we should keep firmly in mind is that while a small child really has no choice but to follow his/her parents' lead, we do have a choice. Instead of banishing doubt, embracing faith, trusting God, and joyfully waiting for what He has for us, whatever that may be, we can, in arrogant adolescent style, doubt His ability, His mercy, His care, His attention, His timing, His knowledge. In the human analogy, this turned out to be foolish on our parts as teenagers - how much more is it not folly now when the One with whom we have to do is the all-powerful Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the One who loved us so much that He sent His own beloved Son to die for us in our place, a death on the cross at that!

Matthew 18:6 (NASB)

6 but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

NIV SB: 18:6, 10 14 little ones. All believers, regardless of age (see Mk 9:42 and note; Lk 17:2).

*

Q1: Do you agree that believers are meant by "the little ones"?

A1: The point made by the note is true, but the context clearly is speaking about the young (and therefore impressionable) – it seems an even greater measure of divine displeasure is forthcoming

for tripping up the very young (akin to heavier sentences in secular law for crimes against children).

*

A2: As the parallel passage of Matthew 18:6 makes clear, the "little ones" are those "who believe in Me", that is, believers. The offense Jesus mentions is "scandalizing" believers, and in the context, scandalizing in particular those who are "young and innocent", that is, those who may not yet have the life-experience to "know better" in the same way that an older believer would/should. So it is indeed talking about "scandalizing" vulnerable believers who are vulnerable not through their own sloppy approach but because of their age (whether chronological or spiritual). The verb in Greek, *skandalizo*, is talking about leading someone else into apostasy, that is, "tripping them up", or "making them stumble" in their faith to the degree that they may lose that faith and hence lose their salvation as a result (see the link in CT 3A: "Definition, Etymology, Process and Prophecies of the Great Apostasy"). The usual way that this happens is through the active tearing down of faith through lies, and by directly sowing of seeds of doubt about the gospel, or indirectly through leading these vulnerable believers into compromising practices, whether of false religion or sin or both, which in turn undermine faith. So these verses are talking about those who have actively taken up arms in the cause of Satan to assault the faith of believers, something which is bad enough when their targets are mature believers (in terms of years and/or spiritual growth), but absolutely horrific when their targets are the young and vulnerable (in terms of years and/or spiritual growth). In this case, our Lord assures us, He and His Father are not going to stand idly by. Such individuals will be dealt with in the most severe terms, ***a fact that shows for certain that there is a differentiation of greater and lesser degrees of divine judgment both in this life and the next.*** One thing is for sure: given our Lord's extreme description of the fate of those who serve the devil in this most heinous activity of trying to deprive of salvation those who are particularly open to assault through no particular fault of their own, we can be certain that He is not just using hyperbole here. Those who engage in this activity have a reckoning coming which is sure to be both swift and a cause for shuddering for all who hear tell of it.

*

Q3: Could you explain from what you wrote the fact that there will be differentiation of greater or less divine judgement in this life and the next (see bold and italicised)?

A3: The more evil in this life, the more judgment from the Lord. The more evil in this life, the more severe the rebuke at the Great White Throne (even believers “fear the Lord” when it comes to our divine eternal evaluation, though we are confident of salvation and reward: 2Cor.5:11). This does not mean, however, that there is any difference in the lake of fire for one unbeliever versus the next -- even though they will be recognizable as “great or small” (Rev.20:12).

Matthew 18:7 (NASB)

7 “Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!

*

Q: What are the stumbling blocks that our Lord is referring to here? Is it the deceptive nature of Satan’s cosmos and world system? And in regards to the latter verse, would this comprise false teachers and the like?

A: Yes, and I believe it comprises anything done not out of love which might lead a fellow believer astray. That is why Paul, for example, tells us not to do things that offend someone else’ conscience and thus might trip them up (Rom.14:1ff.). This does not mean we allow ourselves to be bullied into our out of something otherwise not wrong by self-righteous types. It does mean that we go out of our way not to deliver an unnecessary offense to someone who is immature.

Matthew 18:8-9 (NASB)

8 “If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be cast into the eternal fire. 9 If your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than to have two eyes and be cast into the fiery hell.

*

Q: Please explain how we should interpret these passages. Do you agree with NIV SB: 18:8–9 Hyperbole: Deal as drastically as necessary with sin in order to remove it from your life. This calls for self- discipline. See note on 5:29–30.

8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into

eternal fire. 9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

Matthew 18:8-9 (NIV1984)

A: No self-mutilation can save; only grace accepted through faith can save – the blood of Christ alone washes away sin. Also, no one in history has done this – and our Lord did not expect anyone to do these things. Indeed, the examples are perfectly chosen as impossible things no one can do (cf. the camel going through the eye of the needle – but "nothing is impossible for God": Matt.19:24-26). The point is precisely that we need help from God in order to be saved, and nothing we can do, no matter how severe, could ever save us. This passage destroys salvation by works and throws anyone listening onto the mercy of God – exactly where we need to be to be saved.

Matthew 18:10 (NASB)

10 “See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

*

Q1: Could you relate to the point made in the footnote? Should verse 11 be a part of the scripture?

Q2: Why does our Lord give as a reason for not looking down on the little ones the fact that their angels see God's face in heaven?

A: Verse eleven is not in any of the older mss. and seems to have been imported here from Luke 19:10 (possibly the result of a parallel written in the margin of a ms. and assumed by later copyists to be part of the text). As to the reason for the statement in verse ten, it's human nature to think differently about people we know are related to the rich and powerful. So, for example, we would probably treat the U.S. President's kids differently than some ordinary children. Our Lord's point is that every child has the benefit of angelic protection (to safeguard free will), so that if we were seeing things through God's eyes we would realize that every child – and every person – is important to God, and would be more inclined to act in love out of respect for the One who loves them. Every human being is important to God. After all, He created us all, and more than that He sent His one and only Son to die for the sins of all. The mention of their angels reminds (or should remind) us all that God is involved deeply in the lives of every single person, so that for us to take it

upon ourselves to despise anyone else, even "little ones" who may seem to us to be of no particular importance (more so in the ancient world than today; cf. Lev.27:1-7).

Matthew 18:12-14 (NASB)

12 "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? 13 If it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. 14 So it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.

NIV SB: 18:12–14 The parable of the lost/wandering (see vv. 12–13) sheep is also found in Lk 15:3–7. There it applies to unbelievers, here to believers. Jesus used the same parable to teach different truths in different situations.

*

Q: How do we know that Matthew 18:12-14 refers to believers and Luke 15:3-7 to unbelievers?

A: It applies to both in both places: our Lord's attitude of wanting all to be saved applies to unbelievers (1Tim.2:4); His attitude of wanting all believers to come back after wandering is likewise applicable to all (cf. the prodigal son: Lk.15:10-32).

Matthew 18:15 (NIV1984)

15 "If your brother sins against you,^[a] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

*

Q1: Matthew 18:15 Some manuscripts do not have *against you*. Could you relate to the point made in the footnote?

A1: "Against you" is not part of the text, but it is a legitimate translation. Greek often leaves things out which are understood (like the direct object which is impossible to do in English). Here the verse makes no sense at all unless we understand that "you" are the one who has been offended.

*

Q2: Could it not be that a sin is meant here that has not been committed against the person who is then told to show the sinner's fault, but rather our Lord here teaches how to help others recognize where they have done wrong? Is this possible?

A2: The problem with that is that it would give license to intervene – like a busybody – in other people's affairs. There is a time and a place to correct a brother, but it certainly should not be a regular occurrence, and we ought to be very careful about making the practice a rare one. This passage is paralleled in Luke 17:3 where our Lord says that if our brother responds we should "forgive him". We certainly can't forgive what was done to other parties, so it seems clear to me that our Lord in both passages is addressing personal affronts and how we are to handle them when they come from other believers.

Matthew 18:17 (NASB)

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

*

Q1: Our Lord says: "and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector", and yet he showed mercy to tax collectors and sinners, treating them like the lost sheep that He wanted to reunite with the flock, hence I'm not sure how to understand these words.

A1: In my view we should understand this to be a breach of a very serious nature rather than a garden variety disagreement. Paul commanded the exact same treatment for the incestuous Corinthian man, and yet his motive was not for the person's destruction but his salvation (1Cor.5:5); when the man did repent, Paul took pains to make sure that he was accepted again into fellowship:

If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.
2nd Corinthians 5:2-8 NIV

*

Q2: Do you mean here that the man who was handed over to Satan in 1 Corinthians 5:5 is the same man referred to in 2 Corinthians 5:2-8? If so, how do we know that? Also, since 1 Corinthians 5:5 says that the man was handed over "for the destruction of the flesh", doesn't that imply that he died?

A2: He was handed over "so that his spirit might be saved" which indicates first and foremost a recovery (and from what we know about the sin unto death deliverance in respect of his eternal life even if he refused to recover). As to "How do we know?", this is an issue among interpreters with two schools of thought: 1) it is the same man; 2) it is not the same man. The first opinion is the more venerable – and I would say also the most logical. The Spirit has given us a second letter to the same congregation and the 2nd Corinthians 5:2-8 is most naturally taken to be this same individual on first (and second and third) readings. The better question might be "why don't some people think so?", and the reasons usually have to do with perceived non-matching details between the two accounts (not only what you mention here, but also the different impression received on a number of points in the second account as compared to the first). However, having read these epistles many times, I don't see any difficulties that cannot be explained, and in fact the second passage only seems to make good sense when understood in light of the first – not to mention that it illuminates the first. Also I think that any serious Christian who has read Acts and the Pauline epistles carefully and closely will understand that there are "different impressions" all around when it comes to lining up the historical details. To me, that is not a problem but is rather an indication of what happens when we have a very lacunose record that we may mistakenly assume is complete because of our familiarity with it (the same thing is apt to happen in interpretation of the gospels if we are not careful: cf. 21:25). When dealing with the historical portions of the New Testament, therefore, we need to take care to remember that it is not as if we had the complete jigsaw puzzle and were trying to fit the pieces in correctly, but more of a situation where we have about five percent of the pieces and will want to put them in the approximate area where they belong in order to be able to fill in a general idea of the rest by godly interpretation.

Matthew 18:18 (NASB)

18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.

*

Q: This is a difficult verse - could you clarify it? What does Jesus mean here?

A: I believe that our Lord is speaking about the power of the gospel. For our Lord also says: "you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (**Jn.8:32**). By giving the gospel, the apostles would most definitely be the instruments whereby many, Jew and gentile alike, would be liberated from the bondage of sin, both on earth (saved with the opportunity to serve), and in heaven (looking forward to life eternal). This is connected to the issue of the "keys to the kingdom", on which please see the link: <http://ichthys.com/mail-Enoch and Gospel questions.htm#binding>.

Matthew 18:19 (NASB)

19 "Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.

NIV SB: 18:19 anything. Probably not a reference to prayer generally but to disciplinary decisions, especially in the context of vv. 15-18.

*

Q: Do you agree that this verse refers to the disciplinary decisions? So far I have not interpreted it in this way.

A: No, I don't agree, especially in light of the next verse: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matt.18:20 NIV).

Matthew 18:21-22 (NASB)

21 Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus *said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

*

Q1: What is the number Jesus mentions in Matthew 18:21-22? My Polish translation says 'seventy seven times'. There is a difference between seventy times seven and seventy seven, even if this number is used as a symbol (am I correct to assume it is a symbol?).

A1: *I would agree that this means we should forgive as often as necessary.* In the history of the world I doubt this precise scenario has happened very frequently, namely, that we need to forgive the same person for the same thing "77 times", let alone 490 times. As to the text,

there is no difference in the manuscripts. It all depends on whether or not the translator takes the numbers literally (= 70 X 7) or sees it as so much of a figure of speech for a virtually unlimited number that "77" seems a better balance than "490" – although that is actually correct.

*

Q2: Could you explain the relationship between these verses? In verse 4 Jesus tells the apostles to forgive, to which they reply "Increase our faith" and I don't know how that stems from what has already been said. According to the NIV SB it is to do with them lacking the belief to put our Lord's command into practice:

NIV SB: Lk.17:5 Increase our faith! They felt incapable of measuring up to the standards set forth in vv. 1-4. They wanted greater faith to lay hold of the power to live up to Jesus' standards

Then our Lord, having in verse 6 spoken about faith, moves to the nature of servitude and again, I'm not sure why He does that.

4 And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him."

5 The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6 And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you.

7 "Which of you, having a slave plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come immediately and sit down to eat'? 8 But will he not say to him, 'Prepare something for me to eat, and properly clothe yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; and afterward you may eat and drink'? 9 He does not thank the slave because he did the things which were commanded, does he? 10 So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.'"

Luke 17:4-10 (NASB)

A2: The teaching about being unworthy servants occurs only in Luke (Lk.17:7-10), although Matthew, for example, does have the verse about rebuking one's brother and also about forgiving "seven times" (actually seventy times seven in Matt.18:21). We have already established that our Lord taught many principles of truth in a variety of orders. So I do not think that there must necessarily be a thematic connection between verses six and seven (verse seven begins a new teaching).

Clearly, however, we can say that the need for proper humility (the lesson of vv.7-10) is applicable to one's attitude of forgiveness (the problem addressed in verse four). The principle that even a little true faith is sufficient to do wondrous things (v.6) is a response to the disciples wrongly concluding that they are unable to be so forgiving because of a lack of faith; rather, they are choosing not to wish to forgive – if they were willing, this would easily be possible.

*

A3: Forgiveness is what we do towards others who wrong us or against whom we have some grievance – these are "our debtors"; these are "those who trespass against us":

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

Matthew 18:21-22 NKJV

In our Lord's reply to Peter above, not only was it a case of personal wrong, but also of the one who did the wrong actually coming and asking for forgiveness. We are to have an attitude of forgiveness towards others, especially if they ask for that forgiveness, but it is not our place as third parties to inject ourselves into the disputes of others (e.g., Prov.26:17).

Also, actions have consequences, and personal forgiveness does not necessarily blot out the tangible effects of wrong done. For example, if two people are engaged and one is unfaithful to the other, it is certainly not un-Christian for the wronged party to forgive – but also to terminate the engagement. Just as there is a difference between innocence and stupidity, so the command to forgive is not a command to destroy oneself. People who do wrong should be avoided; true forgiveness from the heart is not inconsistent with prudent behavior. This is especially true in the case of criminal behavior; we should not associate with anyone so involved nor fail to report them to the authorities, forgive them for such wrongs against ourselves though we may.

*

Q4: Got a question to ask you. My relative has been carrying a lot of hate and unforgiveness. I told him that is not what the Lord says but he claims we don't have to forgive he doesn't read the Bible. How can it be explained to him? He seems think it takes a better man not to forgive than to forgive.

A4: You are certainly correct, of course. Forgiveness is not only the way of love (1Cor.13:4-7), but it is also required of believers if we want to receive forgiveness from the Lord:

"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Matthew 6:14-15 NKJV

In my view, these (and similar) verses admit of no alternative interpretations (e.g., Matt.18:35; Mk.11:26; Lk.6:37). If a person is not willing to accept the crystal clear truth of scripture on such a basic topic, I'm not sure that there is a rhetorical way to convince them. Besides laying the truth of scripture before them, it probably must then be left to the Lord to make the matter clear.

I will certainly say a prayer for your relative.

Matthew 18:24 (NASB)

24 When he had begun to settle them, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him.

Matthew 18:24 A talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages of a laborer

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Q1: If one talent was worth more than fifteen years' wages, it seems that the sum of ten thousand talents is extortionate?

A1: Nice observation. Codex Sinaiticus has "many" instead of "myriads". This is corrected to the majority reading in that ms. by what is thought by most to be corrector "C" (ca. 7th century). Sinaiticus is (apparently) the only ms. to have the reading "many", so most critical texts don't even take notice of the "issue".

*

Q2: Do you think "many" is the correct reading, or is the majority reading right on this?

A2: Yes. I think "many" is what Matthew wrote.

Matthew 18:35 (NASB)

35 My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."

*

Q: How do we reconcile this verse with someone who is saved, yet is unwilling to forgive his brother/s (e.g. holds a grudge)? The previous verse (v.34) states that he would be handed over to the torturers until he should repay all that he owed. Why does Jesus say that our Father would also do the same to those who do not forgive their brother or sisters' debts? Would this be intensive divine discipline?

A: This is a parable and as such may be interpreted according to the circumstances to which it is applied. Are you an unbeliever? Christ died for your sins -- but if you throw that sacrifice back into the Father's face instead of responding, what kind of response to think you'll receive from the Judge Himself? Are you a believer? Christ died for your sins and you have been forgiven them; further, you have been forgiven for fellowship everything you've done when you've confessed. Now are you going to be unwilling to forgive a fellow believer some debt he/she owes to you? That is the opposite of walking in love, and a person who persists in such a hateful course can expect divine discipline indeed.

Matthew 19:9 (NASB)

9 And I say to you, whoever [a]divorces his wife, except for [b]immorality, and marries another woman[c]commits adultery [d]."

Matthew 19:9 Or sends away

Matthew 19:9 Lit fornication

Matthew 19:9 Some early mss read makes her commit adultery

Matthew 19:9 Some early mss add and he who marries a divorced woman commits adultery

*

Q: Could you refer to the last two footnotes?

A: The variations indicated by note "c" are results of attempted harmonization with the text at Matthew 5:32, "makes her commit adultery" (NASB); the insertion is not original, but, as mentioned, the wording does occur earlier. The variation in note "d" is only backed up by P25, a fourth century papyrus (and seems to me from the Greek to constitute a gloss); it is not part of scripture.

Matthew 19:10-12 (NASB)

10 The disciples *said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it."

*

Q1: I'm not sure about the basis of disciples' words. They say that if such is the relationship between spouses, it's better not to marry, but what do they mean by that? Do they mean that it's better not to make a commitment that's hard to keep, either for the man or for the woman?

A1: I think they are seeing it from the man's point of view. They had grown up in a patriarchal society where a man's authority at home was bounded only by his will and good nature. Contemplating marriage where a woman could not be divorced at will made it seem wholly unworkable from their cultural point of view.

*

Q2: Who does our Lord mean by the first two types of eunuchs - those "who were born that way" and those "who were made eunuchs"?

A2: I think everyone understands that some people born male are not able to fulfill the male role in a marriage (for a variety of reasons we need not get in to any more than our Lord did). Those who are "made" are those castrated by others (as was common in oriental courts, for example, cf.: Is.39:7).

*

Q3: Would you not say that celibacy is presented as superior to marriage, as it allows a greater commitment to the ministry?

NIV SB: 19:12 born that way. Impotent. made eunuchs. By castration. choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Those who have voluntarily adopted a celibate lifestyle in order to give themselves more completely to God's work. Under certain circumstances celibacy is recommended in Scripture (cf. 1Co 7:25-38), but it is never presented as superior to marriage.

A3: Yes, but with emphasis on the important caveat, "He who is able to accept this, let him accept it". The vast majority of human beings most definitely cannot remain unmarried without falling

into sexual sin. And it is far "better to marry than to burn", as Paul points out (1Cor.7:9). No one should think of physically altering him/herself – as that is not only contrary to scripture but also would do no good in terms of the incontinence of the lust in any case. "Single bliss" is only for those who can handle it, and very few can handle it. Many married men win wonderful eternal rewards. David was married (and then some); Abraham was married; Peter was married. In fact, most of the great believers of the Bible were married. Paul achieved a tremendous amount for the Lord and his single status was clearly a help in that regard (as well as a sacrifice; cf. 1Cor.9:5); but then Paul endured many things that few of us can convince ourselves of being capable of emulating, even in the comfort of our easy-chairs (cf. 1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11).

Matthew 19:13-15 (NASB)

13 Then some children were brought to Him so that He might lay His hands on them and pray; and the disciples rebuked them. 14 But Jesus said, "Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." 15 After laying His hands on them, He departed from there.

*

A: Always good to hear from you - and thanks for your confidence (hope I can justify it with this response)! In this passage, Matthew 11:25-26 (see too Luke 10:21), our Lord expresses a point of truth that, as with the rest of Jesus' teachings, is also taught both in the Old Testament and later in the New Testament epistles. Thus, for virtually every point of Bible teaching, we are blessed to have three different approaches to the same basic truth. I believe that our Lord is expressing the same principle that Paul does in 1st Corinthians 1:17 - 2:16 to the effect ***that the wisdom of this world cannot approach the wisdom of God and, indeed, cannot even truly understand it.*** This sentiment of the essential foolishness of human wisdom is also found in the Old Testament (e.g., Is.24:19, which Paul actually quotes at 1Cor.1:19; cf. Job 5:12-13; Is.44:25; Jer.9:23). But perhaps the key element of this passage in Matthew which is essential to fully grasping its complete meaning is Jesus' use of the word "infants" (KJV "babes"). Our Lord is clearly contrasting "the wise" (from whom the truth is hidden) to "babes" (to whom it has been revealed). It is therefore certain that our Savior means "babes" in a spiritual sense (since literal infants, etymologically in the Greek "those who do not yet have the power to speak", clearly are not yet able to understand any sort of complex verbal communication, much less divine revelation). We can see precisely what Jesus

means by this analogy by examining Matthew 19:14:

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to ***such as these.***"

Matthew 19:14 NIV

By the phrase "such as these" our Lord makes a very helpful and useful analogy between literal small children and adults who are also true believers (or those with the hearts to become true believers). The haughty, the proud, the arrogant, those who are wise according to the wisdom of this world, would never deign to come to Him. Only those of us who approach Him with the simplicity of faith of a little child are able to understand, because truth can only be received in humility. Truth has to be believed, and to believe something that cannot be proved takes childlike faith, the same faith that we had in our parents when we were very young, when we believed the information they gave us even though we had no way to verify it. Later on in life, human beings tend to become skeptical and demand "proof". This is not a bad thing where the world in general is concerned. The ancient Greeks had a saying, "For life, you need first to learn to swim, and second to learn to disbelieve". In a world of coasts and islands and ancient sea transport, swimming was an essential survival skill and these world-wise ancient Greeks saw skepticism in regard to our fellow man as only just second in importance in terms of survival.

But when it comes to God, when it comes to salvation, when it comes to the heavenly wisdom which comes down from the Father of lights, when it comes to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the very opposite is true. When it comes to the truth, we need to suspend our normal skepticism and instead believe everything God tells us. Just as we used to believe our parents as small children, so now we ought to believe our divine Parent, our heavenly Father, since everything He tells us is absolutely the truth. If, instead, we approach the Bible with the same human, worldly skepticism we employ elsewhere, we will never understand what God is telling us, because divine truth cannot even be perceived unless it is believed. We have to have faith that it is true before we can really understand it, because such true wisdom is not perceptible to the empiricism of eye and ear – only God can tell us what is really true:

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (quote fr. Is.64:4). But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

1st Corinthians 2:9-10 NIV

Thus when our Lord rejoices that our Father has revealed to "infants" what He has hidden from the wise, He is saying that only those who approach Him and His Word with that same humility of faith that characterizes the very young can ever receive the revelation of the truth, whereas all those who attempt to filter God's truth through a prism of skepticism, holding themselves back from anything they cannot verify empirically, have, in effect, blinded their eyes to this same truth. This is a cause for rejoicing indeed, because it shows God's grace and mercy towards all who will come to Him in genuine faith, regardless of their worldly limitations, whereas those who are stiff-necked and refuse to accept the truth of what He says because of their stubborn adherence to worldly, material standards, are not accepted even though they may possess many of advantages which the world prizes. That is why it says . . .

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

1st Corinthians 1:18a NIV

and

But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.

1st Corinthians 1:27a NIV

Thanks be to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who has confounded the worldly wisdom of the wise and made available to us who believe with simple child-like faith all the treasures of the true wisdom of God!

In Him.

Bob L.

Matthew 19:16-17 (NASB)

16 And someone came to Him and said, "Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?" 17 And He said to him, "Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments."

*

A1: This is Jesus' whole point in Matthew 19:16-26:

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, " 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:16-26 NIV

The point is that it is impossible to get to heaven by "following the Law" ("these things I have kept") and/or by "doing good" ("sell all your possessions"); when the young man erroneously and arrogantly assumed that he had met the criterion of perfect obedience to the Law (but of course he did not "love his neighbor as himself" perfectly since no one can), then Jesus added the command to "sell all . . . and give to the poor" – not because good works does it either, but because the young man's inability to embrace this proved his essential sinfulness and need of grace salvation (along with everyone else); then Jesus said "follow Me!" which is the only way to be saved: following Jesus. So while it is impossible for a human being to follow the Law by refraining from evil it is perhaps even more difficult to do all that it positively requires. At least we more obviously fail here since in the case of "keeping the ten commandments" et al. we can merely redefine sin until it accords with what we are comfortable doing just as this young man did, but we are more clear that there is always more to do for others that we are never going to be happy about doing. But while it is more difficult to be saved through the Law than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a

needle, nevertheless nothing is impossible for God – because Jesus has made salvation and the righteousness that springs from faith possible by His death in dying for all of our sins. The Law is our "pedagogue" as Paul puts it, leading us to Christ by showing us that we are sinful and in need of a Savior (Gal.3:24).

What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I did not come to know sin except through the Law. For I did not know [what] lust [was] except that the Law was telling [me], "You shall not lust". Then sin grabbed the opportunity [offered] by the commandment and produced in me every [sort of] lust. So without the Law, sin is dead (i.e., to our "knowledge").

Romans 7:7-8

"For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."

Galatians 2:19 TNIV

Matthew 19:29-30 (NASB)

29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. 30 But many who are first will be last; and the last, first.

Matthew 19:29 One early ms adds or wife

Matthew 19:29 One early ms reads a hundred times

*

Q1: Could you refer to both footnotes? How should the verse read?

A1: Both phrases should be included (they are both in Sinaiticus).

*

Q2: Could you explain the link between Jesus' words from verse 30 and 29?

A2: I think the connection is that while the disciples are focused on what is going on here on planet earth (cf. Matt.19:27), our Lord, after assuring them that they have made the right choice, is

also quick to remind them (and us) that this world is temporary, and that what really counts is not our status or possessions or situation here in this ephemeral and fundamentally compromised world, but where we will come out in the ranking at the judgment of the Church: better to be among the first then even if that means we are among the last now, because that ranking is from Him and is eternal, whereas where we rank in the eyes of the world is unimportant and incredibly short-lived.

*

Q3: I read an interesting interpretation according to which this verse could apply not only to the young ruler from verses 16-26, who might be considered among the first in this world through his wealth and status, but also to Peter and the apostles. In verse 27 Peter says "Behold, we have left everything and followed You; what then will there be for us?", which some take as an assumption that they were among the first and our Lord's words are a warning against complacency - what is your take on such a view?

A3: I don't have a problem with that as an application. Clearly, the reversal of the worldly order of things at the last judgment is what is meant. We who serve the Lord as our first priority are often disadvantaged in worldly terms and in the estimation of the world. In truth, God is blessing us now even as we are tested and tried, and the rewards that are to come to those who persevere and truly live their lives for Christ will put all such worldly concerns in the shade. The reversal will truly be great, even among believers (not to mention the difference between heaven and hell for believers and unbelievers respectively).

Matthew 20:13-16 (NASB)

¹³ But he answered and said to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for a denarius? ¹⁴ Take what is yours and go, but I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. ¹⁵ Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with what is my own? Or is your eye envious because I am generous?' ¹⁶ So the last shall be first, and the first last."

*

Q1a: How should we understand this parable? Doesn't it say that eternal rewards will be equal for all who have been saved? I read a number of interpretations and some make more sense than others, your input will as always be greatly appreciated.

Q1b: How should landowner's last words be interpreted? Normally the words "the last shall be first, and the first last" have been said in the context of the eternal status being opposite to one's earthly status (Matthew 19:30), but here it seems to suggest that those who worked least will be put above those who worked longest - please clarify.

A1: On this one, the best thing seems to give you the interpretation I have written up in CT 6 under "the judgment and reward of the Church":

With the use of the word "so" (Greek *houtos*, οὕτως, "thus / in this way") in verse sixteen above, we see that it is the reversal of the expected **order** that constitutes the fulfillment of the "last/first – first/last" prophecy. Applying this to the Church at large, the denarius represents the award of salvation which all who trust in Christ will possess equally. The workers hired first represent those who seem in the world's eyes according to the world's standards as likely to receive a larger reward, while those hired last appear to be precisely the opposite, namely, those whose reward will be the least. But in fact, the situation is exactly the reverse of worldly impressions. For our purposes here, the critical point of interpretation is the greater honor given to those whose production is often invisible to us here and now being represented **by the order** of evaluation: rather than having to wait at the end of the line, this group is promoted by being given their wages first (while on the contrary those who **appear** to our sight to be worthy of more, are not, and are in fact placed behind the truly more worthy). Thus this parable indicates that those who are truly first in God's eyes will receive their judgment and reward first, while those who may seem more prominent to us but are actually not so in truth will have to wait until later, a situation which also reflects their relatively lesser rewards.

*

Q2: I'm not clear about this - on the one hand you wrote that "the denarius represents the award of salvation which all who trust in Christ will possess equally", which is an identical reward for all saved, but on the other you still wrote that some will receive more honour than others.

A2: The focus is salvation, and salvation is our goal. As when Peter says "you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls" (1Pet.1:9 NIV) – even though he certainly understands that there will be a judgment before Christ's *bema* for the purpose of evaluation and reward. So we all hope for salvation, and to be saved is the entire point of this life; within our individual lives, some will respond better to the Lord than others, and will be rewarded more than those others – within the community of those saved.

*

Q3: You wrote that the work of those who receive their rewards first was invisible, but more effective, so should we take the parable to mean that what they have done in the short time was equal to the production of those who have laboured for longer?

A3: This is not an individual evaluation (as with the other parables), but a collective one – and we shall all be individually evaluated. So we have to take care in matching the details here. The point, I think, is a collective one. Israel has been around a long time, and the Church Age is relatively new – and yet even though Israel has born "the burden of the day", the gentiles of the Church Age will not be disadvantaged nor those of Israel advantaged by their status – all will be equally part of the Bride of Christ. Individually, reward will depend upon what we have done (or not) as individuals, and the level of reward achieved will be justly rewarded by the Lord, not on the basis of appearances but on the basis of actual spiritual accomplishments.

*

Q4: Would you say that this interpretation could be true? I know you take this passage as referring to believers of varying productivity, which is in accordance with the fact that in the parable all workers receive the payment, but the NIV SB proposes that those who grumble against the landowner are religious leaders. One aspect of this interpretation which seems to be in its favour is that many religious leaders could be considered as having been in the vineyard for a long time, whereas those who come late can be taken as being the sinners who repent. Your view on this will be appreciated.

NIV SB: 20:1-16 This parable occurs only in Matthew's Gospel. In its original setting, its main point seems to be the sovereign graciousness and generosity of God extended to latecomers (the poor and the outcasts of society) into God's kingdom. It is addressed to the grumblers (v. 11) who just cannot handle this amazing expression of God's grace. They almost certainly represent the religious leaders who opposed Jesus.

A4: No, because the religious leaders were in fact not even doing the work of the vineyard – and they will not be paid. They are the ones who will kill the Son and throw Him out of the vineyard. So this interpretation fails on several critical counts.

Matthew 20:20-23 (NASB)

20 Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. 21 And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She *said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left." 22 But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They *said to Him, "We are able." 23 He *said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father."

*

Q1: Why does Jesus say 'My cup you shall drink' if no one could drink quite His cup?

A1: I believe our Lord meant that they would "drink the cup of martyrdom" which is the ultimate "sharing of the suffering of Christ" (see the links). It is not unusual, as we have seen, for things to be true in one sense and not in another, and vice versa, and for our Lord to refer to both aspects of a question in order to cover it fully.

Matthew 20:29-34 (NASB)

29 As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. 30 And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" 31 The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!" 32 And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, "What do you want Me to do for you?" 33 They *said to Him, "Lord, we want our eyes to be opened." 34 Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

*

Q: The fact that Matthew mentions two blind men and Mark and Luke only one can perhaps be reconciled with there being one who was more prominent and spoke, but how should we understand that according to Matthew our Lord was leaving Jericho when this miracle took place, but according to Luke - as He was coming towards it?

A: I'm not sure that the two are not a different incident, but it is true that Matthew often calls attention to all participants instead of the most prominent one (as in the case of the Gadarene demoniac: Matt.8:28ff.; see the link: <http://ichthys.com/mail-double.htm>). As to where the incident involving Bar-Timaeus took place, I don't think that in fact the accounts of Mark and Luke are irreconcilable. Mark says in verse 46b, "while He was going through [the city] away from

Jericho" – which two phrases taken together most likely mean "moving away from the city center but still technically in the greater area called "Jericho". Luke says in verse 36 that Bar-Timaeus heard the noise of the crowd "passing through" i.e., the center of town (verse 35 says that he was sitting by the road, no doubt on the far side of the town) when Jesus had approached the city from the east. After the healing, Luke has in verse one of chapter nineteen, "and having come in (i.e., to the city), He passed [completely] through Jericho". This means that Bar-Timaeus was sitting in the "suburbs", so to speak, on the west side, but still in what was known as "Jericho". In fact, that is the only way to understand *eiselthon* in verse one of chapter nineteen. So Luke adds a wonderful detail explaining how the blind man could have gotten prepared (physically and also in his heart) for what he would do when Jesus came by (i.e., he heard the commotion in the city center – something that might not have happened had he been on the eastern side of town outside of the city where our Lord first entered).

Matthew 21:1-5 ff. (NASB)

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. 3 If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

5 "Say to the daughter of Zion,
'Behold your King is coming to you,
Gentle, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

*

Excerpt from BB 4a Christology

2) The triumphal entry (Matt.21:1-17; Mk.11:1-11; Lk.19:29-44; Jn.12:12-19):

On that glorious future day of days, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, will enter Jerusalem from the east in glory, mounted on a heavenly white charger, spattered with the blood of His enemies just dispatched at the battle of Armageddon (Rev.19:11-13). On the previous day being considered here, only hours before He would pour out His life's

blood for the sins of the world (the symbol which encapsulates Jesus' spiritual death in the darkness to atone for the sins of all mankind), our Lord rode into Jerusalem in humility, mounted on a donkey colt with an adult animal in tow, the pair of animals symbolizing both the purpose of this present advent as being different from the expectations of the populace, and also that it would be followed in the future by the advent of glory the people anticipated and yearned for then. In the symbolism here, our Lord's being mounted on the colt indicates that the cross comes first since a young and untrained animal would be unsuitable for battle (i.e., for Armageddon), but is on the contrary symbolic of purity and innocence recalling our Lord's sinlessness and suitability for sacrifice on behalf of the sins of the world.

(10) The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. (11) He (i.e., Judah, and thus the Messiah) will tether **his donkey** to a vine, **his colt** to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine (2nd Adv.; cf. Rev.19:13-15), his robes in the blood of grapes (1st Adv.; cf. Rev.7:15 with Lk.22:20).

Genesis 49:10-11 NIV

Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion. Shout [for joy], daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, your King will come to you. **Righteous and victorious** He is (2nd Adv.); **humble** and riding on **a donkey**, even on **a colt**, a donkey's foal (1st Adv.).

Zechariah 9:9

As our Lord made His way down the descent from the Mount of Olives into the Kidron valley and towards Jerusalem, the populace, many of whom would soon be calling for His crucifixion, turned out to see the prophet they hoped might be the conquering Messiah (cf. Matt.21:11), strewing palm branches in His path (symbolic of the Millennial Kingdom Messiah would bring)⁽⁶⁵⁾, and singing a victory Psalm which indeed spoke of Him, but missing entirely the symbolism even therein which spoke of the necessity for the Messiah first to suffer and die for the sins of the world.

(19) [Messiah speaks:] "Open for Me the gates of righteousness (i.e., the eastern gate of Jerusalem and the gate of the temple facing east)! I shall enter by them and praise the Lord. (20) This is the Lord's gate. The righteous will enter by it (i.e., through Christ; cf. Jn.10:1-9). (21) I shall praise You although You humbled ⁽⁶⁶⁾ Me (i.e., 1st Advent sufferings), for You have brought me deliverance (i.e., the victories of resurrection and Armageddon)." (22) [The chorus of celebrants responds:] "The Stone which the builders

rejected has become the Cornerstone! (23) This has come from the Lord, and it is wondrous to our eyes! (24) This is the Day which the Lord has made (i.e., the 2nd Advent)! Let us rejoice and delight ourselves in it! (25) Yes, Lord, **deliver us we pray** (*hoshi'ah na' = hosanna!*) [from the Tribulation]. Yes, Lord, bless us with prosperity (i.e., the blessings of the Millennial Kingdom)! (26) Blessed be the One (i.e., the Messiah) who is coming in the Name of the Lord! We greet you all (i.e., the Messiah and His retinue) from the house of the Lord! (27) The Lord is God! And He has caused His Light to shine upon us! **Bind up the Sacrifice with ropes to the horns of the altar** (i.e., the inaugural memorial sacrifice of the Millennial Kingdom meant to remind of the cross)."

Psalm 118:19-27

Immediately upon entering Jerusalem that first day, our Lord went up to the temple mount and swept the court of the gentiles clean of the commercial enterprises that had turned the worship of God into a human system of monetary transactions, exactly as He had also done at the beginning of His earthly ministry (Matt.21:12-13; Mk.11:15-18; Lk.19:45-48; cf. Jn.2:13-22). This is a striking foreshadowing of what will happen in the Millennium (cf. Zech.14:21; Dan.12:10), and therefore another prophetic sign of Jesus' Messiahship.

While they were coming back into the city from Bethany on the second day, our Lord approached a fig tree beside the road in search of fruit,⁽⁶⁷⁾ but, finding none, He cursed the tree which withered soon thereafter (Mk.11:13-14; 11:19-25; Matt.21:18-22).⁽⁶⁸⁾ The symbolism of this miracle is most important, for the tree represents Israel and her lack of productivity (cf. Micah 7:1). At the very time she should have been welcoming the Messiah with open arms and putting before His feet the fruits of her spiritual labors, she was in fact bereft of all truly godly works, and was about to crucify the One who had come to deliver her from her sins. This demonstrative sign also has ramifications for every believer's spiritual life as well, for while production for the Lord is the normal and expected result of spiritual growth, a complete lack of production is usually associated with apostasy (Jn.15:1-17; Heb.6:7-8).

Another symbolically important event we should note here which took place during those final days in Jerusalem was the request from certain Greeks to meet with Jesus and our Lord's response, that "unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone by itself; but if it does die, it produces much fruit" (Jn.12:20-32). Now that His prophetic ministry to the Jewish people was complete, our Lord had His face "set like flint" (Is.50:7; cf. Lk.9:51) to last through the gauntlet of abuse ahead in order to fulfill the critical objective and primary purpose of His time on

earth, namely, His bearing the sins of the entire world on the cross. In the manner of the grain of wheat in His illustration, Jesus' death would produce abundant "fruit" in the streaming into the family of God people of all nations (which these curious Greeks represent).

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Q2: Also, do we know Palm Sunday actually happened on a Sunday? If so, how? I don't recall reading in any of the gospels that it did.

A2: To take your last question first, it is possible that Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem happened on a Sunday, but in my view it is more likely that it took place on a Saturday; this is the view, following similar reasoning, of Thomas and Gundry in A Harmony of the Gospels (Moody 1978) p.174, note b. John 12:1 tells us that Jesus came to Bethany "six days before the Passover" and then at 12:12 says "on the next day" the triumphal entry occurred. Passover of course starts at sundown, so assuming that this particular Passover occurred Thursday-night-through-Friday-day (since the day following the Passover is the day of Christ's crucifixion and also the "day of preparation" for the Sabbath: Mk.15:42; Lk.23:54; Jn.19:31), then "six days before" counting inclusively in the Greek system would be daylight Friday, with the entry coming daylight Saturday.

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Q3: I heard that during the "Triumphal entry of Jesus on the donkey" the masses of people who gathered were not necessarily there because they believed Jesus was the messiah, whether spiritual or political, but rather, because it was a Jewish tradition to gather at that time and do what they did each year as a symbolic practice pointing to the coming One, and that they did this before the priest brought in the Lamb for the Passover. Those who hold this view say that Jesus circumvented, so to speak, their parade thus fulfilling the Scriptures. Those who hold that view say this is the reason why, just a few days later, these same people were now willing to crucify Jesus. However, I have not been able to find anything to support this view other than the man I heard who told about it.

Now, one other view I heard was this: That the procession was on the 6th day of Sukkot. And all of those lining the streets were anticipating the soon arrival of the Messiah, much as we are anticipating His soon arrival today. Those who hold this view point to the fact that while the synoptic Gospels place the Triumphal Entry near Passover, without the Gospels giving us the actual dates we do not know if the entry was really a week before Passover or if this was from Sukkot. And the people who cried for the crucifixion of Jesus were the Hellenists, not disgruntled faithful Jews. The faithful Jews lined the streets hailing Messiah, Whom they thought was taking

over the government. Those who hold this view say that the rest of the first view is from someone's imagination, not biblical fact. May I please ask your thoughts on these two views? I am trying to understand these subjects for a teaching lesson.

A3: It's always wonderful to hear from you, my friend. I hope you are having a blessed Easter – although we celebrate Him every day. As to your question, here is what I read in scripture:

The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem.

John 12:14 NIV

Many people, because they had heard that he had performed this sign, went out to meet him. So the Pharisees said to one another, "See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!"

John 12:18-19 NIV

And as a result of the triumphal entry, we find this:

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 21:10-11 NIV

From a simple reading of scripture it appears obvious that the huge response to our Lord's entry into the city was unusual. Yes of course there was a large crowd present in the city for Passover as was always the case, but for the crowd to throng to the city's eastern approaches and mob one individual entering therein, putting down palm branches and singing "Hosanna!", was not usual – it had never happened before and has never happened since. The festival of Tabernacles was in the fall, not the spring, though the palm branches are indeed more appropriate to that festival, as are the cries of hosanna – both of which speak to the coming of the Messiah as King to liberate Israel. So it is clear that the people did not understand the need for the Messiah first to suffer (though that is evident from the prophets as well), ***and had confused the cross and the crown, wanting the latter immediately and stumbling over the former in their hardness of hearts.***

Hope this answers your question. Please do feel free to write back as always. Two links which also may help:

The Triumphal Entry (in BB 4A)

Chronology of passion week

In Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior,

Bob L.

Matthew 21:10-11 (NASB)

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, "Who is this?" 11 And the crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee."

NIV SB: 21:11 the prophet. Refers either to a prophet in general (see 13:57) or to the prophet predicted in Dt 18:15-18 (see note on 18:15; see also Dt 34:10-12 and note on 34:12).

*

Q: Do you think that "prophet" here has a generic meaning, or is it the reference to "the" prophet?

A: It is hard to know what the multitude who had come up to Jerusalem for Passover really thought about our Lord – who is **the** Prophet in fact – but it seems unlikely that they recognized that He was the Messiah (which is who **the** Prophet is), even if that was implied in using this phrase on behalf of many. Here we have a case of the words being true in every respect, but of those uttering them not understanding the significance of what they are saying (as happens in unbelieving and undernourished churches all over the world every Sunday morning):

And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish." Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation.

John 11:49-51 NKJV

Matthew 21:12-17 (NASB)

12 And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13 And He *said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den."

14 And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became indignant 16 and said to Him, “Do You hear what these children are saying?” And Jesus *said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies You have prepared praise for Yourself?’” 17 And He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there.

NIV SB: 21:12–17 In the Synoptics the clearing of the temple occurs during the last week of Jesus' ministry; in John it takes place during the first few months (Jn 2:12–16). Two explanations are possible:(1) There were two clearings, one at the beginning and the other at the end of Jesus' public ministry. (2) There was only one clearing, which took place during Passion Week but which John placed at the beginning of his account for theological reasons—to show that God's judgment was operative through the Messiah from the outset of Jesus' ministry. However, different details are present in the two accounts (the selling of cattle and sheep in Jn 2:14, the whip in Jn 2:15, and the statements of Jesus in Mt 21:13; Jn 2:16). From Matthew's and Luke's accounts we might assume that the clearing of the temple took place on Sunday, following the so-called "Triumphal" Entry (21:1–11). But Mark (11:15–19) clearly indicates that it was on Monday. Matthew often compressed narratives.

*

Q1: Did the clearing take place on Sunday or Monday? How can Matthew's and Luke's accounts be reconciled with Mark's?

A1: First, there were two clearings of the temple, one at the inception of our Lord's ministry (John's account), and the one during Passion week (recorded in the synoptic Gospels). As to the chronology of the withering of the fig tree, Mark's rendition is chronological; Matthew's is presented as a flashback. One should translate Matthew 21:19 "Now when He was going back to the city early [that morning], He had become hungry and . . . ". This also explains why it seems in many English translations that Matthew is describing an immediate and visible withering of the fig tree (whereas Mark places the day's events in between cursing and withering); but in fact what the disciples say in verse twenty is "How did the fig tree dry up so quickly?" – a question which calls attention to the fact and speed of its withering and not to a miracle of instantaneous transition before their very eyes – they are seeing this after the passage of a day.

*

Q2: When did the triumphal entry take place? Could you comment on the point made in the NIV SB?

A2: Our Lord entered Jerusalem on a Sunday (see the link: [http://ichthys.com/mail-Death-Martyrdom-Resurrection.htm#Palm Sunday](http://ichthys.com/mail-Death-Martyrdom-Resurrection.htm#Palm%20Sunday)). "We might assume" many things . . . without doing our "homework" first. Matters of chronology are difficult in all ancient history and the reconstruction of "passion week" is a vexed issue because there are many groups which, for reasons that escape me, wish to argue about when the crucifixion took place (in addition to the traditional position, there is also a "Wednesday" and a "Thursday" school of thought). I have a lot at the site about these and related issues. For an overview of the week please see the link: [http://ichthys.com/4A-Christo.htm#2\)_The_triumphal_entry_](http://ichthys.com/4A-Christo.htm#2)_The_triumphal_entry_)

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Q3: Was the temple cleansed on that prior Sunday also?

A3: That is what I have concluded (see prior link).

Matthew 21:18-22 (NASB)

18 Now in the morning, when He was returning to the city, He became hungry. 19 Seeing a lone fig tree by the road, He came to it and found nothing on it except leaves only; and He *said to it, "No longer shall there ever be any fruit from you." And at once the fig tree withered.

20 Seeing this, the disciples were amazed and asked, "How did the fig tree wither all at once?" 21 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. 22 And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive."

*

Q1a: Could you explain the meaning of this occurrence? If there were no figs on the fig tree, was it not due to this not being the time when it would bear the fruit? And yet Jesus curses the tree?

Q1b: How can Matthew's and Mark's accounts of this event be reconciled, particularly with regard to chronology?

A1: I think the point is that while in our human estimation we might not see ourselves as "ready", we have to adopt our Lord's point of view instead so as to have fruit at the time He wants us to

have it (even if that doesn't seem like "the right time" to us). Had this tree done so, it would have served the Son of God; if we do so, we will serve those who belong to Him in ways we never could have imagined. The tree is a tree so not really culpable; but we have free will, after all, and so do have to answer for all we do – and fail to do.

*

Q2: Could you tell me what Matthew 21:21 means: "if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea', and it will be done"?

A2: With the words of this passage, therefore, our Lord cuts right to the quick on the issue of what it means to truly believe. The same sentiment is found at Luke 17:6, Matthew 17:20, and 21:20-21, and although the passage in Luke speaks of a fig tree being uprooted and planted in the sea, there and in the Matthew 17 passage Jesus tells us that we will receive these dramatic answers to prayer if only we have the tiniest amount of faith (as small as a grain of mustard seed). Further, in the Matthew 17 passage our Lord is explaining why the disciples were unable to cast out the demon which He did cast out after His descent from the mount of transfiguration – "because of your little faith".

"Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit" says the Lord of Hosts. What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel (i.e., a type of Christ) you will turn into a plain (i.e., for the construction of the temple). And He will bring forth the Corner Stone to the shouts of "grace, grace be upon it!"

Zechariah 4:6-7

As this passage in Zechariah shows, moving mountains – whether literal or metaphorical – can only be accomplished by the Spirit of God in the will of God (cf. Job 9:5 – God is the only one who can do this, clearly). In Matthew 21:22, in the context of the verse you ask about, Jesus adds, "**If you believe**, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer". Therefore the challenge of uprooting the fig tree and moving the mountain represents where we as believers in Him who promises us this **should** be - that is, at the point in our spiritual lives where we truly do possess supreme confidence of faith, a state that is only achieved through a) a mature knowledge of what God's will is (Phil.1:9-10), and b) a mature relationship with Him (achieved only through spiritual growth based on said knowledge; cf. Heb.5:14). Our Lord had **both** of these to a perfect degree, developed over a life-time of perfectly trusting God and resolutely and consistently growing in grace through diligent spiritual growth (Lk.2:40; 2:52). For this reason, His ability to "move

mountains" through prayers of faith cannot be compared to the "little faith" often demonstrated by the disciples (cf. Matt.17:19ff), and all too often by us as well. But the closer we get to Him, through faith, the more our faith strengthens and the more effective our prayers become. If we cannot move mountains now, everything our Lord says to us indicates that we *can* develop our faith to such a degree, and that even "a mustard seed" worth of faith is enough to do the most amazing things.

Many people think that this faith necessary for "mountain moving" is a matter of working something up - like rallying one's courage in a difficult situation. But in truth it is more of a letting go than a "summoning up". Inevitably there will be many times and circumstances in all of our lives when there is nothing we can really do about a particular problem, no matter how hard we try (or plan or think). At such times, we need to learn to trust God that He will resolve everything according to His will, remembering and believing that that will is for our good in every way (Rom.8:28). When Abraham took Isaac up to the mountain to sacrifice him, he had no idea how this situation could possibly work out for good - after all, it was God Himself who had ordered the sacrifice so that it was not even a case of waiting for God to weigh in on the problem, at least as far as Abraham could tell - this is a critical point that is not often recognized, and explains the depth of Abraham's obedience and trust in the Lord (so that he was truly God's "friend"). When Daniel was taken to be thrown into the lions' den, he had no idea how God or even if God would deliver him, but we know that he put the matter into the Lord's hands in the face of that terrifying and awful prospect. After all, he was about to be horribly killed - absent some unforeseen miracle - and precisely because he was persistent in faithfulness. Yet scripture tells us that he was delivered "because he had trusted in his God" (Dan.6:23). In both of these cases (and countless others in scripture and in our own experience and observation) there was simply nothing the believer could do but continue to believe - pray, to be sure, but pray in complete faith of God's help, God's deliverance, and the accomplishment of all God's good will, no matter what the situation may have looked like from our limited, earthly perspective.

Moving a mountain is impossible - for anyone but God, but nothing is impossible for God. He is the true focus of these verses, not the miraculous event contemplated, or even the person who prays for it with such great faith. Should this actually come to pass, it would not be the miracle itself that should attract our attention, nor should the person who makes this petition be held in excessive awe, but rather God who brings such glorious things about for His own sovereign purposes. Moving a mountain is impossible, and that is the point of Jesus' comparison. We need to understand that if we need a mountain to be moved, then God is not only capable of doing this

with no effort, but He will do whatever is necessary and good and right in the fulfillment of His will and plan for our lives. He can and will do whatever is needful - we only have to believe it. We all have mountains, obstacles in our paths that are so large and so daunting that surmounting them is an obvious impossibility. But if we remember our Lord's words here, we know that He has us by the hand, that we won't sink in the rising waters as long as we continue to trust Him.

Paul makes reference to this same sentiment in 1st Corinthians 13:2 where he speaks of "faith to move mountains" - clearly this represents a supreme test of faith. Is my faith strong enough to believe that God will do the impossible for me? We are not being asked to believe that God will do **absolutely anything** for us no matter what it might be - we are not nearly smart enough to know what is best for us even when we are asking with entirely pure motives - rather we are being told that God will do **absolutely everything** for us that we **need** and that we ask for in **faith**, even if we don't know really know what to ask for (Rom.8:26). For it is not the knowledge of our circumstances that is being commended here by implication but faith even in (or perhaps especially in) the absence of knowledge about what our circumstances truly require. If we doubt, we should not expect God to answer these "mountain moving prayers" (Mk.11:23; cf. Jas.1:6-8), because when we doubt, it is really God's character, God's promises, and God's ability that we are doubting. In all such testing, whenever we find ourselves staring up at the snow-covered Rockies without any means of passing, we need to remember that God knew we would be standing here, and He knew we would need a way through - that is at least part of the reason that the mountains are there in the first place (and probably the biggest part). Without mountains in the way, our faith would never be put to the test to a degree necessary to make it grow on the one hand, and to test its true worth on the other. Mountains in our path are God's way of refining our faith like gold, and also of assaying its true value for all the world to see, men and angels both (Jas.1:2-3; cf. Rom.5:3-5; Heb.11).

It is true that our Lord puts the matter in these verses you ask about in a very matter of fact way. Like so many of His words, this has real "steam". We put ourselves in the situation and blanch. He tells us, "just believe, and it will happen". We know that there is pain involved in these things, and time too, often great trackless vistas of time before the mountains move, but our Lord is forcing us to look to the end of the matter. Even if that mountain moves glacially slow, at the end, if we have trusted Him, we have our victory, and we see that He did move it. From our human perspective, mountains usually move imperceptibly slowly when they move at all, but with God one day is as a thousand years, and the whole span of human history is but the blink of an eye. We know these things, and we know that we can trust Him to do even the impossible things

we need Him to do. But we need more than knowledge - we have to put what we know about Him, His goodness, His power, His foreknowledge, His mercy, His planning out of all things, to work in our hearts with complete child-like faith, that ignores what is seen and felt, and trusts rather in the words of God.

After all, we already have the experience of this. To save us from death and destruction, we needed someone to die for our sins - the impossibility of impossibilities - and God provided this at the utmost cost to Himself. We have the cross of Jesus Christ to remind us that, compared to the sacrifice on Calvary, every other mountain is infinitesimally small.

And one last important observation on this. Jesus' comment on moving mountains occurs in the context of His disciples being unable to cast out a particularly stubborn demon (Matt.17:18-20). That feat our Lord accomplished instantly - and it was instantly needed and necessary. Our trouble often hand heavy upon us and we want them solved instantly in like fashion, but "waiting on the Lord" is also something we need to perfect. There are some mountains which must be moved immediately for us to be delivered and/or accomplish the objective our Lord has for us. In many cases, however, moving that mountain may require waiting on the Lord to answer our prayers to that effect at just the right time. In such situations, the measure of our faith is taken not only in the degree to which we have confidence in His ability to do it, but also and importantly in ***our persistence in that belief even when it does not happen as quickly as we would like.***

For more on faith, please see these links:

Faith Dynamics (Peter #24)

Free-Will Faith and the Will of God.

Faith: What is it?

Free-Will Faith in the Plan of God.

Free-Will Faith.

Please see also in CT 5 "Jesus Christ's Return to Earth on the Mount of Olives (Zechariah 14:2-7)" where this promise is literally fulfilled.

You can find out more about prayer at the following links:

Corporate Prayer: "When Two Agree on Earth" (Matt.18:19)

Cumulative Prayer

The Lord's Prayer

Can Prayer be Offered to the Son?

Holding up Holy Hands in Prayer

Imprecatory Prayer

Praying for Wisdom

Prayer for Failing Faith

Can Prayer Be Offered From Heaven?

Prayer and Imitating Christ

In Him who is able to do abundantly beyond whatever we ask or think, our precious Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Bob L.

Matthew 21:24-25 (NASB)

24 Jesus said to them, "I will also ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 The baptism of John was from what source, from heaven or from men?" And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why did you not believe him?'

*

Q1: Was our Lord's question about John's authority in some way linked to Pharisees' question about His own authority? Why did Jesus give this particular reply?

A1: The Pharisees have nothing to do with Jesus' authority; He put things this way to demonstrate that they had absolutely no interest in hearing a truthful answer inasmuch as they were not after truth but only seeking to muzzle our Lord and counter His ministry.

*

Q2: Would you say it's possible that our Lord asks this question, because it's directly related to answering the question which Pharisees asked? So whatever they answer with respect to John,

would be true with respect to Jesus? If they say "From heaven", then they will condemn their own unbelief, since they rejected John (Matthew 21:32) and in the same way they rejected Jesus. If they say "From men", then just as they feared the reaction of the people if they stated that about John's ministry, then even more the fear would be warranted if they said that Jesus' ministry was from men. So would you say our Lord here answers with a question, because Pharisees' treatment of John directly parallels treatment of our Lord?

A2: Your analysis is "spot-on". As to "So would you say our Lord here answers with a question, because Pharisees' treatment of John directly parallels treatment of our Lord?", I would say that He answers their question with a question because they are not really looking for an answer to the question they ask but really only seeking a way to accuse Him and trap Him.

Matthew 21:32 (NASB)

32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him; but the tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him; and you, seeing this, did not even feel remorse afterward so as to believe him.

*

Q: How specifically should we understand the expression "way of righteousness"?

A: Jesus is "the Way" and everything He did "fulfilled all righteousness". So the "way" here is the only way to please God, the only way of salvation. John revealed that "way" because He bore witness to Him who is the "Way", our dear Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in whom we have the righteousness of God by grace through faith.

Matthew 21:33-46

Parable of the tenants

*

Q1: Could you explain the meaning of this parable of "the tenants"?

A1: As it says in verse 45: "Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them". These leaders of the Jewish state and religion had purloined the vineyard and were using it to their own advantage, meaning that they were not doing

what God wanted (learning and teaching the truth), but merely supporting their comfortable lifestyles through mulcting the nation; when the Messiah came, therefore, they would do to Him as they had done to all God's prophets who had likewise called them to account.

*

Q2: Could you comment on the point made in the footnote?

Matthew 21:44 (NASB)

44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

Matthew 21:44 Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

A2: Verse 44 is part of the text and is in most of the most ancient mss. Some critics want to exclude it because of its similarity to Luke 20:18 and because it is absent in one strain of text. Please see the fine analysis in Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London 1970).

Matthew 21:44 (NASB)

44 And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

*

Q: Could you please clarify Matthew 21:44: And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

A: In my view, the former represents those who stumble over the Rock, Jesus Christ, and are ruined for failing to accept Him (true of most of His contemporaries who were unwilling to accept that the Messiah was not a conquering general); the latter represents the destruction of those who oppose Him at His return. So this verse sums up **spiritual** and **military** opposition which correspond to the **first** and **second** advents respectively.

Matthew 22:11 (NASB)

11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes,

NIV SB: 22:11 not wearing wedding clothes. It may have been the custom for a host to provide guests with wedding garments. This would have been necessary for the guests at this banquet in particular, for they were brought in directly from the streets (vv. 9–10). The failure of the man in question to avail himself of a wedding garment was therefore an insult to the host, who had made the garments available.

*

Q1: Do you agree with this interpretation?

Q2: I know from the previous question regarding this passage that this man represents the Gentiles who are invited to the feast and given the good news, but refuse to act accordingly (believe in Jesus Christ). What I'm not sure about is how to interpret the fact that his man does actually enter the feast.

A1&2: As you say in "b", that is my understanding of the passage; the banquet per se I take to be the Millennium; many will come into the Millennium (and many more will be born into it) who will not, for all the generosity of the King, accept Him in their hearts (no wedding clothes: cf. Rev.3:4-5; 4:4; 7:13; 16:15).

*

Q3: I'm wondering if these verses could be used as evidence for God electing us on the basis of our free-will choice which he knew from eternity past and thus as an argument against hyper-calvinism. The king sees a man not dressed in wedding clothes and on this basis he throws him out into "the outer darkness". Clearly, if the wearing of the wedding clothes was not a matter of a free-will choice on part of the guest, then the king would not have thrown him away. So it is a matter of choice. And yet our Lord summarises the parable by saying that "few are chosen". It looks to me like a summary of God's plan and the relationship between the choice and free will - God chooses those whom He knew would choose Him. What do you think?

A3: I don't have a problem with that. I'm not sure there is force here however: "as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast" (v.9). This person was called, but he chose to disrespect the One who gave the invitation – a good example of unbelievers who will experience the blessings of the Millennium under the perfect King, but will still refuse to accept Him through faith.

*

A4: Matthew 22:13: In the parable of the man with the unclean wedding garment, we see a similar situation where those called to the banquet (again a reference to the resurrection at the Second

Advent and the wedding banquet of the Lamb to celebrate Christ's victorious return) are found not to be worthy. The man with the soiled garment represents those who, like the goats of Matthew 25, are present in the kingdom for the 1,000 year "feast" but who nonetheless do not deign to clothe themselves with the righteousness which can be had only by faith (i.e., his attire shows that he is an unbeliever, and at the end of the age he and his like will be judged and thrown into the lake of fire: on the garment issue see Rev.7:14; *16:15; 19:8; 22:1).

Matthew 22:15-22 (NASB)

15 Then the Pharisees went and plotted together how they might trap Him in what He said. 16 And they *sent their disciples to Him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any. 17 Tell us then, what do You think? Is it lawful to give a poll-tax to Caesar, or not?" 18 But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, "Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? 19 Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax." And they brought Him a denarius. 20 And He *said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" 21 They *said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He *said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." 22 And hearing this, they were amazed, and leaving Him, they went away.

*

A: (NIV SB Notes) 22:15–17 The Pharisees were ardent nationalists, opposed to Roman rule, while the hated Herodians, as their name indicates, supported the Roman rule of the Herods. Now, however, the Pharisees enlisted the help of the Herodians to trap Jesus in his words (cf. note on Mk 3:6). After trying to put him off guard with flattery, they sprang their question: "Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" (v. 17). If he said "No," the Herodians would report him to the Roman governor and he would be executed for treason. If he said "Yes," the Pharisees would denounce him to the people as disloyal to his nation.

Matthew 22:29-32 (NASB)

29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

*

Q: I have a few questions on the topic of death. Do the dead know or ever realize they are dead? If so when is that? I mean how soon after they have passed? Do they remember any of the life they left behind? If a loved one (e.g., mother) is in heaven, and if God takes me to heaven would I see them again? Would she still be my Mom up there also? Will we both recognize each other?

A: I'm happy to answer your questions, as always.

1) Do the dead know or ever realize they are dead? If so when is that?

When the Sadducees tried to trick Jesus into "admitting" that there was no resurrection, He said:

"You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Matthew 22:29-32 NIV

This is a very important point. The "dead" are only "dead" from our limited, earthly point of view. As far as departed believers are concerned, they are more "alive" than we are. They only appear "dead" because a) we cannot see them any longer and b) their first, physical bodies are now lifeless. But they themselves are very much "alive" in every way, and in heaven, face to face with our dear Lord Jesus. They occupy what I call "interim bodies" (cf. 2Cor.5:3 [in the Greek - most English version mistranslate the verse]; Rev.6:11; 7:9) – not the perfect, eternal resurrection bodies which we shall possess and enjoy forever, but bodies nonetheless in which they now feel no pain and know only joy. They are recognizable as "who they are", and recognize each other. Jesus' comments about Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man in Luke chapter 16 make all this very clear, and this was even before all the saved, departed believers were brought by our Lord into the third heaven following His resurrection (see also Rev.6:11; 7:9). See the link in BB 4A, "The Transfer of Believers from the Subterranean Paradise to the Third Heaven".

2) Do they remember any of the life they left behind?

Yes indeed, but without fear or pain or trouble. When it says that the old things "will not even come to mind" (Is.65:17), I believe it means that by comparison with the wonders of heaven, no one will be even that interested about what went on upon the earth in the past (except as it glorified God or effects our eternal rewards: cf. "The Judgment of the Church").

3) If a loved one (e.g., mother) is in heaven, and if God takes me to heaven would I see them again? Would she still be my Mom up there also? Will we both recognize each other?

Yes indeed! We will all be "who we are" for all eternity, only without sin and pain and tears. There will indeed be many joyous reunions when the entire Body of Christ is united, and it is certainly legitimate to look forward to that glorious time. We will, moreover, be thrilled to be with Jesus – and that will be one more thing we share in common forever.

Matthew 22:35-37 (NASB)

35 One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, 36 “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” 37 And He said to him, “ ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

*

Q1: What is the nature of the test here? What answer was the Pharisee hoping for?

A1: Apparently this was the answer he was looking for – which demonstrates that he was thinking of things in the correct way (rather than that Jesus "passed the test"); for he says (as recorded in Mark 12:32-33):

So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Mark 12:32-33

And our Lord says of him (v.34):

Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

*

Q2: How do you think we should understand the list used by our Lord in this verse and in Mark 12:30? Do we know if our Lord read the Septuagint?

Q3: I would imagine that He had the text of the LXX and of course the Hebrew scriptures memorized at a very early age. All of these expressions, in their original forms and in the New Testament express the same thing: ***giving God our "all"***.

Matthew 22:41-46 (NASB)

41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question: 42 “What do you think about the Christ, whose son is He?” They *said to Him, “The son of David.” 43 He *said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying,

44 ‘The Lord said to my Lord,

“Sit at My right hand,

Until I put Your enemies beneath Your feet”?”

45 If David then calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” 46 No one was able to answer Him a word, nor did anyone dare from that day on to ask Him another question.

*

Q: Was this question by our Lord in any way linked to the previous test by the Pharisee (verse 36 - "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?")?

A: At this point of finally being asked the right question and having received an affirmation from at least one of their number as to what was really important in the Law, our Lord slices through several layers of pharisaical thinking to expose the hollowness of all of their unbelieving thoughts towards Him. For by asking this question Jesus makes it clear that the Son of David, the Messiah, had to be also the Son of God, divine as well as human, otherwise David would not be subordinate to Him (calling Him "Lord").

Matthew 23:1-3 (NASB)

1 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to His disciples, 2 saying: “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; 3 therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things and do not do them.

*

Q: I find these verses difficult to understand. Jesus has exposed and rebuked on numerous occasions not only Pharisees' deeds, but also their lack of understanding of the true meaning of the scriptures and yet He commands the people to observe "all that they tell you". I don't know how to reconcile these words with Matthew 15:1-14 or Matthew 16:11-12 and even with the words which quickly follow in Matthew 23:13 (NASB):

Matthew 23:13 (NASB)

13 "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from people; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.

NIV SB note on Pharisees: On free will and determination, they held to a mediating view that did not allow either human free will or the sovereignty of God to cancel out the other.

Could you clarify this view and explain how can it be derived?

A: In addition to being religious leaders, the Pharisees were to a large degree secular officials – and the Bible is always strong on obeying secular authority, even when it is far from perfect. They were the ones who carried out a good deal of the judicial and administrative oversight of the state. Indeed, it was mostly only in the area of foreign policy and the taxation necessary to maintain the defence establishment which protected it that the Romans interfered in those days. In addition, while our Lord tells the people to follow their judicial/administrative commands, He also is quick to tell them not to behave the way they behave. ***To me this is a clear dividing line between secular measures ("render unto Caesar what is Caesar's") and spiritual matters ("and render unto God what is God's").***

Matthew 23:5 (NASB)

5 But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments.

*

Q: I can understand how broadening a phylactery could be taken as an act of outward piety, but what is the meaning of lengthening the tassel of a garment?

A: It is the same idea, namely, an over-doing of the command (in this case Deut.22:12) to appear more righteous than others (when that whole way of thinking is only possible if someone does not really care for God's opinion and is only looking to impress human beings).

Matthew 23:8-11 (NASB)

8 But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11 But the greatest among you shall be your servant.

*

Q: How should we understand these words? Particularly with the reference to not calling one a "Father"?

A: The sentiment is that even supposedly humble acts which are only done out of flattery have the tendency to elevate human beings beyond their proper due to the detriment of our appreciation of the Lord. As to "father"; this is not speaking of refraining from calling one's biological father by that name, but refraining from calling another human being "father" out of misplaced respect or adulation which elevates the person beyond any legitimate status. It's not the technical detail which is as important here as it is the mind-set of making "gods" of men in the supposed Name of God. If a Pharisee was actually teaching the Law aright, he was only doing his job; it is alright to admire that and to emulate that but not to idolize or canonize or apotheosize a person for the same. In all things, the middle road is often the one of true humility and prudence. A good teacher should be shown respect and have his authority respected, but only to a reasonable point and within proper bounds. The Pharisees had created a "Rabbi cult" which produced competition for being just such a "top gun" (as is also obvious from the Talmud and even conservative Jewish practice today) – and we see this sort of thing in evangelicaldom as well.

Matthew 23:14 (NASB)

14 [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you will receive greater condemnation.]

Matthew 23:14 This v not found in early mss

*

Q: Should this verse be a part of the scripture?

A: The verse is in the other two synoptic gospels, but not in Matthew (as the best mss. make clear). For more analysis, see Metzger (op. cit.).

Matthew 23:16-22 (NIV)

16 “Woe to you, blind guides! You say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gold of the temple is bound by that oath.’ 17 You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? 18 You also say, ‘If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but anyone who swears by the gift on the altar is bound by that oath.’ 19 You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? 20 Therefore, anyone who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. 21 And anyone who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. 22 And anyone who swears by heaven swears by God’s throne and by the one who sits on it.

*

Q: Our Lord's reasoning and replies make perfect sense, but I'm not sure how the Pharisees arrived at their understanding of things - could you explain what was their reasoning?

A: I would only be able to speculate that gold and offerings were tangible things of earthly value which the Pharisees really prized more than the spiritual principles they represented.

Matthew 23:23-24 (NASB)

23 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!

*

A:

(NIV SB Notes) 23:24 strain out. The strict Pharisee would carefully strain his drinking water through a cloth to be sure he did not swallow a gnat, the smallest of ceremonially

unclean animals. But, figuratively, he would swallow a camel—one of the largest. swallow a camel. Hyperbole (see 7:3 and note; 19:24; Mk 10:25 and note).

Matthew 23:29-33 (NASB)

29 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, 30 and say, ‘If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ 31 So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. 33 You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell?

*

Q1: What is the meaning of these words?

A1: They were willing affirm that those who killed the prophets were "our fathers", and by doing so make it clear that in fact, when push came to shove, they would have stood with their fathers rather than with the prophets who opposed them – just as in fact they were doing and would do when they lobbied to have Christ crucified. Contrast the sons of Levi who killed their own brethren and chose the Lord over blood ties (and thus won the priesthood: Ex.32:26-29).

*

Q2: Even though I know the meaning of these verses, I'm not clear about why our Lord uses the expression He uses. He says "So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs", as if the approval of their Fathers' deeds was expressed in building the tombs of the prophets rather than in the fact that they rejected Jesus, just as their Fathers rejected their prophets.

Luke 11:47-48 (NASB)

47 Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and it was your fathers who killed them. 48 So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs.

A2: Our Lord's point is that the Pharisees and company can't have it both ways. They want to criticize their ancestors for killing the prophets, but they also claim and boast about their heritage and their traditions to the point of calling these men their "fathers" and preserving their memories – which shows in fact where their true loyalties lie and that they would indeed have helped these

"fathers" stone the prophets if they had been alive in those days, standing with the legalistic establishment instead of with those few brave souls sent by the Lord to rebuke them – just as they were presently doing in opposing our Lord Jesus.

*

Q3: Understood. The passage seems clear now, but I wanted to know the purpose of building the tombs, because the expression "so you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs" seems to carry with itself an implication opposite to what we would expect. We would expect that building the tombs honours the prophets rather than showing approval, but our Lord says the exact opposite - that by building these tombs, the Pharisees are "witnesses and approve the deeds of their fathers". That's the part I couldn't understand. There are two additional explanations I wanted to get your opinion on, as they seem to be reasonable.

Meyer stresses the word *huiοι* here when commenting on Matthew 23:39-31:

ὥστε μαρτυρεῖτε ἑαυτοῖς, κ.τ.λ.] Thus (inasmuch as you say τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν) you witness against yourselves (dative of reference, Jam 5:3), that you are the sons, etc. υιοί? contains a twofold meaning. From τῶν πατέρ. ἡμ., in which the Pharisees point to their bodily descent, Jesus likewise infers their kinship with their fathers in respect of character and disposition. There is a touch of sharpness in this pregnant force of υιοί, the discourse becoming more and more impassioned. "When you thus speak of your fathers, you yourselves thereby testify to your own kinship with the murderers of the prophets." De Wette's objection, that this interpretation of υιοί would be incompatible with what is said by way of vindicating themselves at Matthew 23:30, does not apply, because Jesus feels convinced that their character entirely belies this self-righteous utterance, and because He wishes to make them sensible of this conviction through the sting of a penetration that fearlessly searches their hearts and reads their thoughts.

This sounds like a valid conclusion (again - please correct me if I'm wrong). Our Lord here emphasises the sonship, which, although not present in the Luke passage, does explain both passages.

And secondly, I came across what seems to clarify Luke 11:48 and the purpose of building the tombs (by Bob Deffinbaugh):

Our first impression might be that the Pharisees build tombs for the prophets, which would seem to indicate that they accepted them as from God and their message as true. Our text, however, reads in such a way as to say that their building of tombs for the prophets proves their hatred of the prophets. Why would the Pharisees build magnificent tombs for people whose message they respected, and who, according to Jesus they would have put to death?

Have you ever been to a cemetery and looked at all the kinds of markers which are placed at the grave? I do not mean to suggest that this is true in all cases, but sometimes a very elaborate funeral and tomb is evidence of guilt, more than of love. Some people go overboard with the burial of those about whom they feel guilty, or to make it look as if they loved them when they did not. It seems that this was the case with the experts in the law. They went to great lengths to show honor to the prophets, lengths which only revealed their own guilt. This was a kind of Freudian slip, and Jesus pointed it out.

But how could these experts in the law be guilty of the blood of prophets whom their forefathers had slain? I think that Jesus is pointing out at least three ways. First, they had rejected the teaching of the prophets, just as their forefathers had done. Second, they were presently rejecting Jesus' teaching, which was consistent with (and the fulfillment of) the teaching of the prophets. Soon, they would kill Him. And third, some of those prophets and apostles who are yet to come (namely Jesus' disciples), after the death and resurrection of Christ, will be rejected, persecuted, and sometimes killed by them. All of this puts these experts in the same category of sinners, just like their forefathers. They were not the spiritual elite, they were just like the rest, just like those who had gone before them. They very things they condemned they were guilty of themselves.

So here I would say it does make a lot of sense to build the tombs for exactly the opposite reason than what we would expect - not to honour the prophets, but to cover the guilt deep inside their hearts, to hypocritically build an edifice (similarly as our Lord calls them "whitewashed tombs") which covers their true attitude - and not only in the eyes of others, but, I would perhaps speculate - in their own too, showing the magnitude of self-deception and hypocrisy.

So the verse would go:

So you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers (they are not just your fathers physically, but spiritually too - you are their spiritual seed and here we can bring the huioi

also from Matthew passage); because it was they who killed them, and you build their tombs ("Yes - they killed them and you, out of your unwillingness to own up that you are their spiritual seed and are about to kill me too, build these edifices out of sheer hypocrisy, to cover up what really is in your hearts. In this way, by building them, you testify not that you are different, but you testify that you are the same and this whole empty exercise of building stems from you willing to conceal before others and yourselves too that you are the same - as you will show when you crucify me").

What do you think?

A3: I don't think it's a matter of guilt. Pointless religious activity to prove one's own religious bona fides is nothing new under the sun. We could point to any Catholic cathedral and ask whether or not this edifice isn't a wonderful testimony to God's glory, et al. But in fact building such things has nothing whatsoever to do with the kingdom of heaven, and reflects an earthly point of view divorced from the truth of scripture. The prophets, had they been brought back, would have no doubt condemned the excesses and the false motives behind these activities, calling the people to love the truth of the Word, not ritual and religious pageantry.

Matthew 23:34-35 (NASB)

34 "Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, 35 so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

*

Q: On the one hand our Lord says that some "prophets and wise men and teachers" they will persecute, using future tense, on the other He says "from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah", referring to those repressed in the past.

A: Those killed in the past are the pattern (followed by the fathers); the future actions predicted in verse 34 will be the work of the sons (following the pattern of their unbelieving fathers).

Matthew 23:37 (NIV)

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

*

Luke 13:34 (NASB)

34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!

NIV SB: Lk.13:34 how often I have longed to gather. This lament over Jerusalem may suggest that Jesus was in Jerusalem more often than the Synoptic Gospels indicate (cf. Jn 2:13; 4:45; 5:1; 7:10; 10:22). However, the statement in vv. 34-35 may have been uttered some distance from Jerusalem, i. e., in Perea. According to Mt 23:37-38, the same utterance was spoken on Tuesday of Passion Week. Jesus repeated many of his teachings and sayings.

*

Q: Do you agree that Jesus was in Jerusalem more often than the Synoptic Gospels indicate? Aren't these words a statement referring to God's efforts and opportunities given to Jews from the beginning? Do you agree that Luke 13:34 and Matthew 23:37-38 refer to two different occurrences?

A: First, I agree with you that our Lord's words here are not necessarily evocative of the comment in the note; I prefer your analysis. I would also disagree with the statement in the note that the synoptic gospels "indicate" what is suggested (that is the wrong way to put it). The synoptics are not as concerned with the details of the chronology as John's gospel is and for that reason do not make as clear as John's gospel does the movements of our Lord over the three and one half years of His public ministry before the cross (and even John's remarks take some thought; please see the link: "Comparative Chronology").

On the timing, we have seen before that our Lord said similar things on many occasions – as all good teachers do – and that no short work such as a gospel could possibly include everything He said (Jn.21:25). Matthew 23:37-38 takes place in Jerusalem (cf. Matt.24:1ff.); Luke 13:34 is more difficult to place, but it does seem to predate our Lord's arrival in Jerusalem for the last Passover

(cf. Lk.14:25). Thomas and Gundry, A Harmony of the Gospels (1978) in. loc. adopt the same approach as the NIV SB here and suggest that the quotation in Luke was given at or around Perea.

Matthew 24:2 (NASB)

2 And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

NIV SB: 24:2 not one stone ... left. Fulfilled literally in AD 70, when the Romans under Titus completely destroyed Jerusalem and the temple buildings. Stones were even pried apart to collect the gold leaf that melted from the roof when the temple was set on fire. See note on Mk 13:1. thrown down. Excavations in 1968 uncovered large numbers of these stones, toppled from the walls by the invaders.

*

Q: The chapter is about Jesus' second coming, so should we understand this verse about having a double applicability and referring both to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and to the second advent?

A: Yes. See the link:

[http://ichthys.com/Tribulation-Part1.htm#Day of the Lord" Paradigm](http://ichthys.com/Tribulation-Part1.htm#Day%20of%20the%20Lord%20Paradigm)

Matthew 24:3-13

3 As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

4 And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one misleads you. 5 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many. 6 You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. 7 For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. 8 But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs.

9 “Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. 10 At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. 11 Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. 12 Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. 13 But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.

*

A1:

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 3A

In Matthew 24:3-13, Jesus is responding to a question from His disciples about the timing of these eschatological events. In this respect, our Lord's response puts the Great Apostasy (as well as other events) to similar use as in the passage above. That is to say, the disciples had wanted to know when He would return, and Jesus tells them that before His return all the "birth pangs" of the Tribulation must precede (including the Great Apostasy). In verses four through six, Jesus tells His disciples of trends which will be in play throughout the time preceding His return. And, indeed, throughout the Church Age there have been and continue to be deceivers who represent themselves as Him (cf. 1Jn.2:18), and there have been and continue to be conflicts and threats of conflicts which seem (at the time) to be of such moment as to have apocalyptic significance. Our Lord's message in the opening part of this passage is a threefold one, telling us first that we should not be deceived by any false Christ, nor thrown from our proper Christian walk by fearful anticipation of world events. Secondly, we are told that such deceivers and such potentially deceptive circumstances will be a characteristic of the days to come (i.e., of the entire Church Age). Thirdly, and most germane to our present study, is the message which these words imply, that is, that the actual Tribulation will be so indisputably characterized by one particular false Christ, namely antichrist, and its events so obviously dominated by the series of world conflicts predicted to precede our Lord's return, that there will be no possibility of failing to recognize these things for what they are by those who have given proper attention to scripture. For both of these two Church-Age-long trends will find their exemplars and their ultimate fulfillment during the Tribulation in the person of the arch-antichrist, and in the playing out of his campaign of world domination respectively.

With verse seven, our Lord sums up the Tribulation's first half which He then explains in verse eight to be the beginning of the "birth pangs", namely, the first half of the seven year period which directly precedes His return. In His synopsis of these events, the division of the world into two

power blocks and the "world war" which ensues (ultimately leaving antichrist in essential control of most of the earth) is the event sequence He offers us as an unmistakable, signature sign of the Tribulation's first half, noting as well that both conspicuous man-made disasters caused by intensified evil (detailed by the seven seals: Rev.6:1-17) and unprecedented divine judgments upon this intensified evil (detailed by the seven trumpets: Rev.8:6-11:19) will likewise characterize this period. We reach the Great Tribulation itself in verses nine through thirteen, where our Lord describes the Great Persecution and the culminating phase of the Great Apostasy as a single, composite phenomenon. Believers (who have turned apostate by the time of the Great Tribulation's commencement) betray other believers, resulting in tribulation, that is, in all manner of persecution including imprisonment, execution, and worldwide antipathy to all true followers of Jesus Christ (verse 9). This intense persecution causes many more to "fall away", a further round of betrayal, and increased hostility by these new apostates toward their former brethren (verse 10). In this environment of ever intensifying pressure and persecution, Satan will then launch a deceptive assault directed primarily at those who still remain faithful to Christ (verse 11: explained in verses 23-24 as a new round of false prophets who, with the help of satanically empowered "signs", will falsely proclaim that Christ has already returned). The combination of these horrific events will finally cause the love even of some of those who have endured to this point to be quenched (verse 12; see below under "Causes of the Great Apostasy"), and it is only those who hold out until the final trumpet when our Lord returns who will be saved (verse 13). Thus apostasy will reach its peak and its culmination under the pressures brought to bear by the Great Persecution in the Tribulation's second half. However, as is the case with the rise of antichrist, the Great Apostasy will begin and grow from the moment the Tribulation commences.

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people. (6) And you are going to hear about [actual] wars and impending wars. Make sure you do not become [overly] alarmed [by such things]. For [these things] must happen, but this is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For [before that end] a nation will rise against a nation, even a kingdom against a kingdom (cf. Dan.11:25-30; 11:40), and there will be famines (i.e., man-made disasters) and earthquakes (i.e., divine judgments) in various places. (8) But all these things are [merely] the beginning of the birth pangs (i.e., the first

half of the Tribulation). (9) Then (i.e., the beginning of the second half or Great Tribulation) men will betray you [bringing you] into tribulation, and will put you to death, and you will be hated by all of the nations on account of My Name. (10) And at that time **many will fall away** (i.e., will apostatize) and will betray each other and will hate each other, (11) and many false prophets will arise and will deceive many. (12) Now because of the increase of lawlessness [at that time], **the love of the many will cool**. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved."

Matthew 24:3-13

*

A2:

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 7

1. Deception:

(3) And when He sat down on the Mount of Olives, His disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us when these things will be, and what the sign is of your return and of the end of the age?" (4) And Jesus answered and said, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My Name, saying, 'I am the Christ', and they will deceive many people."

Matthew 24:3-5 (cf. Mk.13:4-6)

(24) "At that time if someone says to you 'Look [(as they will tell you then)]! Christ is here!', or 'Here [He is]!', do not believe [it]. For false christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great miracles (lit., "signs") and wonders [sufficient] to deceive even the elect, if [that were] possible. (25) Look [(as I am telling you now)]! I have told you ahead of time. (26) So if they say to you, 'Look! [The Messiah] is [out] in the desert!', don't go out there, or 'Look! He is in the inner rooms (i.e., hidden somewhere in town)!', don't believe [it]."

Matthew 24:23-26 (cf. Mk.13:21-23)

While deception has always been a problem in the Church, never will it constitute a graver one than during the Tribulation. With the world following after antichrist as if he were the Christ, with the religions of the world, even putatively conservative Christian organizations, joining in the parade of apostasy, and with the beast himself and his false prophet performing a completely unprecedented display of satanically empowered "miracles", it is perhaps not remarkable that so many will be deceived. Resisting this deception will require the alertness which is the subject of this section, and that alertness will in this case consist of understanding and believing the truth

about all these issues. In other words, spiritual maturity based upon prior spiritual growth accomplished through learning and believing the truth of God's Word will be required to stay alert, awake, and effectively on watch for all these developments so as not to be deceived by them when they begin to occur.

After all, we have a tremendous amount of information about the end times in scripture, but that information is of no use to Christians who have not learned it correctly or believed it fully. Without a proper understanding of the circumstances of Christ's return at the Second Advent, for example, immature Christians will be vulnerable to just the sort of deception our Lord warned against in the two quotes above, whereas mature Christians who not only understand these things but have committed them to their hearts by faith **and** hold onto these truths in faith come what may will be able to repel such deceptions through spiritual alertness. It goes without saying that, while we have been given the outlines of the history of the Tribulation (which this series has attempted to sketch in as much detail as scripture permits), many things are likely to happen which, while they may not surprise us in principle, will nonetheless be surprising in their specific manifestations (Hab.1:6).³ It is difficult to appreciate now before the fact the shock which the Tribulation's intensity will deliver to us all, or the degree to which immature Christians will be shaken by those events, or the absolute importance that every single bit of truth no matter how seemingly insignificant now will have for us as we are preparing spiritually now for the challenges ahead. ***For the antidote to antichrist's deceptions will be the Word in our hearts, held fast in faith and applied with determination in all watchfulness, vigilance, and alertness (2Chron.12:14; Hos.4:6; Rom.13:11; 1Cor.16:13; Col.4:2).***

(29) For I know that after my departure fierce wolves will enter in among you who will not spare the flock. (30) And even from among your own number [of elders] men will rise up and speak twisted things in order to entice the disciples (i.e., believers) to follow them. (31) So be alert, remembering that for three years I did not stop warning each of you [about these dangers] day and night with my tears.

Acts 20:29-31

(11) Christ Himself appointed some of us apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers (12) in order to prepare all of His holy people for their own ministry work, that the entire body of Christ might thus be built up, (13) until we all reach that unifying goal of believing what is right and of giving our complete allegiance (Greek:

ἐπίγνωσις, epignosis) to the Son of God, that each of us might be a perfect person, that is, that we might attain to that standard of maturity whose "attainment" is defined by Christ; (14) that we may no longer be immature, swept off-course and carried headlong by every breeze of so-called teaching that emanates from the trickery of men in their readiness to do anything to cunningly work their deceit, (15) but rather that we may, by embracing the truth in love, grow up in all respects with Christ, who is the head of the Church, as our model.

Ephesians 4:11-15

*

A3:

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 3A

(12) Now because of the ***increase of lawlessness*** [at that time], the love of the many will cool. (13) But he who endures until the end, this [is the one who] will be saved.

Matthew 24:12-13

Our Lord's words about the exceptional endurance required for deliverance at the end of this quotation in verse thirteen must be digested in order to properly appreciate what is meant in the preceding *verse twelve*. That is to say, exceptional endurance will be necessary to survive with faith intact this environment of legal and ethical anarchy. For the trend will be for this increase of lawlessness and the corresponding degradation in quality of life which will accompany it to occasion a worldwide hardening and souring of attitudes on the part of almost everyone, unbelievers and believers alike (i.e., "the many" in this verse, or *hoi polloi*; Greek: οἱ πολλοί). To use an analogy, it is much easier to reflect Christian love and cheerfulness when you are well and feeling well than when you are sick, and likewise much easier to do so when things are rolling along nicely for you than when you are under some sort of difficult pressure or testing. The unequalled lawlessness of the Tribulation, played out against the backdrop of antichrist's government and God's judgments upon the world as a result, will make life so bitter that it will be as if a large burden of chronic sickness and pressure were piled upon the backs of the entire population of the world ("the many") – in addition to whatever troubles each individual already possesses. Given these conditions, it should come as no surprise whatsoever that human kindness, civility, and tolerance (the meaning here in Matt.24:12 of *agape*; Greek: ἀγάπη) often present to at least some degree under favorable circumstances, should virtually disappear from the world, as the

charitable inclinations of nearly everyone on planet earth experience a "cooling" under the pressure of tribulational events, the increase of lawlessness in particular.

Jesus' warning to us His followers in verse thirteen to be on guard against this danger tells us in no uncertain terms that this pressure will figure large in the apostatizing of many lukewarm believers (the normal status quo, unfortunately, for the majority of Christians in this final Church era of Laodicea: see part 2A of this series). For if one's love is already lukewarm, what can it become if it cools further than outright cold? As the essential Christian virtue, love cannot be disassociated from faith (Gal.5:6; cf. 1Cor.13:13; Eph.1:15; Col.1:4-5; 1Thes.1:3; 2Thes.1:3). And we know that when faith is truly cold it is truly dead (the analogy being to the life leaving the body: 2Ki.4:34 and Jas.2:17-26; cf. Rom.12:11). Cold love is therefore essentially equivalent to no faith (cf. 1Cor.13:2b). The lack of warmth in the "body" of Christian virtue is a sign that one has allowed one's faith, love and hope to die under the pressures of persecution (i.e., apostasy has set in):⁽⁴¹⁾

And he who was sown on the rocky places, this is the one who hears the Word and immediately receives it with joy. He has no roots [to his faith], however, but lasts only a short time. So when **tribulation or persecution** occurs on account of the Word, he is immediately tripped up (i.e., he apostatizes).

Matthew 13:20-21

And these [second types] who are sown on the rocky places are similar. Whenever they hear the Word they immediately receive it with joy, although they have no root [of faith] in themselves, but are only temporary [believers]. When **tribulation or persecution** because of the Word comes [their way], they are immediately tripped up (i.e., they apostatize).

Mark 4:16-17

And those [whose seed of faith fell] on the rock do receive the Word with joy when they hear it. However these [types] have no root [to their faith]. They believe for a while, but **in time of testing** they apostatize.

Luke 8:13

In addition to the lawlessness-induced trend of unbelievers becoming cold and sullen and of lukewarm believers becoming apostate, we must also take our Lord's words at Matthew 24:12-13 to mean the cooling of love even among believers who were previously zealous for Him. This is a sobering thought for committed disciples of Jesus Christ, and a warning to make the most of the

time at hand to prepare spiritually for the troubles ahead. For, as always, the only way to be sure of salvation and spirituality is to keep marching ahead in spiritual growth. Finally, one very positive point we need to be careful not to miss in this passage is Jesus' qualification of His statement: "the love *of the many* will cool". This means that, on the one hand, not every believer who is a zealous disciple of Jesus Christ will allow tribulational pressures, horrendous as they will be, to adversely affect their Christian walk (indeed, given the multitude of martyrs the Tribulation will produce, the number in this category will be large in gross terms if not in percentage of world or Christian population: cf. Rev.7:9-14). Therefore we have every reason to hope that at least some portion of the lukewarm population of Laodicea will, under these pressures, be prodded in the opposite, positive direction, responding to our Lord's injunction to "become zealous and repent" (Rev.3:19). This is indeed encouraging news for warm and lukewarm alike, but it goes without saying that those of us who have already committed ourselves to be zealous for Jesus Christ here and now rather than awaiting the "shock treatment" of the Tribulation to provide motivation will have much cause to be grateful for any and all spiritual growth and preparation we are able to make ahead of that trying time. For while this present world is already a very dark place in spiritual terms (Jn.1:5 cf. 2Pet.1:19), a kingdom of darkness (Col.1:13) dominated by the forces of darkness (Eph.6:12) from which darkness we have been called forth into God's light (1Pet.2:9; cf. Eph.5:8; 1Jn.2:8-9), nevertheless, the spiritual darkness of the Tribulation will be so intense as to make this present time seem daylight by comparison (cf. Is.21:11-12; 59:9-21; 60:1-2; Joel 2:1-2; Amos 5:18-20; Zeph.1:14-15; Jn.9:4; 1Thes.5:1-8). Let us therefore resolve, if that dark time should come upon us, to stay faithful to the light of truth until our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the glorious Day Star, rises at last and puts an end to that terrible night:

Yet I consider the prophetically inspired Word (i.e. the Bible) even more reliable (i.e., than the transfiguration of vv.16-18). You too would do well to pay the closest attention to it (i.e., scripture), just as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the Morning Star rises (i.e., the Second Advent).

2nd Peter 1:19

Matthew 24:15 (NASB)

15 "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

*

Q1: Why does Matthew add "let the reader understand"?

A1: I think because it requires some degree of interpretation of the Old Testament passages to "get this right"; the Greek actually says "a holy place" and one would have to spend some time in the book of Daniel to recognize that the temple court is meant. Ironically, English renderings such as the one above make it seem as if the statue will be inside of the temple (which is absolutely incorrect).

*

Q2: Would you say it's possible that these words were spoken by our Lord, or is that an addition from Matthew?

A2: Since it says "reader", it has to be Matthew.

*

A3:

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation part 3B

1. The Abomination of Desolation: The placement of this idol by antichrist is well-documented in scripture, being referred to both by Daniel and by our Lord as one of the critical events whereby the beast may be known (Matt.24:15-18; Mk.13:14-16):

For it is from him (i.e., the coming evil one) that the military forces will issue forth which will pollute the sanctuary (i.e., ending the ministry of Moses and Elijah), remove the daily sacrifice, ***and set up the abomination of desolation.***

Daniel 11:31

Daniel's combining of the pollution of the sanctuary and halting of the offerings to God with the setting up of this idol indicates that the place of its erection will indeed be within the temple court:

"But when you see ***the abomination of desolation standing where it should not*** – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Mark 13:14

Matthew goes further and overtly connects this idol with the "abomination" mentioned in Daniel (i.e., Dan.11:31 and 12:11), so as to leave no doubt about the identification of these prophecies: from Daniel's words, to our Lord's words, to the description of the idol in Revelation chapter 13, all

of these passages are clearly referring to one and the same thing, the idol of antichrist which is set up in the temple court at the Tribulation's mid-point:

(15) "So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains."

Matthew 24:15-16

It should be noted that in the Greek text of Matthew 24:15 there is no definite article preceding the words "holy place", so that translations which render this phrase "*the* holy place" are technically incorrect. This is important because, in translation, the words "*the* holy place" generally refer to the outermost of the temple's two spaces which contained the table of the bread of presence, the golden altar of incense, and the golden lampstand or *menorah* (in the LXX: Ex.26:33; 28:29; Lev.16:2; etc.; cf. Heb.9:1-5; in Greek in all these cases, moreover, the word "place" is left out). The omission of the article thus serves as an emphatic sign that the words "holy place" most definitely do not refer to the temple, but rather to the inner court or "priest's court" (as in Dan.8:11; Rev.11:2; cf. Acts 6:13; 21:28). The idol will be visible to all inhabitants of Jerusalem, for it will not be necessary to enter into the temple proper to view it. In fact, during the 42 months of antichrist's reign in Jerusalem, the world will make pilgrimage to the temple mount to do obeisance before the statue of the beast, thronging into the outer court from where the idol, no doubt of substantial size, will be visible from its place in the inner court before the temple (cf. Ezek.8:3-5):

(13) And [the beast's false prophet] [will] perform great miracles (lit., "signs"), even making fire come down from heaven to the earth in front of everyone. (14) And he [will] deceive those who dwell upon the earth on account of the miracles (lit., "signs") which have been given to him to perform in the presence of the beast, even commanding the inhabitants of the earth to make ***an image of the beast***, [that is] of him who received the [deadly] stroke of the sword and [yet] came [back] to life. (15) And it was given to him to provide ***a spirit for the image of the beast so that the image might speak***, and [it was also given to him] to bring it about that as many as refused to worship the image of the beast might be put to death.

Revelation 13:13-15

As is clear from this description, this idol will be most impressive to the unbelievers who view it and come to worship it. In our age of skepticism and worldliness, that is saying quite a lot. We may

therefore expect this idol to be both mammoth in its proportions, incredibly and persuasively life-like in its functioning, and awe-inspiring in its verbal pronouncements. It will strike fear and reverence into the hardened hearts of the unbelievers who come to Jerusalem to worship the beast, confirming their confidence in him and strengthening their support of him. The impression made by this idol in conjunction with the miracles performed by the false prophet and the prior apparent "resurrection" of the beast in conjunction with his military conquest of the world will be more than enough for all those who have rejected the one true God to convince them of the divinity of the devil's son.

Our name for this idol, "the abomination of desolation" comes directly from the conventional translation of our Lord's words in Greek at Matthew 24:15 and Mark 13:14 (*to bdelugma tes eremoseos*; τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως), which is in turn a direct rendering of the Hebrew of Daniel 11:31 (*hashiqutz meshomem*; חֲשִׁיטֻץ מְשֹׁמֵם). This translation, while understandable, is a bit misleading, for even in the Greek translation of the original Hebrew phrase, "desolation" is a verbal noun which ought rather to mean something like "**process of desolating**", a fact even more difficult to ignore in the case of the corresponding participles of Daniel 11:31 and 12:11. Since these words are all really calling attention to the *action* produced by the "abominable thing" (i.e., the idol), we would have been better served had this phrase been traditionally translated "the abomination **which causes** desolation". In applying the exact same terminology to antichrist himself, Daniel 9:27 spells out the precise significance of these words in respect to this capacity of the "abomination" idol to produce "desolation" in a spiritual sense, namely, an appalling isolation and separation from God resulting from horrendous idolatry and in turn resulting in devastation in both spiritual and material terms.⁽⁶⁵⁾

And on account of the extreme [nature] of [his] (i.e., antichrist's) **abominations**, he [will] be causing **desolations** (i.e., desertion and estrangement from God), even until the end when what has been determined will be poured out upon the one characterized by [this] desolation (i.e., the beast as archetype and cause of the alienation and rebellion from God which he fosters).

Daniel 9:27b

Matthew 24:16-19 (NASB)

16 then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. 17 Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. 18 Whoever is in the field must not turn

back to get his cloak. 19 But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!

*

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 4

1. Warning Signs: Deliverance will require unhesitating obedience. Scripture gives sufficient indications of the imminent arrival of this attempted persecution and leaves in no doubt the absolute necessity for swift and immediate flight just as soon as the conditions prophesied below by our Lord have been met. The first such sign is a great earthquake which, as we have seen, will occur immediately following the departure of Moses and Elijah to heaven (Rev.11:13). The upheaval following such an intense disaster will no doubt cause the initial departure of the believers to go unnoticed. The second sign, mentioned by our Lord Himself, will be equally unmistakable, namely, the erecting of the so-called "abomination of desolation", the statue of antichrist set up in the temple court:

(15) So when you see the abomination of desolation (which is spoken of through Daniel the prophet) standing in a holy place – let the reader understand – (16) then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. (17) Let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down to pick up his things out of his house, (18) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (19) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (20) And [so] pray that your flight may not take place during a storm or on a Sabbath. (21) For at that time there will be a great tribulation such as has never occurred from the beginning of the world until now, and [such as] will never again occur thereafter.

Matthew 24:15-21 (cf. Lk.17:31-32)

(14) But when you see the abomination of desolation standing where it should not – let the reader understand – then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, (15) and let the one on top of his roof not go [back] down, neither let him enter [back] into his house to pick up anything out of it, (16) and let the one in the field not turn back to pick up his cloak. (17) And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing in those days. (18) And [so] pray that it might not take place during a storm. (19) For those days will see a tribulation the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God's creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.

Once the abominable idol of antichrist becomes visible in the temple court, believers remaining inside the city must flee without delay. At that point, the necessity for departing immediately and with deliberate speed will be so urgent that even the briefest delay – only to retrieve one's coat or a few essential items – may result in being caught in the beast's net. Further, this emergency departure will be a "one day only" affair, for those involved are told to pray that that day of flight might not be one of inclement weather (which would hinder their movement) nor a Sabbath (where their movements would be obvious). For all who have remained in the city up until this point, strict obedience to our Lord's command to depart without any further hesitation will be absolutely essential in order to avoid being swept up in the persecution the dragon and his antichrist intend. Only swift response will ensure that those believers who have stayed on in Jerusalem will be able to escape safely into the desert now.

This absolute last chance for deliverance from the impending persecution is delivered from the perspective of those believing Jews who are still resident in Jerusalem at that time. Once antichrist has conquered the southern alliance, returned to Jerusalem, killed Moses and Elijah, and put a stop to the temple rites, he will erect the idolatrous statue of himself in the temple court, the so-called "abomination of desolation" (i.e., "the abomination which causes [spiritual as well as material] desolation"; see part 3B, section VIII.1), and this will be the signal for believers in Jerusalem of their final opportunity to leave the city safely. For the dragon's pursuit of the departing Jewish believers will follow immediately, and any who choose to remain or otherwise neglect our Lord's command to make haste will find themselves trapped.

Which of you will listen to this or pay close attention in time to come?

Isaiah 42:23 NIV

Matthew 24:20 (NASB)

20 But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath.

*

Q: Would you say it is possible that our Lord is here referring not only to Tribulational Sabbath observance, but maybe also to Jewish own self-imposed superstitious limitation based on observance of Old Testament commandment?

A: Those who flee will have been educated on these matters by Moses and Elijah, so that one would hope few would be restrained by those sort of false scruples (but it is a good point).

*

Matthew 24:22 (NASB)

22 Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

NIV SB: 24:22 days ... cut short. Some hold that this statement means that the distress will be of such intensity that, if allowed to continue, it would destroy everyone. Others believe that Christ is referring to the cutting short of a previously determined time period (such as the 70th "seven" of Da 9:27 or the 42 months of Rev 11:2; 13:5). the elect. The chosen people of God (see also vv. 24, 31).

*

Q: I cannot understand the point made in the footnote - it seems it is based on the assumption that the time of the distress and the determined time period of the Tribulation are two separate concepts? As far as I understand it from your writings, both refer to the same period.

A: I think the note is trying to distinguish between a metaphorical and a literal interpretation; the former meaning merely that if these trends were to continue without the Lord's return all would be destroyed, and the latter meaning that a literal subtraction of the period represented by the biblical calculations given is necessary to preserve the elect - I think the latter is the correct interpretation, but that does not mean that the former is not also a true application of the principle.

Matthew 24:24 (NASB)

24 For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

*

Q: Does our Lord's words "if possible, even the elect" imply that the elect can or cannot be misled?

A: There will be one third of the Church that is deceived and falls away; on the other hand, they will not then be in the number of the elect for all eternity. Those who are not deceived and persevere will either be martyred or see the Lord's second advent return (about half and half from my reading of scripture). The effect of our Lord's words is to bring home to us that the power of the deception of antichrist will such like as the world has never seen, and we should not take it for granted that it will be "easy as pie" for us to see through his devices, even though we may feel now that this is the case. It is a clarion call to become as prepared as possible in every conceivable way in anticipation of the heavy burden of those difficult days.

Matthew 24:26-28 (NASB)

26 So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. 27 For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. 28 Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

*

Excerpt from Coming Tribulation Part 5

As the Son of Man returns to earth, marshaling His hosts in the skies above, His glory will split the supernatural darkness like a flash of the most intense lighting imaginable and illuminate the dark world below. For He is the Light of the world, literally as well as in every other way (Jn.1:4-9; 3:19; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46; cf. Rev.21:23; 21:11; 22:5). It is unto this radiant Savior of ours that we shall congregate as we rise up from the earth, flocking to Him like eagles gathering in the sky above.⁶⁴

*

A2 (Email response): For instance, when Jesus says "Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather" (Matt.24:28 NIV), most people would see a big difference between that rendering and the KJV's "eagles" – but what is the truth? The truth is that while "vultures" is the better translation, to the people of the ancient world the vulture and the eagle were essentially the same bird. They may not be to our way of thinking or to our system of biological nomenclature, but they certainly were both large carrion feeding birds which, at least as they circle in the sky, are difficult to distinguish. The same thing, it so happens, is true of (ancient Mediterranean) sheep and goats. These were often pastured in one large group, so that "separating the sheep and the

goats" (Matt.25) is something that would ring true as an often necessary task for any herdsman of Jesus' day. On top of that, many of the sheep in the middle east even today are of a slightly different build and appearance than those we are familiar with in the west: they are taller, skinnier, with longer hair and longer ears. That is to say, they look quite a lot like goats – hence the essential equating of the two in Exodus 12:5 and the need to split them up as not automatically separate in Matthew 25. Finally, as to the identification of the goats with perdition and the sheep with salvation, no doubt that is due to the scapegoat bearing sin and being separated from the community while on the other hand the lamb is the primary symbol for our Lord – whose sheep we are – in the capacity of being our Sacrifice.

Matthew 24:29-31 (NASB)

29 “But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 And He will send forth His angels with A great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

*

A1:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will ***gather together His elect*** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Matthew 24:29-31 NKJV

The elect are said to be "gathered up" . . . "immediately after the tribulation of those days": if a "gathering up" or rapture happens ***after*** the Tribulation, how can there be a pre-Tribulation rapture? We have already established that there is only one resurrection between that of Christ and the end of the Millennium – according to Paul (1Cor.15:22-23).

*

A2:

Excerpt from Peter Series #18

5. The Time of Judgement

When our Lord returns to the earth, in victory and glory, we too shall be gathered together to meet Him (1Thes.4:14-17; 1Cor.15:50-58). The time of our Lord's second advent and of our "gathering together with Him" (2Thes.2:1; cf. Is.27:12-13) also begins the time of our evaluation and reward (Matt.16:27; 19:28; 20:8; Lk.14:14; Rev.11:18). Following his glorious conquest of the devil's world at the 2nd Advent (Matt.24:29-31; Rev.19:1-20:6), Jesus Christ will conduct a thorough evaluation of Israel (Is.1:25-28; 4:2-6; Ezek.20:33-38; Zech.13; Mal.3:2-3; Rom.11:26). It is also at that time that He will judge all of the newly resurrected believers (for the purpose of granting eternal rewards on the basis of service: Rom.2:16; 1Cor.3:10-17; 2Cor.5:10). This extended "judgment-day" will terminate with the final resurrection of millennial believers at the conclusion of "the Day of the Lord" (a term encompassing the 2nd Advent and Millennium as one grand event: compare 2Pet.3:10 with 2Pet.3:8; see also Acts 2:20; 1Cor.3:13; 1Thes.5:2; 2Thes.2:2), their judgment, and the final judgment of unbelievers at the Great White Throne (Rev.20:11-15).

*

A3:

Excerpt from Peter Series #27

A Note on the Post-Tribulational Rapture: As we have demonstrated above, the rapture does not occur before the period of Tribulation prophesied in scripture, but afterwards, at the moment of the 2nd Advent. Our Lord was very specific about our "gathering together" after the events of those days, when He returns to deliver His own from that inferno of testing:

Then [the Son of Man] will send forth His angels with a loud trumpet call, and will assemble His elect ones from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Matthew 24:31

The word "rapture" is meant to convey this idea of our being "snatched up" from the earth to be with the Lord (cf. Matt.24:36-44; Lk.17:34-37). The idea itself is derived from the Greek word *harpazo*, translated "snatched up" in our quotation for 1st Thessalonians 4:15-18 (see above), and it is that passage which is ultimately responsible for the fact that we call the living-resurrection

of believers at the 2nd Advent a "rapture". This nomenclature originates in the Latin Vulgate, where *harpazo* is translated by the Latin verb *rapio*. *Rapio*'s past participle *rapt-*, joined with the resultative suffix *-tura*, yields the Latin *raptura* – our English "rapture" – which means, literally, "the state of having been snatched up". There are two other New Testament instances of believers being "snatched up" by God, though neither entail a living-resurrection. The first occurs in Acts 8:39, where Philip is "snatched up" (*harpazo*) by the Holy Spirit and transported to Azotus (Ashdod), a good day's journey from the spot where he had been conversing with the Ethiopian eunuch. Philip's location changes, but he himself remains in his original, mortal body. Likewise Paul's description of the "man who was snatched up to heaven – whether in the body or out of the body" most likely describes a temporary ecstatic state, but this particular individual remained among the mortal Christian community and passed on his vision (2Cor.12:2-4). Only in the 1st Thessalonians 4:15-18 passage does *harpazo* (Lat. *raptura*) refer to the actually "rapture", the resurrection of living believers at the time of Christ's return. [\(2\)](#)

Matthew 24:33 (NIV)

33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it[a] is near, right at the door.

Matthew 24:33 Or he

*

Q: Which rendering is correct?

A: Greek is ambiguous on this point, but while I certainly would not rule out "He" as included in the idea, I would not think that it is exclusively "He" inasmuch as our Lord is talking about Himself, after all ("I"), and the next referent is "all these things" in the following verse (the context has been the entire list of Tribulational events, after all).

Matthew 24:34 (NASB)

34 Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.

*

Q1: Which generation do you feel Jesus is referring to in Matthew 24:34?

A1: The Greek word translated "generation" does not necessarily, as in the English word, presuppose a longevity of 20-40 years. Rather the word is often talking about a "type" or "group"

of people rather than always having to refer to a chronological "generation" as is commonly supposed (wrongly). The "type" in question in Matthew 24:34 is the legalistic sort of Jewish unbeliever who refused to accept Jesus' Messiahship at the time of His first advent, and then continued to refuse His deity and work on the cross even after the resurrection:

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob".

Romans 11:25-26 NIV

Thus "hardening" (against the truth of Jesus Christ) is the characteristic of "this generation" to whom Jesus refers, and, as Paul's expansion of the point above makes clear, "this generation" will continue until they actually see the Messiah return in all of His divine glory at the second advent. Until that time, the same characteristic of "this generation", namely, of serving God legalistically through a type of "worship made up only of rules taught by men" (Is.29:13), is destined to continue.

*

Q2: I think I am well over my head here so I could really use you proven wisdom on this one. In Matt. 24:34 we read the following per KJV.

Matthew 24:34

Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.

The focus of my concern is whether the above highlighted word 'fulfilled' can also be grammatically translated as 'be coming' or 'be beginning'.

The greek word 'ginomai' is suggested to be a - v. 2Aor. midD 3 Sg. ginomai, Greek 1096, Strong's ginomai, ghin'-om-ahee; a prolonged and middle form of a primary verb; to cause to be ("gen"-erate), i.e. (reflexive) to become (come into being), used with great latitude (literal, figurative, intensive, etc.) :- arise, be assembled, be (-come, -fall, -have self), be brought (to pass), (be) come (to pass), continue, be divided, draw, be ended, fall, be finished, follow, be found, be fulfilled, + God forbid, grow, happen, have, be kept, be made, be married, be ordained to be, partake, pass, be

performed, be published, require, seem, be showed, × soon as it was, sound, be taken, be turned, use, wax, will, would, be wrought.

A2: As the Strong's entry indicates, *gignomai* is a very flexible verb. It can be as neutral as a synonym for the verb "to be", or as specific as a synonym for the verb "to be born", and may mean many other things besides. Its particular semantic force is also colored in the NT by the fact that it is the verb most often used to translate the Hebrew *hayah* ("to be / become"), and, specifically in regard to this case, the idiomatic use of that verb in dependent clauses to suggest a furthering of the narrative (i.e., "and it came to pass" in the OT is *vayehiy* in Hebrew and *kai egeneto* in the Septuagint respectively, forms of *hayah* and *gignomai* respectively).

Although the verb can potentially mean many things, that of course does not mean that it does mean anything other than what it actually means in a given context. In other words, there are in this list of Strong's some right answers for a given context and some wrong ones, and the correct solution/interpretation must come from context and usage to determine which is which in any given case. This is usually a matter of experience on the part of the writer and expectation on the part of the reader (the latter of which we try to duplicate through intensive reading of much Greek). So for example as an English speaker you know very well the difference between "put up" (house / or place on high), "put down" (insult / or drop), "put over" (deceive / or place beyond), "put on" (pretend / or don); etc., each of which pair of meanings is decidedly different and cannot be substituted one for the other in every context. However, if a non-English speaker were to look up the verb "put" and then look up the prepositions that are placed with it in the examples given here, some very strange things might result. And even if this person got to the different meanings in the pairs above, he/she might get to only the wrong one in a context: "Are you putting me on?" does not mean "are you donning me like an overcoat?", for example. Long story short, in this biblical context you ask about we have a continuing series of events ("event" being the key). Matthew is anticipating that we will easily realize that *gignomai* in Matt.24:34 means the "happening / becoming / coming to pass" of those events.

I would prefer to translate "until all these things happen" or "until all these things come to pass". This is what it means. I don't like "fulfill" because Greek has a perfectly good word for that if such had been what Matthew had wanted to say, and that word in Greek (*pleroo*) usually focuses on the fulfillment of a positive prophecy (as we expect when we read the normal English equivalent, "fulfill").

If your question is about timing rather than meaning, that is, if that is what you are getting at with "beginning", it would be most unusual for a Greek writer to say so in this way, since the verb is in an unfulfilled temporal clause and in the subjunctive mood. That is to say, there is no "cue" here for the reader that such should (or even potentially would) indicate that the inception of events is the case (and the normal idiom suggest their conclusion instead). The conventional thing to convey a beginning would be to use some verbal cue (as in using the verb *archomai* which means "to begin") if the idea were one of incipient action.

From a purely semantic point of view, since these actions are in the distant future, the termination of the generation "of this sort" is being envisioned as more or less simultaneous with the happening of "all these events"; though, technically speaking, the last event should occur at the latest at the same time as the end of "this sort" generation. That is pushing the language a bit farther than it will probably go. What the verse means, in my estimation, is that the trend of hardness of heart in Israel ("these sort" being those who reject Messiah) will continue until Messiah returns – and we have that precisely from Paul in Romans and from Zechariah as well.

*

Q3: Can you explain these verses in Matthew 24? In verse 32, who or what is the fig tree? In verse 34, what does it mean "This generation shall not pass."? I have heard many interpretations. Does the fig tree in any way represent the nation of Israel, and does this generation pertain to the year of 1948 when Israel became a nation or is it 1967 after the six day war, making verse 34 apply to those who were born at that time, this generation shall not pass? Or in closing, does the generation part in any way pertain to Matt 24 1- 34 as a whole, where in describing many things, that generation that witnesses these things shall not pass? I very much appreciate your insight into the above.

A3: My view of the Matthew 24:34 "generation" is that Jesus is speaking of the unbelief that characterized His contemporaries (cf. Lk.17:25 where the same exact phraseology is employed), a hardness predicted to continue until He, the Messiah, returns in glory (compare Rom.11:25 with Zech.12:10-14). We tend to think of our English word "generation" exclusively in a sequential sense rather than in a typological sense, but the Greek *genea* (γενεά) can have both meanings, and the common typology of unbelieving Israel is what our Lord is referring to here. That is to say, He is speaking of heart-hardened legalistic Jews as a class which spans many physical generations.

The best example of this is Jesus' remark at Matthew 23:33-36 (Lk.11:47-51) to the effect that the present generation of unbelief is responsible for all the blood of the righteous already shed: "all

this will come upon this generation". While in speaking of Zechariah in that context Jesus says, "[Zechariah] whom you murdered". As the murder of Zechariah took place ca. 800 B.C., hundreds of years before Jesus' contemporaries or their fathers or grandfathers were born, "you" and "this generation" must refer to a type or particular "brood" rather than to a single age class restricted to our Lord's day, for only in that sense could His audience be said to have "murdered" Zechariah (i.e., as being of the same [a-]spiritual type and giving consent by their words and deeds to this horrible act). Matthew 24:32 thus tells us that this "type" of hardened unbeliever is still with us today and will be until He returns, even though in terms of strict biological generations Jesus' contemporaries are long since departed.

As to the fig tree, I don't find any particular typological significance to the illustration beyond what our Lord gives it. Jesus pretty clearly states with this illustration that we are look at contemporary events as indications of the approach and arrival of the end-times in the same way that we would recognize the coming of spring by the budding and leafing out of the fig tree. Since this illustration comes in the context of very detailed information about end-times events, I don't think we have to look any farther than the specifics Jesus gives us in Matthew chapter 24. There are more than enough "signs" there that are not really debatable. Once they begin to occur, anyone with even a passing familiarity with Matthew 24 will find ample evidence to support the fact that the Tribulation has already begun (once it has indeed begun). Its "sprouting leaves" will be obvious for anyone who cares to look.

Conversely, if the events described therein cannot be easily said to be in process at any given time, then one can rest assured that the Tribulation has not begun. As pointed out in part 2B section VII of CT, "Signs of the Coming Tribulation", there really are no discernible signs per se that can be unequivocally and irrefutably recognized before the actual commencement of those days to come. So while I suppose one could make the "1948/1968" argument, if it were true it could really only be known to be true in retrospect, and therefore could hardly be called a "sign". Additionally, of course, most of those in either generation in our English sense of that word have already passed from the scene (or soon will), at least in terms of their political influence, so that soon we would have to start talking about the "1973 war generation".

Matthew 24:36 (NIV)

36 "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son,^[a] but only the Father.

Matthew 24:36 Some manuscripts do not have nor the Son.

*

Q1: Could you relate to the point made in the footnote?

A1: It probably should be included. One can see how this would be taken out by those who, understanding that Christ is God, cannot imagine how it would be possible for Him not to know. However, this is another example of the earthly *kenosis* of our Lord at time of writing – there is now no self-imposed barrier between the humanity and deity of Christ.

*

Q2:

How certain a date is 2026?

Dear Bob, I found your Satanic Rebellion to be fascinating reading, but I am a little concerned about the charts. According to Jesus, no one knows the day or the hour of his coming. I don't think that meant day or hour literally, but that it meant the time of his coming, period. Now there will be certain signs which are detailed in Matthew 24, but the year of His coming is left for the Father to know and not for us. Throughout history people have tried to predict his coming and have been wrong. Recently, the Reverend Camping from Family Radio, made a prediction for the return of Christ to be in the Fall of 1994, I think. Miller had a group of followers during the 1840s who actually sold all they had and waited for Christ to return (among the followers was Edith White, founder of the 7th Day Adventists). I respectfully urge that you, at least, show this as only a possibility, but not certain, because no one can know the day or hour of the Lord's return.

A2: I welcome your prudent skepticism in this matter. Please let me assure you that this is not a prediction. What I have done in Part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series (the time-line chart which gives 2026 as the date for the commencement of the Tribulation merely reflects the information contained in that study) is to document and project the seven millennial day plan of God for human history. What you say is absolutely correct: no date is mentioned in the Bible, and the passage you cite (Matt.24:36), gave me some pause. Furthermore, God is not bound by any system He may have set up (even if He has in fact followed it and revealed in scripture His following of it thus far). All that said, the seven millennial day interpretation I believe to be correct based upon analysis presented in S.R. #5. So, despite the fact that naming this date opens me up for the very reasonable sort of questions your e-mail contains, I felt that it would be wrong of me to believe something so strongly and yet withhold it, simply because I was concerned about the

consequences. Were it a question of personal doubt, that would be another matter. Where that is not an issue, I have always felt constrained to do as Paul has indicated we should and give the whole counsel of God without reserve (Acts 20:20 and 20:27). In short, I am sympathetic to your concerns, and this has not been an easy choice. S.R. #5 lays out in detail why I believe as I do so that you and other readers can decide for themselves whether the scripture supports this position adequately. S.R. #5 also includes the following caveat that makes some of these very issues clear as I have attempted to address them above (and I am reproducing part of that section here):

"The most potentially controversial piece of information developed below, that is, the projected date for the commencement of the Tribulation, is based upon the following suppositions (all of which are treated within the context of this study):

1. The seven millennial day interpretation is taught in scripture and meant to be understood and applied.
2. The Church Age will last for two millennial days or 2000 years.
3. The Church Age commences following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.
4. These events took place in 33 A.D.
5. The Tribulation belongs to both the Church and Jewish Ages and is therefore to be subtracted from the 2000 year total when calculating the start of the Tribulation.
6. The half hour of silence in heaven at the breaking of the seventh seal (Rev.8:1) signifies a half year grace period that shifts the start point from spring to fall.
7. Scripture gives no indication of either shortening or lengthening of this time-line, and therefore no such change of schedule is anticipated.

The above points are all presented here as true, and the analysis upon which they are based is set forth below. Clearly, deviation from any of the above will alter the entire scheme. It is also true, as we have already said, that alteration of the schema presented below is certainly within the power and authority of the Almighty. The very end of the Tribulation, for example, will be shortened by some undisclosed amount of time (Mk.13:20). Rather than undermining the theory advanced in this study, however, Mark 13:20 in actuality supports the importance of paying heed to the Bible's chronological information. For if "the days are shortened", then surely this means that there was a definite heavenly timetable in the first place. Secondly, Mark 13:20 indicates that the shortening mentioned is a matter of days, weeks at the most (i.e., not enough to change the general time-line

given below). This is certainly in line with the very specific tally of days and months given in Daniel and Revelation (Dan.7:25; 8:14; 12:7; 12:11-12; Rev.11:2-3; 12:6; 12:14; 13:5)."

In terms of some of the specific passages you and I mentioned, this is what I say in footnote #60 of the same study:

The "unknown day and hour" of Matt.24:36 and Mark 13:32 merely indicates that we may know an event is imminent without knowing the precise day of the year and hour of the day in which it will occur. After all, this comment occurs *immediately* following the parable of the fig tree where we are told by our Lord in no uncertain terms *precisely to* pay attention to scripturally significant events and not to ignore what the Bible has to say on these matters (cf. Matt.24:32-35; Mk.13:28-31). Acts 1:7 is often mistranslated "It is not for you to know", but should be rendered "It is not for you *to decide* the times and the seasons". The Greek verb *gignosko* commonly has this meaning of "decide" especially when it is in the aorist as it is here. The context strongly supports this revised translation since our Lord immediately adds "which the Father *has ordained by His authority*". That is to say, Jesus' point is that it is the Father who has *decided* these matters; they are *not to be decided* by your wishes. For our Lord's disciples had just very clearly expressed the wish through their question in the preceding verse six for Him to establish the Kingdom immediately. Therefore our Lord's reproof in verse seven is not a commendation of complete ignorance about the Father's timetable, but rather a reminder to them that it is His will in these matters that counts, not theirs; they would have to remain patient, even though from their perspective the time seemed ripe for the commencement of the Messiah's kingdom. We must also take into consideration the fact that this statement was given to the apostles prior to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit is the agent of inspiration, chronology included, who, as Jesus had already made clear, would be the One to relate to them "the things to come" (Jn.16:13; cf. 2Pet.1:16-21). Since they will later come to understand the "things to come", verse seven must also be understood in conjunction with verse eight: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you . . .", a statement that clearly includes the previously promised further revelation of the Spirit (not excluding information about the end times). This is why, a few short years later, Paul can tell the Thessalonians the exact opposite of Acts 1:7 (that is, as it is generally misconstrued): "concerning the times and the seasons, you have no need that anyone write you, for you know very well . . ." (1Thes.5:1-2).

Again, I very much appreciate your careful and insightful questioning, and I appreciate the supportive and concerned tone with which it was delivered.

Please also see:

The Chronology of the End Times

When will the Tribulation Begin?

Is the world about to come to an end?

The Tribulation Overlap and the Date of the Tribulation's Commencement (in SR 5)

End Times Interpretation

Interpretation of the Book of Revelation: Bible Questions.

The Trinity, the Date of the Tribulation and Calvinism

History's Seven Millennial Days: The Seven Thousand Years of Human History

Eschatology Issues III: Over-focusing on Revelation, the Seven Churches

The Tribulation itself is covered in the extensive series **Coming Tribulation**.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Bob Luginbill

Matthew 25:1-13 (NASB)

1 “Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7 Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish said to the prudent, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9 But the prudent answered, ‘No, there will not be enough

for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10 And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 Later the other virgins also came, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open up for us.’ 12 But he answered, ‘Truly I say to you, I do not know you.’ 13 Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour.

*

Q1:

Parable of Ten Virgins

Can you help me explain the Parable of the Ten Virgins. Does the oil represent our faith in this parable?

A1: Yes indeed. That is how I understand it. Believers during the Tribulation will be made up of three groups: 1) those who apostatize (the 5 whose oil runs out), 2) those whose faith endures to the end (the 5 who have enough oil), 3) those who are martyred. The latter are not mentioned in this particular parable, but are equal in number to the other two groups so that during the Tribulation one third of believers are martyred in *the Great Persecution*, one third fall away in *the Great Apostasy*, and one third remain, alive and faithful, to meet the Lord at His return (see the links).

I also treat this parable in the final installment of Coming Tribulation:

All of the main issues which pertain to the need for spiritual alertness during the Tribulation are covered here in the parable of the ten virgins. The ten represent believers during the Tribulation, the light of their lamps represents their faith, the arrival of the bridegroom represents Christ's 2nd Advent return, and the oil – which runs out before He arrives and causes the foolish five to miss the celebration – represents the truth of the Word of God taught by the Spirit which feeds and empowers faith. The phrase emphasized in verse 13 above, "keep watch", means, more precisely translated, "stay awake!", and refers to the need to maintain one's faith during those dark days to come. Spiritual alertness is all about faith (and prayer is an important part staying spiritually alert: Matt.26:41; Mk.14:38; Lk.22:40; 22:46; Col.4:2).

Just as being physically tired often induces physical sleep which, if it comes on suddenly and unexpectedly at an inappropriate time or manner, may have negative consequences, so also allowing oneself to become spiritually tired is a problem at any time – how much more

during the dramatic testing of the Tribulation? In the parable of the ten virgins, the light or faith of the five is seen to be on the point of being completely "quenched", with the unhappy result that the foolish miss the return of our Lord – which can only mean that they are not resurrected at His return. And since all believers who survive until the Second Advent will be resurrected at that time, this can only mean one of two things: either the five have lost their faith entirely (so as to no longer be believers) or they are no longer alive (having unnecessarily perished not from martyrdom but from poor choices made under the pressures of the Tribulation). The detail of their running off to buy oil at a most inopportune moment is also critical. From this we may surmise that 1) they did not have a sufficient store of truth in their hearts amassed before the troubles began to be able to withstand the otherwise unbearable stresses and strains of the Tribulation, and 2) this lack of usable truth made real in their hearts through believing in it and consistently applying it before the time of testing came rendered them vulnerable to taking actions which for Christians are at the very least not salutary and at worst capable of producing the shipwreck of one's faith. And while it may be true that some such unprepared Christians may not lose faith entirely so as to apostatize (though one third of the Church will do so as we have previously seen, so the danger of this is very real and not to be minimized in any way), that is precisely what the five here are meant to represent: "I tell you the truth, I don't know you".

Whether the believers in this group got themselves involved with inappropriate activities because of their lack of spiritual knowledge (such as becoming involved in some guerilla movement against the beast's forces and being destroyed outside of the will of God as a result; see section II below), or were caught up in the world's enthusiasm for antichrist and through lack of spiritual preparation abandoned their faith altogether and accepted his mark, the result in either case is was apostasy. What then, should the foolish five have done to avoid the horrendous outcome? What should they have done to stay spiritually awake? The answer is the same as it has always been: only God's truth consistently sought out, believed and applied in faith can produce the spiritual maturity which in turn makes possible the corresponding spiritual alertness necessary to avoid falling spiritually asleep. These foolish five should have been growing up through the milk and solid food of the Word before the Tribulation began – storing up "oil" for the dark days ahead – and, once it did, they should have taken great pains to recall that truth and live by instead of falling into a state of spiritual lethargy. Doing both, i.e., hearing and believing the Word and putting it into practice (Matt.7:24-26; Lk.8:21; 6:47-49) is the hallmark of the mature believer. And

while it may be possible for the spiritually immature who are failing to advance to survive life's pressures today and not lose faith, this will be a much more difficult proposition during the Tribulation (as the Great Apostasy will bear witness).

*

Q2: Regarding the parable of the ten virgins you wrote in <http://ichthys.com/Tribulation-Part3A.htm>:

Like the wise virgins in our Lord's parable (Matt.25:1-13), we too must commit ourselves to stocking up on the oil of truth while it is yet day, that our lamp of faith may not be extinguished during that dark night to come.

And in <http://ichthys.com/Tribulation-Part4.htm>:

In that parable the light of the lamp represents faith so that the five virgins whose lamps are extinguished before the bridegroom arrives stand for those who fall away in the Great Apostasy. Thus the five wise virgins whose lamps continue to shine represent those who maintain their faith until the end of the Tribulation (in contrast with those who fall away).

I take it then we should understand that the ***oil stands for the truth and the light for faith*** - but how should we understand the fact that all ten virgins fall asleep? You wrote:

Just as being physically tired often induces physical sleep which, if it comes on suddenly and unexpectedly at an inappropriate time or manner, may have extremely negative consequences, so also allowing oneself to become spiritually tired is a problem at any time – how much more so during the dramatic testing of the Tribulation?

It seems that both these believers who kept their faith and those who lost it in the end went through a period of "spiritual sleep"?

A2: Falling asleep in this instance does not seem to be of any spiritual significance; it is part of the "furniture" of the parable and serves to advance its beginning to the critical time. The fault lies not in sleeping (we all have to sleep literally) but in being unprepared for the time of crisis.

*

Q3: How would you explain the fact that the prepared virgins don't want to share their oil with those unprepared:

9 But the prudent answered, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you *too*; go instead to the dealers and buy *some* for yourselves.'

Matthew 25:9 (NASB)

I understand that the truth which empowers the faith cannot be "transferred" onto another person in an instant, but rather requires a lengthy commitment, but here the issue is presented not as if the oil cannot be transferred, but rather as the virgins not willing to share it - what is your view?

A3: To the extent that there is a valid spiritual lesson here I would have to say that it lies only in the fact that the wise virgins are unable to comply with the request – and unwilling. Would we really give up our claim on eternal life for the sake of someone else? That is what is implied here "lest there should not be enough for us and you". In the event, it is not possible to do so. Lesson for unbelievers: you cannot count on the intercession of your friends and family if you reject Christ.

Matthew 25:14-30 (NASB)

14 "For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. 15 To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. 16 Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and gained five more talents. 17 In the same manner the one who had received the two talents gained two more. 18 But he who received the one talent went away, and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

19 "Now after a long time the master of those slaves *came and *settled accounts with them. 20 The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, 'Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have gained five more talents.' 21 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

22 "Also the one who had received the two talents came up and said, 'Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have gained two more talents.' 23 His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'

24 “And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.’

26 “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed. 27 Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival I would have received my money back with interest. 28 Therefore take away the talent from him, and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’

29 “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. 30 Throw out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

*

Parable of the Talents

Excerpt from CT Part 6

3) The Parable of the Talents and the Minas: The parable of the talents (Matt.25:14-30), and the parable of the minas (Lk.19:11-27), though not identical in all details do teach the same principles. In both cases, the master or king represents our Lord, while we are represented by his servants. In each telling of this parable, the servants are given money belonging to their lord and commanded to make good use of it until he returns (with his return representing the Second Advent). The money given to (us) represents the means, opportunity, and authority (cf. Mk.13:34) to act for the Lord in His stead here on earth according to the gifts we have been given (*n.b.*, the English word "talent" actually comes from this parable). Talents and minas are both monetary units used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world from Babylon to Rome. Depending upon the specific standard employed, the approximate weight of a talent could range from some 60 to 100 pounds. At current rates for gold, therefore, a single talent might be worth as much as a million and half dollars in contemporary terms (although its buying power in the ancient economy where money was scarcer in relative terms would be significantly greater). A mina (or mna), was commonly one sixtieth of a talent and thus, while still very valuable, was worth considerably less (i.e., comparing the total value of the amounts given to the servants who received the talents to that given to the servants who each received a single mina equates roughly to eight million dollars versus twenty to thirty thousand dollars). The disparate range between these two similar parables indicates a similarly large range in the gifts and opportunities we are given, but the standard of judgment is the same in every case: our Lord expects a return on His investment, and will reward us

wonderfully and marvellously in proportion to our efforts (i.e., the one whose mina gained ten more is placed over ten cities; the one whose mina gained five more is placed over five cities), but will do so with a reward that abundantly exceeds our results to an unimaginable degree (i.e., by the standards of the ancient world even more so than today, rulership over a city would be vastly more valuable than a single mina). For our purposes here, we see in both versions that the servants who accomplished the most are judged and rewarded first, and that the judgment continues in a descending order until it reaches the servant who accomplished nothing.

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Q2: I'm going through your writings. What do you say about verses like Matt.25:30 where Jesus shows that the lazy, fearful Servant, (not those who stopped believing in Him, but thought he was harsh, and was therefore unproductive) - was cast out with the wicked?

A2: On Matthew 25:30, every actual believer will have something to put before the Lord on that great day of days, no matter how insignificant (a single prayer prayed, for example, or a cup of cold water offered). But the "talent" in this parable represents our free will; those who use it to believe in Christ and respond to Him (as all should) produce a good crop; those who don't use the free will they have been given as those created in the image and likeness of God to respond to Christ but "hide away" their free will, being unwilling to offer it up to the Lord so as to be saved, are lost. The Lord envisions only two general categories in this parable, the saved who respond and are productive (as we all should be) and the lost who are not even willing to believe in the first place – after all, *that* was by far the biggest category among those to whom He ministered. It is true that there have always been many who allow the world to choke their productivity – but that is not how it should be. I have treated this passage at the link: "The Judgment and Reward of the Church".

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Q3: I have recently stumbled across a very unusual interpretation of 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' and 'outer darkness' as referring to unfaithful believers, while who have eternal life, are not allowed to be ruling during the millennium. These teachers argue that this is what the parable of the talents displays ie the unfaithful servant loses his reward (ruling in the 1000 year kingdom) and has a temporary weeping /gnashing of their teeth but will enter eternity after the 1000 year reign. Please could you give me your expert analysis of this as it seems extremely pernicious to me even though the teachers clearly present gospel essentials. Many thanks in advance

Authors: Dillow and Hodges

A3: As to your question, the outer darkness is the Lake of Fire, which is described as being in darkness in spite of the fire. Our God is a God of light, and separation from Him is of necessity a place of darkness. "Weeping and gnashing of teeth" is accompanied by being "thrown into the blazing fire" in Matthew 13:42 and 13:50, clearly referring to condemnation and in direct and deliberate contrast to the eternal state of believers, when God will "wipe every tear from their eyes" and "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Rev.21:4 NIV). We have been forgiven all of our sins by the blood of Christ. Punishment of this sort after death is not at all in keeping with anything we know about salvation, or the mercy, love and forgiveness of God. Also, there is no place for this odd and dangerous interpretation in the teaching of the resurrection in scripture, wherein the entire Church is said to be raised on Christ's return (see the link: "The Resurrection of the Lamb's Bride").

The unfaithful servant in the parable of the talents did not use his free will (his talent) to respond to God **at all** – i.e., he was an unbeliever; all have free will (the image of God – which the talent represents), but not all accept God's will so as to be saved. That is the reason for this servant's condemnation. All believers have some "fruit", however small (even if it is only one single simple prayer of thanks when saved; that is represented by the "interest" this person could easily have earned if he had cared, i.e., been saved, for the lack of which he is reprov'd – as its lack demonstrates he is not even a believer; cf. Jas.2:14-17).

Perhaps one reason for wanting to find this distinction (where it doesn't actually exist) is the textual problem in Revelation 20:5. The phrase (in parentheses in the NIV version) "*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended*" is **not** a part of scripture. It is a late addition (an interpolation; see the link), added later by some scribe, no doubt to give his own (incorrect) explanation of the passage. It does not occur in the best manuscript of the Bible, but like several other such passages printed by the KJV (whose translators did not have access to the best mss. since they did not come to light until some centuries later, and who had to abide by the same composite critical text all were given, the so-called *textus receptus*, replete with such errors), it is usually kept in newer translations for "sentimental" reasons (read "profit motive" as publishers whose scholars know the truth on these issues don't want to be accused of "changing the Bible" and so lose out on potential sales).

The world these days is, as you are discerning, filled to the brim with unprepared "teachers" who feel they have a right to conjure up any sort of interpretation from any passage to fit their needs or to seem topical. False teachers are bad enough, but are easily spotted. Those who are believers but who do not possess the academic, linguistic, and experiential preparation necessary to teach – and

who have not been given the gift – can be harder to spot, and so may do great damage to the faith of the elect, especially to the degree that they lack integrity in their methodology and faithful commitment to the truth.

We are all responsible for what we believe and what we say. Therefore I always advise all believers to make it a priority to find the best possible teaching ministry which meets their true needs by laying out the truth of the Word of God in an orthodox, substantive and understandable way. It certainly doesn't have to be Ichthys (although you are certainly welcome here), but I do suggest giving all substandard and false "ministries" such as the one cited a wide berth, finding instead something good, and cleaving to it through thick and thin.

Matthew 25:24-25 (NASB)

24 "And the one also who had received the one talent came up and said, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. 25 And I was afraid, and went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you have what is yours.'

*

Q1: Why is God compared to a master who reaps where he didn't sow and gathers where he scattered no seed?

A1: Unbelievers emphasize the unyielding nature of God's perfect character in order to justify their unwillingness to submit to Him; in fact of course He sacrificed His own dear Son on their behalf as well as ours so that His perfect justice would be satisfied and He could provide salvation. In other words, this self-serving "fear" which merely was an excuse for the unbeliever to do what he really wanted to do (ignore God in this life), should really have led him to exactly the opposite conclusion – as the Master here makes clear and as the Lord will make clear at the last judgment in each and every case.

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Q2: I understand that the unproductive servant has a wrong perception of the character of his master here and based on this wrong perception he draws the wrong conclusion also, since, as you wrote, he should have been led to the exact opposite attitude - one of commitment to deliver. One aspect of this parable which I cannot understand is why the master agrees with the servant by saying "you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed", rather than rebuking the unfaithful servant for what he said about him. Some commentators state that

rather than repeating servant's words, the master here asks a question - "You knew ...?" What is your take?

A2: I don't see how making it a question changes the fundamental calculus of the situation. It sounds better in English, so one might be able to defend the translation (Greek questions where no question word or signal occurs are notoriously hard to locate without a very good sense of the language – they think somewhat differently than we do on this point). I would still stick with my interpretation here: the Master only agrees with the slave's assessment of His awesome nature. The correct response then is to seek mercy – which our Master always provides to those who ask it.

*

Q3: It also seems to me that this perception on part of the servant is obviously false since he was given the talent, so he shouldn't say of the master that he sows where he didn't reap, because clearly the servant was given a means to generate profit. Would you agree?

A3: In the analogy, the "seed" is the money. "Sowing" is putting it to work.

Matthew 25:31-46

NIV SB: 25:31–46 The two most widely accepted interpretations of this judgment are:(1) It will occur at the beginning of an earthly millennial kingdom (vv. 31, 34; see Rev 20:4 and note on 20:2). Its purpose will be to determine who will be allowed to enter the kingdom (v. 34). The basis for judgment will be the kind of treatment shown to the Jewish people ("these brothers and sisters of mine," v. 40) during the preceding great tribulation period (vv. 35–40, 42–45). Ultimately, how one treats them will reveal whether or not one is saved (vv. 41, 46). (2) The judgment referred to occurs at the great white throne at the end of the age (Rev 20:11–15). Its purpose will be to determine who will be allowed to enter the eternal kingdom of the saved and who will be consigned to eternal punishment in hell (vv. 34, 46). The basis for judgment will be whether love is shown to God's people (see 1Jn 3:14–15). See note on v. 40.

*

Q: I understand from your writings that you consider the second interpretation to be correct. Could you explain why these verses cannot be taken to refer to the beginning of the millennial reign? Would you say that verse 46 makes this interpretation incorrect, as it talks about "eternal punishment", and this will not come until the White Throne judgment?

A: Yes, that is the clearest proof of what is going on here. We know clearly that the Last Judgment occurs at the end of human history, so this must be taking place at that time, not at the beginning of the Millennium. Also, this then becomes the clearest treatment of what we would postulate must also take place at that time, namely, the judgment of the millennial believers who, like the Church which has already received its resurrection and reward, must likewise be resurrected and rewarded.

Matthew 25:40 (NASB)

40 The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'

NIV SB: 25:40 least of these brothers and sisters of mine. To whom does Jesus refer? The principal views are: (1) all who are hungry, thirsty, poor, needy or otherwise distressed—but this seems too comprehensive; (2) apostles and other Christian missionaries—but this seems too restrictive; (3) the Jews mentioned in the first interpretation in the note on vv. 31–46; (4) Jesus' disciples (12:46–50; 28:8–10); (5) "God's people" mentioned in the second interpretation in the note on vv. 31–46.

*

Q: How do you interpret the "least of these brothers and sisters of mine"?

A: Compare Romans 12:16: "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion" (NKJV; cf. Jas.2:1-6). The idea here though is that legitimate production done for the Lord on behalf of even the most marginal Christians is still worthy of reward, even though in terms of actual effect it might be minimal – it is still a service the Lord appreciates and rewards.

Matthew 25:46 (NASB)

46 These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

NIV SB: 25:34–40 Rewards in the kingdom of heaven are given to those who serve without thought of reward. There is no hint of merit here, for God gives out of grace, not debt.

*

Q: What is meant here by "there is no hint of merit here"?

A: I think the person who wrote the note is trying to distinguish between rewards based on grace and the Roman Catholic idea of works of supererogation.

*

Matthew 26:5 (NASB)

5 But they were saying, "Not during the festival, otherwise a riot might occur among the people."

*

Q: Why did the chief priests and elders think that a riot could occur if Jesus was to be seized during the festival?

A: Our Lord was attracting great crowds who saw Him as a prophet – even if they did not actually put their faith in Him. Also, these rulers obviously did not understand the nature of our Lord's ministry but were viewing it through the lens with which they looked at all such "movements" where supporters would fight on behalf of their leaders if acted against in a violent fashion.

Matthew 26:6-7 (NASB)

6 Now when Jesus was in Bethany, at the home of Simon the leper, 7 a woman came to Him with an alabaster vial of very costly perfume, and she poured it on His head as He reclined at the table.

*

Excerpt from Bible Basics 4a Christology – Anointing at Bethany

The scriptural treatment of the final week before the crucifixion begins with Mary's anointing of Jesus in Bethany (i.e., the "six days" of Jn.12:1),(62) and nearly everything that transpires serves to demonstrate ahead of time the essential truth of which Jesus has been attempting to forewarn His disciples throughout this final phase of His first advent (e.g., Matt.16:21-26; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; Mk.8:31-37; 9:30-32; 10:32-33; Lk.9:22-25; 9:43-45; 18:31-34), namely, that the Messiah had to come twice, a second time to reign in glory (as all were expecting Jesus to do now in short order), but a first time as well, in order to die for the sins of the world and purchase a "people for Himself" to share His kingly reign forever (Rev.5:9; cf.Rev.1:5-6).

1) The anointing at Bethany: The first of these events was Jesus' anointing by Mary, sister of Martha and Lazarus (similar to but to be distinguished from an earlier occurrence related

at Lk.7:36ff.).⁽⁶³⁾ As Jesus Himself tells us, this was very significant not only because it prefigured His death and burial (i.e., anointed head *and* foot as in burial preparations: Matt.26:6-13; Mk.14:3-9; Jn.12:1-8; cf. the holy anointing oil: Ex.30:22-33), but because it demonstrated that while none of His disciples seemed to understand, at least Mary did realize full well that our Lord was about to give His life on our behalf, so that “wherever in the entire world this good news [of the Kingdom] is proclaimed, what this woman has done shall also be mentioned to remind of her [faith]” (Matt.26:13; cf. Mk.14:9). This incident and the outrage it initially caused among the disciples (because of the “waste” of money involved) we may take to be the “final straw” for Judas who realized great personal monetary loss from the anointing (helping himself to the common purse as he often did: Jn.12:4-6). For the nard employed was of such high quality that it was actually liquid (and thus would have fetched a princely price).⁽⁶⁴⁾

Matthew 26:8 (NASB)

8 But the disciples were indignant when they saw this, and said, "Why this waste?

*

Q: In Matthew 26:8 plural is used - "disciples" - but in John 12:4-5 it is only Judas reported to make the remark to Jesus?

4 But Judas Iscariot, one of His disciples, who was intending to betray Him, *said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and given to poor people?"

John 12:4-5 (NASB)

A: Judas' reaction is the important one because it is one of complete hypocrisy. We can also imagine Judas, who seems to have been well thought of and perhaps influential among his peers, being the "leader" in this indignation.

Matthew 26:18 (NASB)

18 And He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is near; I am to keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'"

*

Q: Since Jesus says "to a certain man", how did the disciples know whom He meant?

A: It was more common for women (and slaves) to be carrying pitchers of water (Mk.4:13; Lk.22:10), so it would be easy for them to recognize the first man they saw so doing as the "one" our Lord had in mind. Also, we see here that Matthew does not include the detail but the other two synoptic writers do. This shows us that, clearly, there are many details that were left out (cf. Jn.21:25), so that we should always have faith that these things "make sense", even if we cannot figure them out just yet.

Matthew 26:20-25 (NASB)

20 Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. 21 As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." 22 Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, "Surely not I, Lord?" 23 And He answered, "He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. 24 The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born." 25 And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" Jesus *said to him, "You have said it yourself."

*

Q: You wrote: *but the other disciples apparently suspected him least of all as we can surely discern from the fact that he does not even come under suspicion even after our Lord gives John and Peter such a clear sign in the dipping of the sop (Jn.13:26-28), and then essentially names him in response to his question "Is it I?": "You have said [yourself]" (Matt.26:23-25).*

Some translations of the passage from Matthew say: "Surely it is not I, Rabbi?" (NASB) instead of "Is it I"?

Regarding the same question by Judas - what was the purpose of it? Was it aimed at clouding the vision of other disciples? Or was Judas so lost by then that he was lying to himself about his betrayal?

A: The versions go both ways. What I like this first rendering you quote of *meti ego eimi* is that it brings out Judas as being in the posture of pretending he knows nothing at all about the matter instead of asking a simple question. Judas is trying to deflect attention. The others all asked this question. He was probably nervous about the prospect of being conspicuously the only one who didn't. That fact argues against "surely not" (which may be a little too strong in any case). The adverb *metiis* usually emphatic rather than necessarily suggesting a negative answer. The problem

is bringing all this out in the English effectively. Maybe, "Is it **ME**?" is closest to representing the posturing and indignation meant to deflect attention

A2: When our Lord told the disciples at the last supper that one of them would betray Him, the eleven were concerned and asked anxiously "it's not me, is it?!" (Mk.14:19). After our Lord's explanation about dipping the sop, Judas got around to asking the same thing (Matt.26:25), but he did so disingenuously since he knew very well that the traitor was himself. So is it ever. Those who ought to be worried are only worried about getting caught – if they are worried at all. Believers who are genuinely interested in pleasing the Lord do not need to worry, but it is good to keep spurring ourselves on in the realization that we are but flesh and that only by proceeding resolutely forward can we be absolutely certain that we will not slide backward:

(24) Don't you know that all the runners in the stadium run the race, but that only one receives the prize? Run in such a way so as to achieve what you are after. (25) And again, everyone involved in competition exercises self-control in all respects. Those athletes go through such things so that they may receive a perishable crown of victory, but we do it to receive an imperishable one. (26) So as I run this race of ours, I'm heading straight for the finish line; and as I box this bout of ours, I'm making every punch count. (27) I'm "pummeling my body", one might say, bringing myself under strict control so that, after having preached [the gospel] to others, I might not myself be disqualified [from receiving the prize we all seek].

1st Corinthians 9:24-27

Matthew 26:26-28 (NASB)

26 While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

*

Q1: How should we understand the words "Take, eat; this is My body" and "Drink from it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins"?

Like you wrote, Jesus didn't bleed to death, so the blood is not to be taken literally, so the way our Lord puts things here ("this is My body" and "this is My blood") seems quite direct?

A1: So "is" here means "represents", but the use of the copula makes the analogy and the symbolism more vivid. Obviously enough it is a symbol since our Lord's body was not composed of bread nor was His blood wine – but it is through His body (His willingness to become a human being) and His blood (His spiritual death for all sin on the cross) that we have life (eternal rather than temporal).

*

Q2: What do you think about communion? I have seen anywhere from every Sunday communion up to once every three months to twice a year. I see Jesus tell us do it as often as you can. Some tell me too much and people start to abuse it. What's your opinion?

A2: Good to make your acquaintance. The first communion took place among Jesus and His disciples gathered together as they ate a Passover meal in an upper room. That is to say, it didn't look anything at all like "church" or "church communion". Jesus' explanation of communion and Paul's explication of it to the Corinthians (1Cor.11:20-34) make it clear that this is a ceremony of remembering Jesus, His Person (represented by the bread) and His work (represented by the cup). "Communion" didn't look like we imagine it from our experiences until the Reformation at the earliest. Before that, it had been ritualized into "mass" as the Roman Catholics still practice it. But it seems pretty clear from Paul and the gospel accounts that believers "coming together" and "remembering Jesus" through eating and drinking is the heart of the sacrament. Most of what we associate with communion is not essential – or at least it is not essential to do things in the *particular* ways that have become traditional. Anywhere "two or three are gathered" in the Name of Jesus, eating and drinking in memory of Him, they fulfill the command of our Lord to "keep on doing this in remembrance of Me" (Lk.22:19), as long as the abuses noted in 1st Corinthians 11:20-34 are avoided.

Indeed, as Paul reports, Jesus also said "This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me" (1Cor.11:26). The "it" is not there in the Greek, and while it is fair to say from the verses which follow that what is meant is a ceremony where believers have gathered, the whole thrust of these passages seem to me to indicate that we should remember our Lord whenever we eat and drink, and, further, that we should do so on a regular basis in a formalized, ceremonial way when in the company of other believers. The purpose of this is first and foremost to remember Him, who Jesus is and what He has done for us

– and surely that should be something we do individually *at least* as often as we eat and drink. The secondary purpose noted by Paul is seen in 1st Corinthians 11:26: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (NIV). When we do eat and drink communally in a ceremony of remembrance of the Lord and His work on the cross for us, we "proclaim [Him and] His death [for us]", and that is both a powerful witness to the world and a very emphatic presentation of the gospel – provided we are doing it right, explaining when we hold a communion ceremony precisely what we mean by the bread and cup, namely, that we have accepted Jesus' Person (the bread) and work (the cup, representing His "blood" or work on the cross in expiating sin) by faith (represented by eating). That is also why Paul in the verses which follow upbraids the Corinthians for failing in their communion practice by not sanctifying Jesus' memory and thus missing the whole point of the sacrament.

Present day Protestant communion services generally avoid the types of abuses of which the Corinthian congregation was guilty, but to the extent that they do not explain the essence of the gospel and the essence of faith in Christ which the ceremony is designed to proclaim, reminding us of our Lord, His work, and our new birth through faith in Him and His blood in the process, to that extent they are failing and would be better off not holding communion (*especially* if they are endowing it with some kind of mystical significance in the manner of R.C. mass).

So as to frequency I would say, the more the better, provided the meaning is always correctly explained so that true remembrance and proclamation of Jesus Christ is the result. And I would also say that believers really ought to think about having their own, private remembrance of our Lord whenever they eat and drink, even if alone.

Matthew 26:28 (NIV)

28 This is my blood of the^[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:28 Some manuscripts *the new*

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Q1: Is "the new" a part of the scripture?

A1: Not here. Later (e.g., 1Cor.11:25; 2Cor.3:6), Paul does call it the "new" covenant/testament to distinguish it from the Law, but, after all, there really is only **one** covenant/testament, namely, the peace and life eternal we have with the Father based upon our acceptance of the sacrifice of the Son. The "old" is merely a shadow of the "real" or "new".

*

Q2: How should we understand the fact that Paul also uses quotation marks and yet says "new covenant"?

1 Corinthians 11:25 (NASB)

25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

A2: Quotation marks as such do not exist in ancient Greek. This is an editorial interpretation (so no need to make anything of it).

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Q3: Dear Professor,

Another set of questions:

Could you please clarify 1st Corinthians 11:27-33? Firstly, what does Paul mean by 'unworthy manner' and what does 'examining' oneself involve? Secondly, why does Paul say that 'Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment'? Does it mean that we should satisfy our bodily hunger before eating food and drink in remembrance of the body and blood of Our Lord?

In Jesus and with constant prayer,

A3: Always a pleasure. 1st Corinthians 11:27ff. is a much debated passage. To me it is clear that this particular abuse of the Corinthian congregation (and Paul's first epistle to them is filled with similar corrective stipulations) is not something we see today much in the west. Christians of that early era apparently got together for communal meals (we do the same) but in doing so celebrated the communion ceremony as part of the communal meal. The problem in Corinth was that some members were wealthy and others poor, but they did not share the food: each ate what he/she brought. This resulted in the obvious abuse of some rich persons of little self-control carrying on in an excessive way even as other poor persons didn't even have enough to eat. The modern church for all of its other faults has avoided this particular abuse by 1) separating communal meals from the communion ceremony entirely (and engaging in sharing of food in those communal meals; in this country we call it "Potluck"); 2) having a communion ceremony as part of the worship service wherein here is no "eating and drinking" at all, merely the taking of a small bit of bread or wafer and a small thimble of wine or grape juice. One of the problems I have with the way things are done now is that it seems to me that in spite of the Corinthian abuse of the ceremony they were in

some respects closer to the mark of what it should resemble. The "Lord's supper" (1Cor.11:20) is modelled on the Passover which was in fact a meal of remembrance (and that of course is the purpose of the ceremony: remembering our Lord and what He has done for us). So while I have no wish to overturn thousands of years of subsequent tradition when it is at least focused on the main points of the truth (remembering Jesus' Person in the bread and His work of the cross in dying spiritually for our sins in the cup which represents His "blood"), it seems to me that remembering Him and His death on our behalf is entirely appropriate whenever we eat or drink (the custom of "saying grace" while giving thanks often does not recall the Person of Christ and His death on the cross for us).

In the context of these verses of which you ask, the "unworthy manner" is the specific scurrilous behaviour of the haves vis-a-vis the have-nots, but it also includes any disrespectful conduct during the one ceremony given to the Church to honour the memory of our dear Lord. This includes, we also find out here, partaking of the communion ritual without self-examination, namely, without examining one's *prior* conduct and confessing all as yet unconfessed sins. Confession of sin restores us to fellowship with the Lord (1Jn.1:9). Failing to confess or being unwilling to confess results in being "out of fellowship". Since sin is a very devious adversary, it is certainly a good idea to make a confession about sins of ignorance before partaking of communion – and to stay away from communion if for whatever reason a person is unwilling to admit to him/herself or to confess to the Lord sins known to have been committed. Therefore taking communion when involved in a pattern of sinfulness is a very bad idea, because it proclaims fellowship with the Lord when the person in question is really not in fellowship with Him at all:

If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth.

1st John 1:6 NIV

This failure to examine, repent and confess before communion is what brings on the Lord's examination and, in the case of the Corinthian congregation we can say for certain, results in the situation reported that "many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep". But "if we judged ourselves (i.e., repented of our sins and confessed them), we would not come under judgment". This judgment from the Lord is designed as all divine discipline is to turn those afflicted by it around so as to be restored and kept from falling away.

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

Revelation 3:19 NIV

See the link: **Confession of sin before partaking of the Lords supper**

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Q4:

Communion Ceremony outside of the Local Church

Link **here**.

Greetings. Thank you once again that you make yourself available for questions. A friend and I were wondering about communion. We both used to attend churches and we partook in communion or The Lord's Supper and we are wondering about this now that we do not go to church. Could you elaborate on this subject or direct me to the studies where it is discussed. Thank you again, May God richly bless you.

A4: Good to hear from you again, and thanks for your question. I have written the following about communion in general which I quote here as background to answering your question:

Covenants in general in the ancient Middle East required two parties and a formal blood-sacrifice for ratification wherein both sides agree to abide by the terms specified. A biblical covenant is an agreement made by God on mankind's behalf, wherein God undertakes to bless all those who faithfully follow Him. God's part is two-fold: He supplies blessing (culminating in resurrection and eternal life), and He provides the blood-sacrifice (the gift of His Son, necessary to redeem us from sin so that we may be blessed). Our part is to keep faith with Him (i.e., accepting Christ and continuing to trust Him, believe Him, obey Him, follow Him: cf. Gen.15:6). God's covenants are formalized promises that provide those who have set their hearts on following Him with a strong basis for confident hope, because God has not only promised the eternal life and concomitant blessings we eagerly await, but has irrevocably bound Himself to fulfill them. Therefore although part of these covenants' fulfillment is still yet future (requiring those who accept God's gracious offer of salvation which is at the heart of both covenants to trust Him while waiting patiently for fulfillment after the pattern of Abraham's faith and patience), fulfillment is absolutely certain for all who embrace the promises and persevere in faith. Both Old and New Covenants are ratified by blood: the Old through the shadow of animal blood, the New through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross (where the reality of His death on our behalf and in our place [and wherein He did not bleed to death: Jn.19:30-37] is symbolized by the phrase "the blood of Christ": Heb.9:16-22). God promises, formalizes the promises, and pays the most

severe price to fulfill the covenants He has established - the price being the sacrifice of His only beloved Son. We benefit from His unconditional and glorious act of grace, if we but trust in Jesus and stay faithful to Him. Whether it be present day believers who partake of the communion which proclaims the completed reality of salvation through the blood of Christ (Matt.26:26-29), or believers of the past who partook of sacrificial meals "of covenant" that foreshadowed the future reality of salvation (Ex.12:1-12; cf.Gen.31:51-54), our participation "proclaims the death of Jesus until He comes" (1Cor.11:26) and so pledges our continuing faith and faithfulness. The old, shadow covenant(s) (cf. Ezek.16:60 "covenant of youth") and the memorial, "New" covenant (cf. Ezek.16:60 "everlasting covenant) thus both proclaim the salvation to which we are heirs and partakers by the work of God through our continuing faith in Jesus Christ [from "**Covenants**" in **Part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series**].

Thus "proclaiming the death of Jesus until He comes" (1Cor.11:26) really is the reason why Jesus gave us this one genuine "sacrament" in which we are to participate, because by doing so we show the world (and remind ourselves) that He has bought us and that we believe in Him and have received the blessings of His work on the cross. That is why Jesus says "keep on doing this in remembrance of Me" (Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24). The context of 1st Corinthians chapter eleven makes very clear the solemnity of this one and only true ritual of the Church wherein Christ's Person (bread) and work on the cross (wine) are clearly and graphically represented, and wherein our participation in His Person and work is likewise tangibly and powerfully represented by our eating of these symbols, a very clear representation of our abiding faith in Him and His sacrifice for us (cf. Jn.6:25-59). Compare my comments in **Coming Tribulation: Part 2A**:

Jesus Christ Himself gave us the ceremony of communion (Matt.26:26-28; Mk.14:22-24; Lk.22:17-20; 1Cor.11:23-26), a ritual of remembrance of Him and His work and the only true Christian ritual, and even this has been abused - for its true purpose is not to "impart" grace or fellowship or anything else, but to remind believers of Him and His work and the choice we have made to follow Him.

This last point is important for your question because there is even in evangelical circles the sense abroad that somehow only a communion service presided over by an ordained pastor and occurring in a local church setting could ever be legitimate. Scripture does not, in my opinion, support that view. Jesus told His disciples and, by application, told us all, to "keep on doing" communion until He returned in order to preserve our memory of Him and our sense of commitment to Him (and to make that obvious to all the world thereby). That is the point of

communion - to proclaim and remind and focus on that *koinonia*-oneness with the Son whom we believe, love and serve (i.e., "communion" is a translation of *koinonia* which means "oneness" or "fellowship"). Communion is most definitely **not** a vehicle for "dispensing grace" (as it is commonly misrepresented to be whether overtly or subliminally).

I see no scriptural reason why believers who, for whatever reason, are not blessed with having a large group with which to fellowship or a church building or a formally ordained pastor should be restricted from practicing communion in their own small group worship. Indeed, the first communion was conducted by our Lord in a small, secular room with a small group of individuals whom the "formal" world regarded as heretics. It is not the size of the group, nor the type of building, nor the academic qualifications of the group leader that matter. Rather, the key to proper communion lies in the hearts and in the spirits of those who partake. Proper understanding of what the ceremony means (see above), and reverence in conducting the ceremony are the true points at issue:

(27) Therefore whoever eats the [communion] bread or drinks the [communion] cup of the Lord in an unworthy way is guilty [of offense against] the body and the blood of the Lord. (28) So let [each] person evaluate himself and in this manner (i.e., following confession of all sins remembered in such reflection) let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (29) For the person who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment for himself if he does not evaluate his body [aright] (i.e., refusing first to repent and confess). (30) It is for this [very] reason that many among you are sick and infirm – and not a few have passed away. (31) But if we were evaluating ourselves [so as to repent and confess], we would not be falling under judgment. (32) And when we are being judged [for this offense], it is by the Lord that we are being disciplined, to the end that we might not be condemned (lit., "terminally judged") along with the world.

1st Corinthians 11:27-32

Thus this final point is one of central significance. Communion is the one remaining ceremony authorized for Jesus' Church, the one time we approach God to remember Him in a formal way. Therefore the seriousness of the event and the extreme importance of our doing so in a wholly sanctified way cannot be understated (cf. Lev.10:1-3). And it is certainly fitting when we remember Him in communion to remind ourselves that we are here to walk as He walked. There is certainly value in doing all this in a formal church setting. But as long as we have examined ourselves first, and as long as this ritual of remembrance is conducted "decently and in good order" and in full understanding of the significance of the Person and work of our Lord as represented in the

communion elements, then I see no reason for we who are Christ's Body to shy away from remembering Him in this way outside of what has become traditional. After all, looking to the scriptures instead of tradition, this ritual of remembrance was given to all of us. It is most certainly not the property of a special few ordained by one denomination or another, and is nowhere restricted to a particular venue such as a church building.

For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread and having blessed it He broke it and said, "This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. **Keep on doing this in order to remember Me**". And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. **Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me**".

1st Corinthians 11:23-25

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A5:

Excerpt from BB 4a Christology – Meaning of the Communion Memorial

3) The Meaning of the Communion Memorial: The Role of the Son: Communion is the one and only biblically authorized ceremony for the Church, and its essential purpose is very clear: “Be doing this **in remembrance of Me**” (Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24-25). The bread represents Jesus' body, the wine His blood. We have already seen how that the blood of Christ is a symbol representing His spiritual death rather than any physical bleeding. When we drink of the communion cup we acknowledge His sacrifice in dying for our sins and say by our action that we believe in and accept His death on our behalf. The bread, on the other hand, represents His Person, who He truly is, God become man as well in order to physically bear our sins and save us from eternal condemnation. And it is in this human body represented by the bread that He bore the sins of the world. When we eat the communion bread we acknowledge the wonder of who He is and what He has done for us, the reality of His incarnation and of the giving up of His life unto spiritual death to save us from our sins by taking our punishment in His own human flesh. Thus the blood focuses on the work of redemption; the bread on the One who sacrificed so much to win it. It is important to note that our Lord actually says in this regard that His body was “given” (“broken” is an incorrect translation of 1Cor.11:24; cf. Lk.22:19), “given”, that is, over to judgment to satisfy the penalty of death on “our behalf” (1Cor.11:24).

The cup of blessing which we bless – is it not *fellowship in the blood of Christ*? And the bread which we break – is it not *fellowship in the body of Christ*? For one bread, one body we many are, since we all partake of that One Bread.

1st Corinthians 10:16-17

Just as Christ in His divinity did not aid His human nature beyond measure during all the prior events of the first advent (i.e., the doctrine of *kenosis*; see **section I.5.e** above), so we may be sure that the same principle applied as He bore our sins in His human body on the tree. But the verse above demonstrates as of prime importance in the thinking and remembering of the Church that He gave up His human nature unto spiritual death, bearing all sin in His body, so that we might become One Body with Him. It is indeed precisely because the sacrifice He made for us was so great that it is described as giving up us His body for us to eat, and pouring out His blood for us to drink. He used up His humanity as the coin with which to redeem us.

This cup is the *new covenant* [ratified] by My blood which is shed on your behalf.

Luke 22:20b

For [on this matter] I received [directly] from the Lord what I passed on to you, namely that on the night on which He was betrayed He took bread and having blessed it He broke it and said, “This is my body which is [offered up] on your behalf. Keep on doing this in order to remember Me”. And in the same way [after eating] He took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant [made] by my blood. Keep on doing this as often as you drink [it] in order to remember Me”.

1st Corinthians 11:23-25

And having taken the bread and blessed it, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is *my body* which is being given on your behalf. Be doing this to remember Me”.

Luke 22:19 (cf. Matt.26:26; Mk.14:22; Jn.6:51-59; 1Cor.11:23-25)

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Communion and the Spiritual Death of Christ

Email and questions link **here**.

Q6: I found your postings on communion very helpful. Like many other people, whose questions you addressed, I also didn't know how we could partake in communion outside of the church. Having gained that understanding, I would very much appreciate some more guidance on this

matter. If these matters, or some of them, are in your view personal and up to us to decide, or simply irrelevant - please let me know. I would like to know more about it and not 'eat and drink judgment for myself' - this is obviously a critical part of our Christian life and, like you said, the only formal ritual left.

a) Firstly, should we use every meal we have as an opportunity for communion, thus making sure that everything we eat and drink we do in remembrance of Our Lord? Or would you say this should be done less frequently (once a day, once a week?) in order to mark the occasion and make it more formal (even if we do it ourselves, which is the case with me)?

If it shouldn't be done every time we eat, would you say we should just say a short grace, thanking our Lord for our 'daily bread' whenever the meal is not a communion?

b) Secondly, regarding the confession of our sins, which is the prerequisite, should this be done before every meal we have (assuming every meal is, or should be, a communion), or simply performed when we sin, so that later on, during the communion, we don't go through the examination of ourselves again?

c) Finally, with full awareness that it's our spirit and inside that is critical when partaking in the communion, would you say it's good to mark the occasion with any 'outside' features - type of food (any specific type of bread?), type of drink (does it have to be wine? any specific type?), official character of the communion expressed in what we're wearing, so that this ritual is performed in what we understand as an 'official setting'?

Again, please don't take offence in the personal and technical nature of these questions - I ask them with full cognizance of the fact that it's the spiritual dimension of this act (and any other, for that matter) that really matters. The reason I would like to know more is that having left the RC church I don't attend any group worship (and don't feel the need to do so either - I'm immersed in the study of the Word of God and feel that this is the path for me) and I just want to make sure that this very important ritual is given all the attention it requires.

A6: On communion per se, the only things we have are church tradition (which will likely only lead us astray), the descriptions of the last supper in the gospels, and Paul's treatment of the issue in 1st Corinthians chapter 11. I make it my personal policy to try to remember the Lord and what He has done for me whenever I have a meal. I try not to be legalistic about this (i.e., not every time I take a swig of water or grab a handful of chips left over on the department common table etc.), but for me it is important to remember Him regularly. I certainly would not wish to lay that burden on anyone else – especially if it is a burden. It is something I enjoy and find helpful to my

own Christian walk. I also do not do this in any sort of formal way but only in prayer before a meal, remembering that while "real" bread and drink may keep me alive for a few days, the Body and blood of Jesus have given me life eternal, so that nothing in this world is anywhere near as important. Since the Bible boils down all human effort in this temporary world to procuring food (Eccl.6:7), remembering that we Christians are all about the next life, eternal life, and how it is we have it, through Jesus Christ our Lord, is important however one wishes to remember this blessed truth. Jesus said, "keep on doing this in order to remember Me", and I am very clear that the "this" is not nearly as important as the "remember Me" part; that is the objective of the exercise. Paul lists abuses on behalf of the Corinthians which are to my way of thinking abuses because they detracted from the point of the ceremony. Remembering Jesus is what counts. Providing some small portion of food and drink for the process is for reasons explained to contrast the eternal to the temporal and to remember the latter. The bread represents His body, His Person, who He is (Matt.26:26; Mk.14:22; Lk.22:19; 1Cor.11:24); the wine represents His blood, His work on the cross in bearing all of our sins and being judged for them (Matt.26:28; Mk.14:27; Lk.22:20; 1Cor.11:25).

Over-focusing on the ritual itself instead of what it means as almost all churches seem to me to do to a large extent defeats the point of the ceremony. Were I conducting a communion service, these are the points I would wish to stress: the reality of Him and what He has done for us. Without making these things clear, there is no point to the ritual. So if it is just me or whomever, we do know and we do remember when we say our prayer of thanks that recalls wonderful things about our Savior in advance of our meal. If we have a small congregation, it may also be possible to do more with less assuming that we have explained these matters many times in the past. If there are many present who do not understand precisely who Jesus is, human and divine, and what His death on the cross really entailed and means, His spiritual death in the darkness before His physical death in particular, then more explanation will be necessary. As in all things, it is difficult to reduce the really important matters to a mere formula. The best that may be said for the formulae that many churches have come up with (they are all pretty similar in the Protestant realm) is that they generally avoid the specific abuses Paul mentions where a communal meal (which really would be more like the last supper) was not conducted in a sanctified way (nevertheless to the extent that by not explaining things they make communion "mysterious" or worse deliberately endow it with some sort of mysterious properties in the manner of Roman Catholicism, they certainly are in error).

So rather than committing to a preferred formula, I would rather say that if Jesus is proclaimed, if He and what He did for us is remembered, if what we have as a result is made clear, then the true purpose of "do this in remembrance of Me" has been accomplished. As to confession of sin, this is another very good question, especially since as I have no doubt remarked before sin is a very insidious and ubiquitous problem, and when we consider that our thoughts may be sinful, that what we allow ourselves to emote may be sinful, and that even the attitudes we allow ourselves to fall into may be sinful, it is very difficult for even the most introspective among us to be absolutely certain that "we have not sinned" (cf. 1Jn.1:8-10). So while some sins are very obvious and so should be studiously avoided – and immediately repented of and confessed when and if we do fall into them – we also have to keep in mind, especially before something like communion, that we are all prone to "sins of ignorance", so that a prayer of confession which includes anything in our thinking which may have been a sin along with a prayer for whatever we may have missed is a sound practice. If we do so, God is faithful to forgive us all of our sins and to cleanse us from all of our unrighteousness so that our remembrance of His dear Son our Lord will be honored and not a cause for discipline.

Matthew 26:29 (NASB)

29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

NIV SB: 26:29 drink it new ... in my Father's kingdom. At the Messianic banquet (see Lk 22:16 and note).

*

Q: How should we understand "the Messianic banquet"?

A: See the link:

"The Wedding Super of the Lamb" http://ichthys.com/Tribulation-Part6.htm#II._The_Wedding_Supper_of_the_Lamb

Matthew 26:30 (NASB)

30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

NIV SB: 26:30 hymn. The Passover fellowship was concluded with the second half of the Egyptian Hallel Psalms (Ps 115-118). Ps 113-114 were sung before the meal. Mount of Olives. See note on Mk 11:1.

*

Q: How do we know that these Psalms were sung during the Passover celebration?

A: If I'm not mistaken, this reference comes from the Tosefta (essentially a supplement to the Mishnah). It is usually assumed to have a fairly early date, but that date is after the destruction of Jerusalem (no earlier than the second century and I have my doubts about it being so early). I do not know of any contemporary writer who gives these details and there is nothing about this in the Bible. Our Lord and His disciples did sing a hymn on this occasion, however.

Matthew 26:34 (NASB)

34 Jesus said to him, "Truly I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times."

26:34 before the rooster crows. The reference may be to the third of the Roman watches into which the night was divided (see note on 14:25; see also Mk 13:35 and note). Or it may simply refer to early morning when the rooster crows.

(NIV SB Notes) "During the fourth watch of the night," 3:00–6:00 a.m. According to Roman reckoning the night was divided into four watches: (1) 6:00–9:00 p.m., (2) 9:00–midnight, (3) midnight–3:00 a.m. and (4) 3:00–6:00 a.m. (see note on Mk 13:35). The Jews had only three watches during the night: (1) sunset–10:00 p.m., (2) 10:00 p.m.–2:00 a.m. and (3) 2:00 a.m.–sunrise (see Jdg 7:19 and note; 1Sa 11:11).

*

Q: I always took it as a reference to a crowing rooster, so could you explain the interpretation according to which Roman watches are meant?

A: In our context it is an actual rooster crow – which Peter hears; this was also apparently a name sometimes given to the last night watch since roosters characteristically crow well before dawn.

Matthew 26:38 (NASB)

38 Then He *said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

*

A: In short, from what I can see, you are doing precisely the right thing. You are trusting the Lord to get you through. The fact that pain is painful, that suffering is unpleasant, that anticipation of terrible things that may come is a thorn in the mind which must be held off by continual application of the truth – these things are merely part and parcel of the test itself. Anyone who would suggest that to even be capable of being tested is in itself a failure of the test is merely falsely condemning fellow believers before the fact. Such logic would have condemned Job, Paul, Abraham . . . you name the great believer.

Then He said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."

Matthew 26:38

We do have to be careful about drawing the comparison with our Lord here. For one thing, He was in complete control and said these words for our benefit, not for His – in order that we might have some small idea of the tremendous pressure He was under in facing the cross and spiritual death for the sins of the entire world. Also, that ineffable sacrifice was so much more than all the suffering of the human race in all of history put together that it defies proper description. Nevertheless, using the MacArthur argument we would be hard pressed not to find fault – and I hope it is not necessary to add that there was no fault. In any trial, mental pressure is part of the test – probably the biggest part. And in a long test, there are going to be moments when we do flag in our spirits and have to make a concerted effort to regroup. This life is a spiritual war and these tests are its major battles. No war was ever won without loss and no battle ever fought without casualties and mistakes. The only really important question in the end is "who won?". You are winning. Please don't let someone who doesn't even understand what's going on cause you to think that you have lost just because you have to fight. We all have to fight, every day, every step of the way.

I will continue to keep you in prayer, my friend. Know that the Lord has already written your deliverance in His book.

We will sing for joy over your victory, And in the name of our God we will set up our banners. May the LORD fulfill all your petitions.

Psalm 20:5 NASB

In Jesus Christ our dear Lord and Savior,

Bob L.

Matthew 26:39 (NASB)

39 And He went a little beyond them, and fell on His face and prayed, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will."

NIV SB: 26:39 cup. A symbol of deep sorrow and suffering. Here it refers to his Father's face being turned away from him when he who had no sin was made sin (perhaps a sin offering) for us (see 27:46; 2Co 5:21 and note).

*

Q: Why does the note say "perhaps", as if something else could be meant here?

A: No doubt to avoid being censured for being on the wrong side of the "penal substitution" controversy (whichever side the Study Bible reader may be on), not wanting to adopt it nor fail to address it. Jesus died for our sins and the Father accepted that perfect sacrifice; getting overly and unnecessarily specific in regard to technical vocabulary of human legal systems can be misleading. We could never "pay off" our sins, no matter what terminology is used.

Matthew 26:50 (NIV)

50 Jesus replied, "Do what you came for, friend." [a] Then the men stepped forward, seized Jesus and arrested him.

Matthew 26:50 Or "Why have you come, friend?"

*

Q: What is the correct rendering?

A: It is not a question. The rendering in the main text is the best way to take this, literally "for which you came" (statement) = "[Get on with doing the thing] for which you came".

Matthew 26:54 (NASB)

54 How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?"

NIV SB: 26:54 Scriptures be fulfilled. In view of v. 56 probably a reference to Zec 13:7 (see notes on Mk 14:49; Lk 24:44).

*

Q: The NIV SB note suggests that Zechariah 13:7 is meant by our Lord, but could these words be taken as a more general reference to all of the crucifixion?

A: You are correct; it contemplates the entire set of prophecies about the Messiah's sacrifice.

Matthew 26:63 (NASB)

63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God."

*

Q1: Did the high priest say "whether You are the Christ, the son of God" because he knew that Christ was to be the son of God, or did he just use this title because Jesus used it to describe himself?

A1: I think his motive was to have Jesus incriminate Himself; in God's plan it provides the perfect unveiling of the truth – and demonstrates the total hardness of the Jewish rulers against the truth.

*

Q2: NIV SB: 26:63 I charge you under oath. Jesus refused to answer the question of v. 62 (see v. 63a). But when the high priest used this form, Jesus was legally obliged to reply.

Do you agree with the footnote?

A2: The former was a false accusation; the latter was a direct request for the truth of a statement. Our Lord had no interest as well as no obligation to reply to false charges; but His entire public ministry was dedicated to the truth. There is no longer any need for parables in imparting the truth, moreover, since the day of the great sacrifice by which we are saved is now at hand.

*

Q3: Some commentators propose that our Lord here was obliged to answer based on Leviticus 5:1 - what is your take?

A3: This is (clearly) not the same situation as envisioned in Leviticus 5:1 at all. However, our Lord was gracious in responding in any case.

Matthew 26:65-66 (NASB)

65 Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; 66 what do you think?" They answered, "He deserves death!"

NIV SB: 26:65 tore his clothes. Ordinarily the high priest was forbidden by law to do this (Lev 10:6; 21:10), but this was considered a highly unusual circumstance. The high priest interpreted Jesus' answer in v. 64 as blasphemy (see note on Mk 14:64).

*

Q1: I take it that breaking the Law by the high priest went unnoticed?

A1: More importantly, wrongly condemning an innocent man to death for political purposes is "breaking the Law" – even though it is never spelled out that way.

*

Q2: Why does the high priest ask "what do you think" having already torn his clothes?

A2: No doubt to compel everyone else to join in the false accusation and thus share the blame for the judicial murder.

Matthew 27:6 (NASB)

6 The chief priests took the pieces of silver and said, "It is not lawful to put them into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood."

*

Q: Was it a commandment of the Law not to put "the price of blood" into the treasury?

A: I'm not aware of this "treasury" per se being in the Law, but we do have this in Deuteronomy:

"You shall not bring the wages of a harlot or the price of a dog to the house of the LORD your God for any vowed offering, for both of these are an abomination to the LORD your God."

Deuteronomy 23:18 NKJV

Matthew 27:9-10 (NASB)

9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel; 10 and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me."

*

Q1: Which prophecy of Jeremiah does Matthew have in mind in Matt.27:9? None of the ones I've got listed in the footnotes says what he quotes in the gospel.

A1: This is a well-known crux. The quotation itself seems to be mainly taken from Zechariah 11:12-13. How then can it be attributed to Jeremiah? Two main solutions are usually proposed: a) this paraphrase contains information also from Jeremiah (i.e., Jer.19:1-13; and cf. Jer.18:2-12 and 32:6-9); Archer and Chricigno point out, for example, that no "field" is present in Zechariah and explain how they feel that may be an element Matthew is taking from Jeremiah; b) it is possible that the scroll Matthew was using combined Jeremiah with the minor prophets (or at least with Zechariah); there is some other evidence of this (e.g., Mk.1:2 citing Isaiah instead of Malachi). In antiquity, the entire Old Testament was most likely not on a single scroll, especially in the Greek version, and we are completely in the dark today about what books may have been contained with others in popular editions (the codex form dates to the ca. the 3rd century after which the larger scrolls begin to fall out of use). In either of the above two solutions, the idea is that the Major Prophet gets the top billing, even though the quote (or the bulk of it) comes from a Minor Prophet associated with him in the current edition or scroll.

*

Q2:

Zechariah 11:13 (NASB)

13 Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter, that magnificent price at which I was valued by them." So I took the thirty shekels of silver and threw them to the potter in the house of the Lord.

NIV SB:

11:13 handsome price. Irony and sarcasm. threw them to the potter at the house of the Lord. For the NT use of vv. 12-13, see Mt 26:14-15; 27:3-10 and note on 27:9.

Matthew 27:9 (NASB)

9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel;

It seems that Matthew is definitely quoting Zechariah and it's Zechariah's prophecy which seem to fit the context perfectly - why is it then attributed to Jeremiah? Many solutions are offered by different commentators. You wrote that the more recognized prophet got the billing, but I have to say it still bothers me. It's hard for me to accept in the case of an inspired writing that such an attribution is made when linking what happened to our Lord with various proposed passages from Jeremiah is really quite strained.

A2: Not really. It depends on the times and circumstances where things are said. Our Lord said this at a particular time and place where the way "books" were produced, organized and described, was quite different from today. If we found ourselves back in that day and age and proclaimed that thus and so was "in the Bible", or in "the Old Testament", no one would have a clue what we were talking about. If the practice at the time was to combine prophetic books in the manner indicated, then that was the practice; so for our Lord to use this terminology was merely what was expected. If I have a scroll which begins with Jeremiah and contains the "minor prophets", then it is just as appropriate to say "Jeremiah" as it is for us today to say "the gospels" – when really there is no such designation in the text of the Bible. It is also true that there does seem to be some conflation of prophecy which would then give Jeremiah "top billing" and with no need in the convention of the day to add a footnote to say something like "and of course this is really in Jeremiah later on in the scroll". See response #17 at link: <http://ichthys.com/mail-Lost-My-Salvation2.htm>.

One final thing on this, inasmuch as I am not really telling you here anything you haven't already heard. As a prospective Bible teacher who has the gift and is fast gaining the tools necessary to "feed yourself", one thing that has to be borne in mind whenever encountering a "problem" such as this is that there always IS a solution. It may not be what first comes to mind, nor just what "dear old Dr. So-and-So said", but there is a solution. What we as men who teach the Word can never fail to have is absolute faith that the solution is there to be found, if only we are patient, if only we continue to work the problem, if only we trust the Lord through the Spirit to illuminate it for us in

His good timing and right way. These are the sorts of things which test the faith of many, but which build up the faith of those who have the courage to persevere through the fog until the daylight melts it off into the glory of the rainbow of the truth and wisdom of God.

Matthew 27:16 (NIV)

16 At that time they had a well-known prisoner whose name was Jesus[a] Barabbas.

Matthew 27:16 Many manuscripts do not have Jesus; also in verse 17.

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Q: Could you relate to the point in the footnote?

A: It's not part of the true text.

Matthew 27:19 (NASB)

19 While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent him a message, saying, "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man; for last night I suffered greatly in a dream because of Him."

*

Q: Could we take this occurrence as an indication that God gives chances to repent and it is by our wilful choices that we condemn ourselves? I suppose the whole crucifixion can be interpreted in this way - there is no way to pierce through a hardened heart.

A: I would strongly agree.

Matthew 27:24 (NASB)

24 When Pilate saw that he was accomplishing nothing, but rather that a riot was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this Man's blood; see to that yourselves."

NIV SB: 27:24 washed his hands. See Dt 21:6; Ps 26:6 and notes; 73:13.

*

Q: NIV SB gives scriptural references for Pilate's gesture, but he wasn't a believer, so I don't know how they relate to the point. Was washing of hands a gesture known in cultures beyond Jewish?

A: Pilate was a shrewd and professional Roman official. As any good governor of a foreign province or occupied territory or any ambassador would do, Pilate took pains to learn something about the culture and practices of his charges. He went along with the demand for crucifixion to avoid being charged with indifference to defiance of Caesar, but with this coopted and adapted ritual, he makes it clear that he was well aware of Jesus' innocence.

Matthew 27:33-34 (NASB)

33 And when they came to a place called Golgotha, which means Place of a Skull, 34 they gave Him wine to drink mixed with gall; and after tasting it, He was unwilling to drink.

*

Matthew 26:29 (NASB)

29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

*

Q1: When Jesus was eating Passover with his disciples the night before He died, He said He would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the day when He would drink it new with them in the Kingdom of Heaven (The actual wording varies in the different gospels.). Some teachers claim that the Kingdom arrived when Jesus accepted the so-called sour wine while on the cross.

Is the Kingdom already here, in some spiritual, unseen way?

A1: It is true that *oxos*, the "vinegar" given to Christ on the cross, is wine vinegar (i.e., "red vinegar" as opposed to the apple vinegar very common in this country). And if one does come down on the side of assuming that Jesus' drinking of the vinegar the next day constituted the end of this self-imposed prohibition, then one would almost certainly have to conclude that, at least in some sense, the kingdom had already arrived (spiritually, as you say).

However, even on the face of it, it would seem a little odd if this pronouncement and the subsequent drinking of the vinegar were to be **the** proclamation of an event so important and dramatic as the arrival of the kingdom of God – even in some “spiritual” sense. For that reason alone, I would be skeptical about basing any teaching of an already arrived kingdom on this set of synoptic passages alone (i.e., Matt.26:29; Mk.14:25; Lk.22:18). After all, Jesus knew full well that He would be offered vinegar on the cross since this was part of the prophecy about His death on

behalf of the world (i.e., "they put gall in my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink": Psalm 69:21). And, for all the world, Jesus' declaration about not drinking wine until the arrival of the kingdom, naturally read, certainly **sounds** as if the length of time that our Lord would refrain from wine would be longer than the less than 24 hours until He drank the vinegar.

I believe that the true explanation is to be found, as is often the case, in a careful reading of the original Greek. Jesus does not actually say that He will refrain from all grape products. He says, "I will certainly not drink from **this** product of the vine until that day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of God" (Matt.26:29; and see the link: "On this Rock").

By His use of the critical and somewhat unusual phrase "this product", Jesus is deliberately distinguishing the present wine from the future vinegar. Only Matthew 26:29 has the word "this", but the parallel passages in both Mark and Luke do have the definite article (i.e., the word "the"), and in Greek the definite article has a more pronounced demonstrative flavor than our English article (i.e., it often means "THE" rather than "the"), allowing us to expand the translation in both of those passages as follows: "the product of the vine we have right here (as opposed to other products, like vinegar)". So Jesus' words are very carefully chosen here precisely for our benefit in understanding both of these events. Remember that when first He was nailed to the cross He refused the wine mixed with gall (Matt.27:34; Mk.15:23), but He later drank the vinegar (after the darkness of judgment had passed).

Whether we look at the issue from the mind-set of the ancient world or even in our own day, despite their common origin, wine and vinegar could hardly be any more different. The latter is sour and devoid of alcohol, the former is sweet and its alcoholic content is a critical part of what makes it "wine". And it is the alcohol which is the issue. The Son of Man came "eating and drinking" (Matt.11:19), because as the Bridegroom He was heralding the coming kingdom (cf. Lk.5:34-35), and wine is appropriate for gladdening the heart in celebration (Jn.2:1-11; cf. Eccl.9:7; 10:19). Hanging on the cross and about to breathe out His spirit was truly a victorious moment (for He had redeemed us all with His victory over sin and death; cf. Ps.110:7), but it was not the moment to celebrate. That moment, the coming victory banquet in the kingdom, is yet future (Is.25:6-8; Matt.8:11; 25:1-10; Lk.13:29; 14:15; 22:28-30; Rev.19:9). This explains the further qualification that Jesus adds here, often overlooked in discussions of this sort. Our Lord tells us that He will drink this celebratory wine **only** when He is able to drink it **with us**, the Bride for whom He gave His life.

The partaking of the vinegar on the cross thus lacks the appropriate element of celebration, the gladdening effect of the alcohol, and the fellowship of the Bride with her Bridegroom, all of which will indeed be present when the Church celebrates in resurrection our Lord's great victory on His return to earth at the Second Advent.

Through whatever sadness and sorrow we know now, in sober anticipation of that blessed day when we celebrate with our glorious Lord Jesus Christ!

Bob L.

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Q2: Do you agree that Luke 23:36 and John 19:28-30 refer to two different occurrences?

Luke 23:36 (NASB)

36 The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine,

NIV SB: Lk.23:36 wine vinegar. A sour wine, the drink of laborers and common soldiers. Jesus refused a sedative drink (see Mt 27:34; Mk 15:23 and notes) but later was given the vinegar drink when he cried out in thirst (see Jn 19:28-30 and notes). Luke shows that it was offered in mockery.

A2: Yes. Before darkness descended our Lord was offered a sedative by the soldiers which He refused. It is differently described in all three synoptics and not mentioned by John. This is discussed at the link: "The Crucifixion":

When they arrived at Golgotha, our Lord was offered wine mixed with some sort of additive to deaden the pain. Mark calls it "myrrh" and Matthew calls it "gall". Both terms are somewhat generic in Greek (i.e., admissive of a wide variety of bitter, aromatic substances). Matthew's choice of the word "gall" is clearly intended to emphasize the fulfillment of part of the prophecy from Psalm 69:21, "They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst" (where the Hebrew word ro'sh [translated here "gall"] actually refers to a specific bitter herb, "wormwood", but is often used metaphorically for things producing noxious effects). Mark's use of "myrrh" makes this event more understandable for his Roman

audience and also demonstrates for us the reason behind Jesus' refusal to drink it: certain types of myrrh were considered to have sedative properties, and our Lord, though without question by now terribly thirsty after this horrendous ordeal, was yet unwilling to drink anything that would in any way compromise His free will decision to take on the sins of the world – He had to be fully conscious when He bore our sins for the sacrifice to count. As in all the events of this gauntlet He ran for us even to get to the cross, everything He did, He did for us – that we might have eternal life.

The unadorned wine-vinegar is given to our Lord after He bore our sins, not by the soldiers but by one of the bystanders.

Matthew 27:45 (NASB)

45 Now from the sixth hour darkness fell upon all the land until the ninth hour.

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<http://ichthys.com/4A-Christo.htm#5>. **The Spiritual Death of Christ:**

The Spiritual Death of Jesus Christ

1) The Supernatural Darkness

Just as the Passover lamb, that poignant type of Jesus Christ sacrificed for us, was commanded to be slaughtered “between the evenings (pl.)”, (i.e., at a time neither clearly day nor night: Ex.12:6; 29:39-41), so our Lord's death on behalf of all mankind was destined to be accompanied by an analogous, yet supernatural, darkness. Scripture tells us that at “about the sixth hour” (i.e., around mid-day), darkness descended upon Golgotha, and that this darkness lasted “until about the ninth hour” (Matt.27:45-54; Mk.15:33-39; Lk.23:44-49), with Luke adding the important detail that “the sun gave out” (literally “eclipsed”). It was during this supernatural “blackout” that our Lord bore the sins of the world and stood judgment for them, being spiritually put to death in our place and for our sins (see section II.5 below, “Spiritual Death”). That the darkness was indeed supernatural (and that therefore no useful purpose is to be served by any attempt to correlate first century natural eclipses to this event) can be seen from the duration of the darkness: three full hours. In this we see a telling parallel between the judgment of the sins of the world in darkness and the other instances of supernatural darkness which attend significant divine judgments, (81) with the extremely important exception of course that Christ bore this judgment on our behalf, and

that it is through His being judged in our place that the gate of eternal life has been opened for all who believe in Him and accept His work in dying for our sins.

2) The Blood of Christ

While the subject of the “blood of Christ” and Jesus' spiritual death for us on the cross is covered respectively in sections II.4 and II.5 below, a few things need to be pointed out here. As is obvious from the fact that He breathed out His own spirit to end His physical life, our Lord Jesus Christ did not bleed to death (Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37; Lk.23:46; Jn.19:30; see below, section I.5.1.3). (82) Also apparent from His final statements on the cross after the darkness lifted (covered in detail in the next point below), is the truth that our Lord's death for sin was completed before He gave up His spirit. Taken together, this unquestionably means that the efficacious and atoning work of our Lord in dying for our sins consists in what He endured in the darkness for us while still physically alive. So while Jesus' physical sufferings on our account visible to all before the darkness descended on Golgotha were immense and beyond true appreciation, the intensity of the sufferings He endured under that darkness in paying the penalty for the sins of the world, dying spiritually in a way we cannot even adequately conjecture, must exceed those preliminary sufferings to an incalculable degree.

(18) For you know that it was not with perishable things [like] silver or gold that you were ransomed from the futile manner of life passed down to you by your ancestors, (19) but [you were redeemed] with precious blood, like that of a lamb without spot or blemish, [that is, by the blood] of Christ.

1st Peter 1:18-19

The “blood of Christ” is the coin with which we are redeemed, but this is a sanctified analogy. Jesus is not literally a lamb, and likewise we are not redeemed by His physical blood. Rather, Jesus is the Father's sacrifice, represented by the lamb, and the image of physical blood represents something even more precious than our Lord's physical death – it represents His spiritual death, the death He died in the darkness on the cross, paying the penalty for the sins of the entire world.

For what He died, He died to sin, once and for all, and what He lives, He lives to God.

Romans 6:10

He made Him who had no [personal] experience of sinning [to be] sin (i.e., a sin offering) for us, so that we might have (lit., “become”) God's righteousness in Him.

2nd Corinthians 5:21

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, in order that we might die to sins and live to righteousness. By His wound you are healed.

1st Peter 2:24

3) Our Lord's Final Statements of Completion

(28) After [all] this (i.e., His physical suffering and His spiritual death for the sins of the world), since Jesus knew that everything had now been accomplished in order for the [prophecy of salvation found in] scripture to be fulfilled, He said, “I am thirsty”. (29) Now a jar of wine-vinegar lay there, so they placed a sponge full of the wine-vinegar on a hyssop [stalk] and brought it to His mouth. (30) So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, “It (i.e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!”, and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:28-30

The Greek verb behind the second highlighted portion of text above, teleo (τετέλεσται in the perfect tense as conjugated in context), corresponds to the identical form in verse 28 (πάντα τετέλεσται) and along with it refers to the completion of the goal of Christ's first advent. This statement is in fact a paraphrase of the final stanza of the Messianic Psalm 22, verse 31: “He has done it!”. We have already seen how this Psalm prophetically foreshadows much of our Lord's suffering on the cross (e.g., the mocking of the crowds in vv.7-8, His “pierced hands and feet” in v.16, the “casting of lots” for His clothes in v.18, and the vivid poetic description of His suffering throughout). But not only does our Lord paraphrase the end of this psalm; He also directly quotes its beginning, so that this emphatic proclamation, “It has now been accomplished!”, is the direct answer to the question posed by the previous quote: “My God, my God, why did You forsake Me?” (Ps.22:1; cf. Matt.27:46; Mk.15:34; see below). For the latter actually explains the former: the Father had to forsake the Son, give Him over to judgment for the sins of the world, in order for salvation to be “accomplished”. The fact that Jesus Himself while still physically alive declares

salvation accomplished (and His suffering and forsaking a necessary precondition for it), demonstrates ipso facto that this accomplishment of our redemption had already taken place before our Lord exhaled His spirit to give up His physical life. Thus, Jesus' victory on the cross consists in the spiritual death He died for our sins in the darkness (for He was still physically alive so as to be able to make this proclamation: “it has now been accomplished”), and not in His subsequent physical death. Far from being some sort of desperate plea of doubt from the cross (as it is sometimes blasphemously portrayed), the words “Why did You forsake Me?” are meant to show precisely the opposite. For the “forsaking” is now in the past (“why did You forsake Me?”), while Jesus' successful completion of the Father's mission and victory over sin is now an accomplished reality (τετέλεσται: “It has now been accomplished!”).

He was handed over (i.e., forsaken) on account of our transgressions (i.e., to redeem us from sin), and was raised up on account of our justification (i.e., so that we too could be raised, having been justified by His death).

Romans 4:25

Jesus' drinking of the wine-vinegar is also a fulfillment of prophecy which likewise signals the accomplishment of the Messiah's mission:

For they mixed gall with what they gave Me to eat, and for My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink.

Psalm 69:21 (Matt.27:34; 27:48; Mk.15:23; 15:36; Lk.23:36; Jn.19:29)

He will drink from a brook beside the way; therefore he will lift up his head.

Psalm 110:7 NIV

The first quotation, covered above, relates two events; one at the beginning of the ordeal when Jesus refused the gall, and the other at its successful completion where our Lord's request for and

acceptance of the wine-vinegar bespeaks victory, a short refreshment after the accomplishment of the salvation of the world. The second passage likewise comes from a very well-known Messianic Psalm, one which (as is often the case in Old Testament prophecy as we have seen many times in the past) conflates the two advents. Psalm 110 is primarily a victory Psalm, celebrating the Messiah's accomplishment of salvation in His first advent and anticipating His return as Ruler of the world in the second. This final verse can be read to refer to the refreshment of Messiah's troops after the battle of Armageddon, but in our present context applies to Jesus Himself at the completion of His own mission during the first advent. (83) Therefore this act of drinking on our Lord's part has as its primary goal to call attention through the fulfillment of the prophecy to the fact that the true "battle" was now over, and that He had been victorious in the accomplishment of salvation through His death for sins on our behalf. This is also the significance of our Lord "lifting up His head" preparatory to exhaling His spirit as recorded in John 19:30, that is, here we have the fulfillment of the other prophecy in Psalm 110:7 in the raising up of His head after drinking. (84) Both fulfillments underscore the fact that salvation has already been accomplished at this point.

Lastly, our Lord's final statement from the cross, His quotation of Psalm 31:5, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit" (Lk.23:46), also demonstrates the successful completion of His mission. For it is the Father who commissioned Him (see section I.3.c above), and here we see our Lord voluntarily returning to Him as these words portend – something He would never had done had that mission not been perfectly and completely fulfilled. Jesus had the power to lay down His life and to take it up again (Jn.10:18), not arbitrarily, but after accomplishing the monumental task He had been given to do in dying for the sins of the world. That this quotation likewise speaks to salvation as an already accomplished fact at this point is made clear by the second stanza of this verse, not spoken by our Lord but well-known to all readers of the Psalms: "You have redeemed Me, O Lord, God of truth". Jesus' death to redeem us from sin was now an accomplished fact, and our redemption vouchsafed before He gave up His spirit.

Matthew 27:46 (NIV)

46 About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli,[a] lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?").

Matthew 27:46 Some manuscripts Eloi, Eloi

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Q: Could you relate to the footnote?

A: They mean the same thing but the version in the note is the more normal Aramaic rendering of "my God", and that is what Jesus actually said.

Matthew 27:50-51 (NASB)

50 And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. 51 And behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split.

*

Q1: Why was the veil of the temple torn after Jesus' physical death rather than right after His payment for sins?

A1: A good question. The actual way into heaven was cleared by His spiritual death; this splitting of the veil, however, was to symbolize that victory, and those watching – even the believers – could scarcely have been expected to understand yet the difference between His spiritual death and the physical death that now occurred as our Lord lay down His life by giving up His spirit.

*

Luke 23:44-45 (NASB)

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. 46 And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." Having said this, He breathed His last.

*

Q2: In Matthew 27:50-51 it seems that the veil is torn after our Lord's physical death and I asked why the veil was not torn after the redemption has been completed. Here, however, Luke presents an account which could mean that the veil was torn after our Lord's payment for the sin, when the way to heaven has been perhaps opened.

A2: Matthew and Luke's accounts are identical except for the fact that Matthew mentions the splitting of the veil directly after our Lord's final words while Luke puts it directly before. Inasmuch as the two things happened simultaneously, these are the only two ways a writer could

report them in relation to a simultaneous event; the combination of before and after shows that it did happen just as our Lord exhaled His spirit.

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The Physical Death and Burial of Jesus Christ

Then Jesus shouted out again in a loud voice and sent forth His spirit.

Matthew 27:50

Then Jesus gave forth a great shout and exhaled.

Mark 15:37

And having shouted loudly, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit". And having said this, He exhaled.

Luke 23:46

So when He had taken the wine-vinegar, Jesus said, "It (i.e., salvation) has [now] been accomplished!", and having thrown back His head, He gave up His spirit.

John 19:28-30

Our Lord was here on earth to fulfill a particular mission: after teaching us the truth, to die for our sins in our place on the cross. Once that mission had been fulfilled, Jesus deliberately left this life of His own volition. With salvation now an accomplished fact, staying on the cross any longer served no useful purpose. For the rest of us, taking into our own hands the decision to leave this world is a horrendous act of rebellion against the will of God. Human life begins when at birth God imparts the human spirit, and it ends when the spirit returns to the One who gave it (no matter what secular science may believe),(85) and no one has the right to infringe on God's prerogative in this respect. But our Lord, uniquely in all of human history, had been given the right and the ability to lay down His life once His work was accomplished (Jn.10:18). Just as the darkness which had covered Golgotha for three long hours while Jesus bore the sins of the world was an exceptional and incontrovertible miracle, so also the very manner in which our Lord died was in itself a miraculous sign which demonstrated that He was indeed who He claimed to be, the

very Son of God. This fact is testified to by the Roman centurion, a combat veteran who had seen many men die before (for this rank was only achieved through meritorious service over many years):

And when the centurion who was standing opposite Him (i.e., being in charge of the detail) saw the manner in which [Jesus] exhaled [His spirit and so expired], he said, “Truly, this man was God's son!”

Mark 15:39 (cf. Matt.27:54; Lk.23:47)

So remarkable was the way in which our Lord left this life, that even this hardened veteran soldier was so impressed that he came to believe the reports about Jesus at which he had no doubt hitherto scoffed. Other miracles accompanied Jesus' departure from life as well, all of which were meant to demonstrate His divinity and the fundamental change in all things which our Lord's victory on the cross entailed (e.g., Ps.110:1; Eph.1:10; 4:7-10; Col.1:13; 1:20; 2:13-15; Heb.2:14-15; 1Pet.3:22; 1Jn.3:8; and see section I.5.0 below, “The Session of Christ”).

(8) He humbled Himself, becoming obedient to the point of death, even [His] death on [the] cross [for us all]. (9) Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name (10) that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth (11) and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:9-11

1) The Earthquake

Earthquakes are the essential divine exclamation point (cf. 1Ki.19:11-12; Acts 4:31), and very frequently employed by God to demonstrate the beginning of a new period in history (e.g., Is.29:6; Matt.28:2; Heb.12:26-29; Rev.8:5; 11:13; 11:19).(86) An earthquake occurred after Christ released His spirit which “split the rocks asunder” as Matthew tells us (Matt.27:51), thus dramatically setting the Father's seal of approval on the work of His Son who is the Word of God.

“Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord, “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”

2) The Splitting of the Veil of the Temple

As with the earthquake (or perhaps even more so since the divine source is even harder to deny in this case), the supernatural splitting of the veil in the temple which separated the holy place from the inner sanctum of the holy of holies was a sign from God Himself (Matt.27:51; Mk.15:38; Lk.23:45). This sign, moreover, demonstrated the fundamental change of universal realities in a very graphic way. For the holy of holies represents symbolically the third heaven and the presence of God Himself, so that the splitting of the veil symbolizes the end of the unavoidable enmity between man and God because of sin, and the access mankind now has to God through the blood of Jesus Christ and by body of Jesus Christ (see below, section II.9, “Reconciliation”).

But only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy Place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing. This is an illustration for the present time, indicating that the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper. They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings – external regulations applying until the time of the new order. When Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption.

Hebrews 9:7-12 NIV

(19) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, (20) an entryway through the [heavenly] veil [of separation] which is new (lit., “newly slain”) and alive and which He has consecrated for us, that is, [through the sacrifice] of His flesh (cf. Heb.10:10; 10:18) . . .

Hebrews 10:19-20

3) The Resuscitation of the Dead

The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

Matthew 27:52-53

In the manner of Lazarus, these individuals were restored to life, but to the life we all now lead. That is to say, they were temporarily resuscitated rather than being eternally resurrected, and Matthew is careful to distinguish in the passage above their status from that of our truly resurrected Lord. Nonetheless, this is an astounding miracle, and one clearly meant to call attention to the life-giving properties of the victory our Lord had just won. For through His death for our sins, we have been given eternal life through faith in Him (Jn.3:16; 1Jn.5:11).

The treatment of our Lord's body after death also fulfilled several Old Testament prophecies demonstrating beyond question His true status as the Messiah. It was pierced by the soldier's lance with the result that "blood and water" came out (Jn.19:34; see section II.4 below, "The Blood of Christ"), a sign according to most medical authorities that He had been physically dead for some time when this action occurred. Indeed, it was because He was clearly and demonstrably physically dead that the Roman soldiers did not break His legs to hasten His death (as they did in the case of the two crucified with Him: Jn.19:31-37).

(36) These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken" (Ps.34:20; cf. Ex.12:46; Num.9:12), (37) and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10; cf. Rev.1:7).

John 19:36-37 NIV

Joseph of Arimathea (a rich man: Matt.27:57) and Nicodemus requested and were granted leave of Pilate to take down Jesus' body and bury it. This they did, binding it in linen wrappings with approximately sixty pounds of myrrh and aloes (which would have cost an enormous sum), and placing it in the garden near Golgotha in an impressive "new tomb in which no one had ever [previously] been placed" (Jn.19:38-41; Matt.27:57-60; Mk.15:43-46; Lk.23:50-53), thus fulfilling Isaiah's prophecies about the burial of the Suffering Servant, a clear indication of divine approval following the horrendous abuse and judicial murder prophesied to precede Messiah's death.

(7) Though He was oppressed and afflicted, like a lamb led to slaughter He did not open His mouth, and like a ewe before her shearers He did not open His mouth. (8) By repressive

judgment He was taken away, and who gave any thought to His posterity? For He was cut off from the land of the living. He was punished for the transgression of my people. (9) And they assigned Him a grave with the wicked (pl.) and with a rich [man] in His deaths (sic).

Isaiah 53:7-9

He lay bare His life unto death, and was dealt with as transgressors [are], so that He bore the sin of the many, and substituted [Himself] for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12b

The rejection of the Messiah was now complete. He had come to His own, but His own refused to accept Him (Jn.1:11). And yet as the Messiah He was precisely who and what the Law and the Prophets had prophesied (Lk.22:37; 24:44; Jn.5:39; 5:46), and He was precisely who and what Israel had asked the Lord for: an intermediary between themselves and the burning holiness of God Almighty:

(15) The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him. (16) For this is what you asked of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said, "Let us not hear the voice of the Lord our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we will die." (17) The Lord said to me: "What they say is good. (18) I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. (19) If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

Deuteronomy 18:15-19 NIV

Matthew 27:52-53 (NASB)

52 The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.

*

Q: What was the reason the bodies of saints being raised?

A: This temporary resuscitation was a vivid demonstration of the life-giving power of our Lord's sacrifice (cf. 2Ki.13:21).

Matthew 27:54 (NASB)

54 Now the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard over Jesus, when they saw the earthquake and the things that were happening, became very frightened and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

*

Q: Is there any chance this was the centurion mentioned in chapter 8?

A: Possible, but there were a good number of centurions in Judea at the time, and the duties undertaken by the one on Good Friday seem to be those of a lower order of rank than the man who had resources to bless the local Jewish community (roughly speaking, centurions were both the "senior NCO" and the "officer class", though not generals, of the Roman army, so that the difference between a relatively junior one versus a relatively senior one could be as great as that of an SFC and a full Colonel today).

Matthew 27:55-56 (NASB)

55 Many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee while ministering to Him. 56 Among them was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

*

A: The importance of the women who accompanied Jesus throughout His earthly ministry and who supported Him and His disciples logistically (i.e., through monetary and domestic means, not to mention the encouragement and moral support of their presence) should not be underestimated even if it is not generally appreciated (cf. Lk.8:2-3). We can see something of the key role these women played from their appearance at the empty tomb early that first Easter Sunday. The list of women mentioned as going to the tomb in order to care for Jesus' body includes Mary Magdalene (Matt.28:1; Mk.16:1; Lk.24:10), "the other Mary" (Matt.28:1; cf. Matt.27:61), who is probably Mary the mother of James (Mk.16:1; Lk.24:20; and apparently also "of Joses", cf. Mk.15:40; 15:47),

Salome (Mk.16:1), Joanna (Lk.24:10), and “the other women” (Lk.24:10). These last may have included the women mentioned by Luke at 23:55 “who had come with Jesus from Galilee” (cf. Lk.23:41), a group which no doubt included the women who had actively supported the ministry (Lk.8:2-3), and who stood by Him at the cross (Matt.27:55-56; Mk.15:40-41; Lk.23:49; Jn.19:25).

Preeminent within this group, even in respect to those mentioned by name as watching and waiting at the crucifixion, namely, Mary, Jesus' mother (Jn.19:25), her sister (Jn.19:25), Mary the wife of Clopas (who may have been Mary's sister: Jn.19:25)(94), Mary the mother of James the lesser and Joseph (Matt.27:56; or Joses: Mk15:40), Salome, the mother of the disciples James and John (Matt.27:56; Mk.15:40; cf. Lk.24:10), is Mary Magdalene.(95) That is so for several important reasons. For Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom our Lord appeared after resurrection, and that is no small honor.

Matthew 28:8-10 (NASB)

8 And they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to report it to His disciples. 9 And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they came up and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him. 10 Then Jesus *said to them, “ Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren to leave for Galilee, and there they will see Me.”

*

Excerpt from BB 4a Christology - The Chronology of the Resurrection

(39) “We are witnesses of everything [Jesus] did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, (40) but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. (41) He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. (42) He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. (43) All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

Acts 10:39-43 NIV

Having exhaled His spirit on the cross on the Friday before the Passover, Jesus rose from the dead on the following Sunday, and proceeded to appear over the next forty days – not to everyone – but to worthy witnesses among those who had previously believed.

(1) In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach (2) until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. (3) After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:1-3 NIV

(30) “But God raised him from the dead, (31) and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.”

Acts 13:30-31 NIV

(3) For I entrusted to you as of primary importance what I had also received, [namely] that Christ died on behalf of our sins according to (i.e., in fulfillment of) the scriptures, (4) and that He was buried and that rose on the third day according to the scriptures, (5) and that He appeared to Cephas (i.e., Peter), then to the twelve, (6) then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, of whom the majority abide [in life] until now, though some have fallen asleep (i.e., have died). (7) Next He appeared to James (i.e., His earthly half-brother), then to all the apostles, (8) and last of all, as if to the [one left out due to having been a] miscarriage (i.e., at the time of Christ's earthly ministry), He appeared also to me.

1st Corinthians 15:3-8

When that first Easter Sunday dawned, our Lord was resurrected from the dead by the power of God (Rom.1:4; 1Cor.6:14; 2Cor.13:4; Eph.1:18-23; Phil.3:10; Col.2:12; Heb.7:16; cf. Rev.20:6). That is to say, His human body now dead since Friday afternoon was transformed into in a new, eternal body incapable of decay, and His human spirit was placed back within it in a fashion comparable to God's in-breathing of the spirit into every human body at the point of birth. From this point forward, Christ in His humanity became alive forevermore, so that the Messiah in accordance with the prophecy recorded in Psalm 16 “never saw decay” (Ps.16:10; cf. Acts 2:27; 2:31; 13:35). After neatly folding up His grave clothes (Jn.20:5-6; an indication not only of the resurrection,(92) but also of our Lord's pattern of careful diligence in all things and proof of the wonderful fact that He is and we will be “the same person” after resurrection), our Lord simply

walked out the carefully sealed and guarded tomb (Matt.27:62-66), apparently without even being visible to the sentries.

Jesus' rising and departure from the tomb were divinely punctuated, as was His death, by a mighty earthquake, as an angel refulgent in appearance rolled away the stone to reveal the place where Jesus' body had lain (Matt.28:2). The angel's appearance terrified the guards (Matt.28:3-4), and understandably so, to the point where they play no further role in the story (other than reporting these miraculous events later to the Sanhedrin: Matt.28:11-15). When the women who had attended Jesus during His earthly ministry came to the tomb to anoint His body, though they had been concerned about how to roll back the entry-stone, they found the tomb already opened up and entered. It was then this angel explained to the women who had come that our Lord was not there because He had "risen from the dead" (Matt.28:6-7; cf. Mk.16:6; Lk.24:5-7).(93)

1) To Mary Magdalene (Jn.20:11-18)

The importance of the women who accompanied Jesus throughout His earthly ministry and who supported Him and His disciples logistically (i.e., through monetary and domestic means, not to mention the encouragement and moral support of their presence) should not be underestimated even if it is not generally appreciated (cf. Lk.8:2-3). We can see something of the key role these women played from their appearance at the empty tomb early that first Easter Sunday. The list of women mentioned as going to the tomb in order to care for Jesus' body includes Mary Magdalene (Matt.28:1; Mk.16:1; Lk.24:10), "the other Mary" (Matt.28:1; cf. Matt.27:61), who is probably Mary the mother of James (Mk.16:1; Lk.24:20; and apparently also "of Joses", cf. Mk.15:40; 15:47), Salome (Mk.16:1), Joanna (Lk.24:10), and "the other women" (Lk.24:10). These last may have included the women mentioned by Luke at 23:55 "who had come with Jesus from Galilee" (cf. Lk.23:41), a group which no doubt included the women who had actively supported the ministry (Lk.8:2-3), and who stood by Him at the cross (Matt.27:55-56; Mk.15:40-41; Lk.23:49; Jn.19:25).

Preeminent within this group, even in respect to those mentioned by name as watching and waiting at the crucifixion, namely, Mary, Jesus' mother (Jn.19:25), her sister (Jn.19:25), Mary the wife of Clopas (who may have been Mary's sister: Jn.19:25)(94), Mary the mother of James the lesser and Joseph (Matt.27:56; or Joses: Mk15:40), Salome, the mother of the disciples James and John (Matt.27:56; Mk.15:40; cf. Lk.24:10), is Mary Magdalene.(95) That is so for several important reasons. For Mary Magdalene was the first person to whom our Lord appeared after resurrection, and that is no small honor.

Contemporary scholarly opinion discounts the view of earlier times that saw Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany (sister of Martha and Lazarus) as the same person, but there in fact good reasons

for equating the two. We should begin by reiterating a point made above about Mary of Bethany, namely that she is more than likely also the woman described in Luke chapter seven who poured myrrh on Jesus' feet after first washing them with her tears (Lk.7:36-50). For Mary is definitely identified as the woman who performs a similar action six days before the crucifixion (and distinguished from the early anointing both by the lack of tears and the anointing of Jesus' head as well in anticipation of burial), demonstrating in the second instance that there was at least one person who had listened to Jesus' words to the effect that He was about to be put to death (Matt.26:6-13; Mk.14:3-9; Jn.12:1-8). As was said earlier, the uniqueness of these acts, the considerable expense they involved (which of necessity would preclude the vast majority of Jewish women from consideration), and the fact that both take place in the house of Simon (Lk.7:40 compared with Matt.26:6; Mk.14:3), are good evidence that we are dealing with the same person. Further, the fact that Mary had access to Simon's house (Jn.12:2-3) explains how this "sinful woman" could enter freely and wash Jesus' feet without so much as a reproach in Luke's description.(96)

Immediately after reporting this story in chapter seven, Luke in chapter eight gives us an account of the women who followed Jesus and the disciples during their ministry, supporting it through their personal efforts and finances.

(1) After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, (2) and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; (3) Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Luke 8:1-3 NIV

The Greek phraseology which introduces this paragraph (Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ καθεξῆς) deliberately links the anointing with this description of Jesus' travels and the women who attended Him, and Luke seems to be signaling thereby that the woman in chapter seven is included in the list in chapter eight (only without being named out of deference to her identification as a "sinful woman"). In this list, Mary Magdalene is the first named, and also the one delivered from the greatest demonic attack. The demon possession described above is only possible in the case of unbelievers, and generally follows a rejection of God and His will (often as a result of extreme sinfulness).(97) As in the case of the Gadarene demoniac, however, Mary turned to God and

embraced the offer of salvation wholeheartedly, being appropriately more grateful than most others precisely because she had been forgiven so much (Lk.7:40-49). The anointing of Luke chapter seven was Mary's first public expression of her gratitude following the deliverance from demon control which must have taken place earlier, and as with the Samaritan leper, she returned to give glory to God in this most dramatic and memorable way, indicating the depth of her gratitude and completeness of her conversion. Henceforth she would devote her life and her resources to Jesus' ministry (compare the support given by the sisters from Bethany and their similarly greater than average resources: Lk.10:38-42; Jn.11:9; 12:2; 12:3-6, Mary's delight in the Lord and His Word: Lk.10:39-42, and our Lord's love for the three siblings: Jn.11:5; 11:35). The picture we are given of Mary Magdalene's faith and faithfulness at the crucifixion (standing by the cross), burial (watching to see where He was buried), and resurrection of our Lord (buying spices – resources again – and going first, leaving last), is in complete accord with that of Mary of Bethany. In each case we have to do with a woman who had made serious mistakes in her youth, had eagerly embraced the offer of eternal life Jesus preached, and had become an exceptional believer as a result, demonstrating by deeds of faith and selflessness her love for our Lord and for His mission in dying for us on the cross.

I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.

Matthew 26:13 NIV (cf. Mk.16:9; Jn.12:7)

Mary's willingness to believe and so to understand both the necessity of our Lord's death and the reality of His resurrection (as evidenced by her behavior below) results not only in the kudos above, but the honor of being the first to see Jesus in resurrection, no small distinction as she is in this unique in the entire Church. It is for this reason that we have the name which has in truth been at the root of the reluctance of so many commentators to see this Mary as Martha's and Lazarus' sister, for most take it for granted that the name “Magdalene” is a gentile adjective, referring to a town in Galilee. However, as may be seen from other Greek adjectives, it is certainly possible that the entire ending -ene is a suffix. This would make the Aramaic word magdal (Hebrew migdol), meaning “tower”, the root of this adjective (rather than the hypothetical town names usually proposed). As such, this title for Mary is **not** a gentile describing her place of birth or city (she was in fact from Bethany), but rather an **honorific** (explaining why she was “called” Magdalene: Lk.8:2), (98) bestowed upon her for the stalwartness of her faith displayed before, during, and after the crucifixion when she stood firm “like a tower” when many others gave in to despair. Mary's conduct and this resulting honor should be both an example and an

encouragement to us all, as we remember that the Lord will bestow names upon us all in eternity, based upon our response to Him here in this life (Rev.2:17; Is.65:15; cf. Is.62:2b; Rev.3:12). This resilience of faith was the result of her actually listening to what the Lord had to say and believing it, then as now the “best part” of our life on this earth (Lk.10:42), and the only formula for spiritual growth and success.

Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands ***will be called great*** in the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:19 NIV

We may now consider the circumstances of precisely how it was that Mary came to see Jesus risen from the dead. The three synoptic gospels report that the inner circle of faithful women had made a point of observing where Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus put the body of our Lord after taking it down from the cross (Matt.27:61; Mk.15:47; Lk.23:55-56), with Matthew and Mark specifically identifying and giving first mention to Mary Magdalene (along with “the other Mary”, Mary the mother of Joses) in so doing. All four gospels record the coming of the women to the tomb on the Sabbath with the intention of anointing Jesus' body according to Jewish practice (Matt.28:1; Mk.16:1-2; Lk.24:1; Jn.20:1), with Mary again receiving first mention not only in Matthew and Mark, but also in John. John's description is particularly important in reconstructing the events of that first Easter morning as he gives us details that are only summarized by the other accounts:

(1) Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. (2) So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!”

John 20:1-2 NIV

While the other women also come to the tomb, Mary was unwilling to wait for daybreak. Scripture does not say for certain, but we may infer from her being the first to arrive not only her great love but also some hope that she would find Jesus alive based on a small amount of faith in His words about rising from the dead – small only in relative terms (cf. Jn.20:9 NASB of the eleven: “For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that He must rise again from the dead”), for she was apparently the only one who clung to the possibility, a mustard-seed modicum of faith even so capable of moving mountains. It is no doubt just for this reason that our Lord honored her with

the first resurrection appearance, just as she was honored with the assurance of her act of anointing Him ever being part of the gospel story. For the gospel is only beneficial to those who believe as Mary did.

As verse two of John twenty quoted above shows, the specific events of that morning need to be disaggregated to get a clear picture of what took place next. Mary was first to the tomb, leaving for it before day broke, but arriving just after dawn shortly after our Lord had risen when she saw that the stone had been rolled away. The other Mary and then the other women arrived shortly thereafter and entered the tomb (where the angels informed them of Jesus resurrection and instructed them to carry the news to the apostles). But Mary had already gone, having discerned from outside of the opened tomb without entering (cf. Jn.20:11, where she is still reluctant to enter) that Jesus' body was no longer there. Just as she was unwilling to await the other women in going to the tomb, she must have departed before their entry and the subsequent appearance of the angels. This explains her report to the apostles “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!” (whereas the other women, arriving later, gave the apostles the angels' report). As Peter and John raced to the tomb in response to Mary's words, the other women already at the site ventured to enter the tomb, received the good news of the resurrection from the angels, and immediately sought out the apostles to convey the message as instructed. At some point on their way, they were met by our risen Lord (see the section immediately below) – but not before Jesus appeared to Mary. For she must have returned to the tomb again, arriving after John and Peter had already come and gone, and not encountering them or the other women on the way. When she arrived, through her tears she too saw the angels, sitting at the place where Jesus' head and feet had been.

(13) And they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?” She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.” (14) When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. (15) Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?” Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said to Him, “Sir, if you have carried Him away, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away.” (16) Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to Him in Hebrew, “Rabboni!” (which means, Teacher). (17) Jesus said to her, “Stop clinging to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God.'”

John 20:13-17

While the other women receive directly and are told to give to the apostles indirectly a lesson reminding them of Jesus' teaching on the resurrection (Matt.28:6-7; Mk.16:6-7; Lk.24:5-8; because they still as yet failed to understand what our Lord had repeatedly told them: Jn.20:9), Mary alone does not receive any such reminder, for she had been hoping for this blessed event all along. What she does receive is an explanation of what is about to happen: the joy she feels must be restrained, because our Lord was only going to be with her and His other disciples for a short time before ascending to the Father to await the day of His victorious Second Advent return. But these words of truth are given to her by our Lord Himself to the one person whose faith had put her in the right place and the right frame of mind to receive them.

2) To the Other Women (Matt.28:9-10):

Following His appearance to Mary, our Lord appeared to the other women who had already been instructed by the angels to return and report to the apostles (Matt.28:9-10; and this appearance seems to have followed their doing so: cf. Lk.24:11 with Matt.28:8). It is significant that our Lord's second resurrection appearance is also made exclusively to these women who had also come to the tomb even though Jesus was dead, an indication of their love, hope, and faith. The disciples to whom they report, on the other hand, considered their words "nonsense" (Lk.24:11; with the exception of Peter and John who had already raced to the tomb), even though in this second appearance our Lord had Himself commanded the woman to report to the disciples and to reinforce the instruction to them from the angels to meet Him at the prearranged location in Galilee (Matt.28:10; cf. Matt.28:7; Mk.16:7).

3) To Peter (Lk.24:34; 1Cor.15:5)

After receiving from the women the angels' report about Jesus' resurrection, these things "seemed like madness" to the rest of the disciples, but Peter and John had raced to the empty tomb as soon as they had heard Mary declare that it was empty (Jn.20:3-10).(99) John outran Peter, but Peter in his boldness to know the truth entered the tomb and saw the Lord's grave clothes, after which John also entered, and the two of them "went to their own homes" (Jn.20:10). It was probably at this time or after arriving home that our Lord appeared to Peter (compare 1Cor.15:5 with Luke 24:34). It is significant that Peter, who had most visibly denied the Lord, was the first of the remaining eleven disciples to recover his faith and his hope (seconded by John), and no doubt for this reason rated the first appearance of our Lord to any man (cf. 1Cor.15:4-5).

4) To the Two on the Road to Emmaus (Lk.24:13-32)

Cleopas, possibly Clopas, about whom we know little in either case (see above), and one other man (probably not one of the eleven: cf. Lk.24:36ff.) were met by our risen Lord while journeying that same day to the village of Emmaus. However, our Lord deliberately concealed His identity from them, and the point of our being given this information seems in large part to demonstrate the as yet skeptical state of all the male believers in spite of the detailed and emphatic testimony of many of the women who had been part of the ministry for years (cf. Lk.24:22-24) – without first hand experience of the resurrection, they remained reluctant to believe. Our Lord's response to their continued doubt is to pronounce it foolishness and slowness of heart (Lk.24:25), and to instruct them from the scriptures – something He had done repeatedly before His crucifixion – about the necessity for the suffering and the resurrection of the Christ (Lk.24:26-27). Later, He does reveal Himself to be Jesus as He breaks bread, then disappears (Lk.24:30-32), and finally they believe once they have seen with their own eyes.

5) To the Ten and Others (Lk.24:36-43; Jn.20:19-25; 1Cor.15:5b)

Cleopas and his companion immediately returned to the disciples in Jerusalem and found all ten with the exception of Thomas assembled there with certain unnamed others (Lk.24:33), now being ready to accept their testimony because they had by this point already heard and believed Peter report of the Lord's appearance to him (Lk.24:33-35; cf. Jn.20:24-26), in addition to Mary Magdalene's testimony (Jn.20:18), as well as that of the other women (implied by Matt.28:10). While the two were in the process of giving the details, Jesus appeared, entering directly into their company even though “the doors had been secured” (Jn.20:19). While this miraculous appearance demonstrated the power of His newly resurrected body, His eating of the fish (Lk.24:41-43) and the other proofs He gave them that this body was “tangible” (Lk.24:39-40; Jn.20:20) demonstrated beyond any question or doubt that it was really He Himself, that He was really alive – resurrected from the dead with a body that was now capable of so much more than the first one, and incapable of ever experiencing death again.

It was at this time that our Lord, in order to facilitate the important teaching ministry to the eleven (Matt.28:16-19; Lk.24:44-49; Jn.20:21-23; 20:30; 21:15-23; 21:25; Acts 1:2-8), which He would fulfill during these forty some days before His ascension (Acts 1:3), bestowed upon them a special unction of the Holy Spirit (Jn.20:22; cf. Ex.31:3; 31:35; Num.11:17; 11:25-26; 27:18; Deut.34:9; 1Sam.10:6; etc.). This was a temporary unction which would soon be replaced by the even better indwelling of the Spirit (Lk.24:49; Acts 1:4-8; i.e., the “baptism” of the Spirit given to all the

assembled believers at Pentecost, and since the early days of the apostolic age to all believers at the point of faith in Christ: Rom.8:9; cf. Eph.4:5; 2Tim.2:1). It is for this very reason that our Lord gave very specific instructions on this occasion (Lk.24:49) to the effect that the evangelizing of the nations was not to begin until the giving of the Holy Spirit. This is the thrust of the command to “remain” in the city in Luke 24:49, and should not be taken to apply to their upcoming trip to Galilee in the meantime. Compare Luke 24:52 where we are told that “they stayed continually at the temple, praising God”; coupled with Acts 1:1-9, one might get the impression that there was no trip to Galilee at all (but the other gospels show clearly that there was). Although in his summary of events Luke has passed over that part of the post-resurrection appearances, he has included the essential teaching our Lord left to the apostles, focusing on the commission to evangelize in Luke 24:45-49, and on Jesus' final message about the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:1-9. In this respect Luke's testimony is identical to that of Matthew's “Great Commission”, when rightly understood (i.e., the command/commission is to evangelize the world, a process which leads through salvation to the baptism *of the Spirit*; and to teach the truth of the Word, whereby disciples, faithful followers of Christ, are “made”; see point 8 immediately below).

6) To the Eleven in Jerusalem (Jn.20:26-31)

This appearance, similar to the previous one, is “the second time” that Jesus comes to His disciples (as implied by Jn.21:14). Thomas, who famously would not believe unless he too received the same tangible proof of our Lord's resurrection, is given just that by our Lord. When Thomas finally does express his belief, our Lord pronounces as blessed “those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn.20:29). John tells us that this appearance took place “eight days later” (Jn.20:26), so that we may safely assume that the disciples as yet had still not obeyed our Lord's command to meet Him in Galilee.

7) To the Seven at the Sea of Galilee (Jn.21:1-23)

For the eleven to depart Jerusalem for Galilee directly after the crucifixion seems to have been what our Lord had planned all along, with even the specific place of rendezvous having been previously designated:

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

Matthew 26:32 NIV

But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.

Mark 14:28 NIV

But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'

Mark 16:7 (cf. Matt.28:7) NIV

Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:10 NIV

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

Matthew 28:16 NASB

Ideally then, assuming perfect responsiveness, we may surmise that the disciples should have and would have listened to everything Jesus said about the necessity of His impending death, and about the reality of His resurrection destined to follow on the third day after His crucifixion; that they should have and would have departed for Galilee immediately to meet with the Lord at the appointed place, the designated mountain in Galilee. Even now, however, after waiting at least the additional eight days described above, though they did eventually go to Galilee, it was apparently to their homes in the area of sea of Galilee that they went first (Jn.21:1; cf. Matt.4:18-22). For John tells us that Jesus' appearance to them here as related in chapter twenty one was "the third time" that Jesus showed Himself to them all (Jn.21:14), and further, that only seven of them were together in that place: "Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples" (Jn.21:2 NIV). In this appearance, in addition to demonstrating yet again the real, physical nature of His new body, our Lord impresses upon Peter as the leader of the eleven the necessity for them all to "feed my sheep" (Jn.21:15-17), that is, to provide the Body of Christ with nutritious spiritual food on a consistent and regular basis, with "eating" then being a picture of faith in the truth being taught (Matt.24:45; Lk.12:42; Acts 20:28; 1Cor.3:2; 1Tim.4:6; Heb.5:12-14; 1Pet.2:2; 1Pet.5:2; cf. Matt.14:16; Mk.6:37; Lk.9:13; Jude 1:12).

8) To the Eleven on the Mountain in Galilee (Matt.28:16-20)

But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated.

Matthew 28:16 NASB

Matthew's narrative, after a digression which relates the report of the guards at the tomb to the Jewish authorities (Matt.28:11-15), jumps directly to the verse above from Jesus' appearance to the other women and His message for the disciples to "to leave for Galilee, for there they shall see Me" (Matt.28:10). Following the appearance at the Sea of Galilee in John chapter twenty one, then, all eleven finally gathered together on "the mountain which Jesus had designated" (Matt.28:16).

(17) And when they saw Him, they worshiped [Him], but some [of them still] had doubts.
(18) Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, (19) so go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them into the Person (lit., "Name") of the Father and [into the Person] of the Son and [into the Person] of the Holy Spirit, (20) [and] by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you all the days until the end of the age."

Matthew 28:17-20

While our Lord taught the disciples something at each appearance, as Galilee, and particularly the prearranged rendezvous on the mountain, had been the place He had purposed for this, it is no surprise that in this passage we see what is perhaps the most detailed example of His post-resurrection teaching (albeit given to us here in very brief synopsis; cf. Jn.20:30; 21:25; Acts 1:3). It is instructive to note that although by this time all of the disciples had seen our Lord at least twice (i.e., all but Thomas were present at the first appearance, all eleven at the second, and Thomas was among those listed in the John chapter twenty one appearance), yet we are told that even so some of them "had doubts", so difficult was the concept and idea of resurrection for this first group of believers, even though they were blessed to be first-hand witnesses to it. Even today, of course, with the detailed testimony of the Bible and the universal indwelling of the Spirit, it is this author's observation that the literal, bodily resurrection remains a stumbling block for many Christians – and that is tragic thing. For the resurrection is our hope, the hope of eternal life

which cannot be separated from Jesus' resurrection and our own (1Cor.15:12-17). This is the point of “primary importance” which has been “entrusted to us” as Christians (1Cor.15:1). For if our hope in Christ extends only to this life, then we are indeed “to be pitied above all others” (1Cor.15:19). The hope of the resurrection is found in nearly every chapter in the New Testament (e.g., Rom.5:2; 8:25; 1Cor.13:13; Gal.5:5; Eph.1:18; Col.1:23; 1:27; 1Thes.1:3; 5:8; 2Thes.2:16; 1Tim.1:1; 4:10; Tit.1:2; 2:13; Heb.3:6; 6:18; 7:19; 11:1; 1Pet.1:3; 1:13; 3:15; 1Jn.3:3), and it is not too much to say that this hope is the proper, primary focus of the Christian life. Therefore we are truly blessed to possess so many proofs our Lord's rising from the dead in definite, bodily form, with a body no longer subject to death, but fit for eternal life.

The doubts expressed by some disciples on this occasion form a counterpoint to the coming of the Holy Spirit after which all of the disciples/apostles would display a zeal, courage and unbending faith that is remarkable to anyone who compares their behavior in the gospels to their deeds in “The Acts of the Apostles”. Therefore it is entirely understandable in this synopsis we are given by Matthew of the content of Jesus' teaching at this time that the ministry of the Spirit figures large, even if that fact is often misunderstood. Three main points of our Lord's teaching are recorded here. First, that the message of salvation, the gospel or “good news” about our Lord Jesus' conquest of death (whereby He has won “all authority”) and the resurrection which is now available to all who put their faith in Him and follow Him, is now to be carried beyond Israel and made available to “all nations”. Secondly, Jesus relates the means by which these “marching orders” (often called “The Great Commission”) are to be accomplished. And thirdly, an important reassurance aimed not only at the doubters among the apostles but given also for the benefit of all who might have similar doubts in the future: we may not be able to see our Lord at present, but if we take Him at His Word given to us here, He is indeed “with us”, and more than that, “in us” to the end, even if we abide until the day of His return, the Second Advent “at the end of the age”, when all believers who remain alive will be “caught up together to meet the Lord in the air” (1Thes.4:17) in a living resurrection wherein our present bodies will be instantly swallowed up in eternal life.

On that day [of the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. Jn.14:15-19)] you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.

John 14:20 (cf. Rom.8:10; 2Cor.13:5; Eph.3:17; Col.1:27)

The Spirit, of course, had “not yet been given, because Christ had not yet been glorified” by being seated at the right hand of the Father (Jn.7:39), and the doubts of some of the disciples are a clear

indication that the temporary unction given them by our Lord did not alleviate all obstacles to their receiving the truth to the degree that the actual indwelling presence of the Spirit later would (Jn.20:22; cf. Acts 2:1-44; 4:13). And it is to this gift that our Lord refers in His second instruction, not to water baptism. For John baptized with water but Christ “will baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Matt.3:11; Mk.1:8; Lk.3:16; Jn.1:3; cf. Acts 1:5; 11:16) – this is the “one baptism” of the Church (Eph.4:5), and the baptism to which Jesus here refers by instructing the disciples/apostles to “baptize them into the Person” of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit: this entering of the believer into union or “oneness” with the Trinity cannot be accomplished by any ritual; it can only be accomplished supernaturally, by the Spirit of God, and now occurs at the point of faith in Christ (Acts 10:43-44; cf. Rom.8:9; 2Tim.2:1). Thus “baptizing” refers to the mediation of the gospel message whereby we are saved and entered into the Christ by Spirit baptism (and the Father and Spirit) to become one with Him (and with Them), and pairs up perfectly with “teaching”, which properly has as its object those who have now become believers. Herein, therefore, we do indeed have the “Great Commission” not only to the disciples/apostles but to the whole Church, the essential task of all believers throughout this present age put forward in synoptic form: to work for the salvation of all, and for the spiritual growth of all who believe.

9) To the Five Hundred (1Cor.15:6)

We know of this “mass” appearance only from 1Corinthians 15:6, and it most likely took place in Jerusalem. That is because after private teaching to the disciples/apostles in Galilee, later we find our Lord appearing to them in Jerusalem and instructing them not to leave until the promise of the Holy Spirit is given (for Jerusalem was where this was set to take place: Acts 1:4-5; 2:1-4). As late as circa A.D. 55, over twenty years later, Paul reports that most of these believers who saw our Lord on this occasion were still alive, and it is clear from this fact and from the use to which Paul puts it in context that this rather large number of witnesses giving their testimony over such a relatively long period of time was an important factor in confirming the reality and the truth of the resurrection for many early believers who had not seen Jesus' resurrection personally.

10) Other Post-Galilee Appearances

There are two other passages which imply some further appearances by our Lord during the forty days of His time on earth following the resurrection and before the ascension which may not be specifically delineated in the other accounts. As John's description of the appearance to the seven at the Sea of Galilee is “the third time” (Jn.21:14), and as the meeting on the mountain and a

return to Jerusalem followed shortly thereafter, these other appearances probably took place in the time period after the apostles' return to await the coming of the Spirit:

After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.

Acts 1:3 NIV

(30) “But God raised him from the dead, (31) and for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him from Galilee to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people.”

Acts 13:30-31 NIV

11) James (1Cor.15:7)

Paul tells us that Jesus also appeared His half-brother James, and this appearance also most likely dates to the post-Galilee period (as Paul's sequence suggests: 1Cor.15:7). While none of our Lord's siblings believed in Him before the resurrection (Jn.7:5; cf. Ps.69:8; Mk.3:21), a major change of heart took place thereafter (cf. also Jude 1:1), with James' conversion either occasioning (or occasioned by) this appearance from Jesus Himself. As the later leader of the Jerusalem Church (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal.1:19; 2:9; Jas.1:1), it was also no doubt important for Him to have this special distinction, both for purposes of his own faith, and also as a measure of authority comparable to that of the eleven apostles (all of whom saw our Lord on more than one occasion).

12) The Disciples at the Ascension (Acts 1:1-9)

(1) The first account I produced [for you], O Theophilus, dealt with all the things which Jesus did and taught from the beginning, (2) until the day when Jesus was taken up [into heaven], having given instructions to those apostles whom He had selected through the Holy Spirit. (3) To these [apostles] He also presented Himself alive after His suffering by means of much convincing evidence, appearing to them over a period of forty days, and telling them the things of the Kingdom of God. (4) And gathering them together [Jesus] commanded [the disciples] not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the

Father (i.e., the Holy Spirit) “which you heard about from Me. (5) For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit not many days from now”. (6) So when they had come together (i.e., for the last time), they were asking Him, “Lord, are you about to restore the kingdom to Israel at this time?” (7) And He said to them, “It is not for you to decide the times and occasions which the Father has ordained on His own authority (i.e., the Second Advent et al. will happen on His time-table, not yours). (8) But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth”. (9) And having said these things, He was lifted up while they looked on, and a cloud obscured Him from their sight.

Acts 1:1-9

This passage written by Luke is not to be confused with the end of the gospel of Luke. There are clearly similarities between the last meeting the apostles had with our Lord after their return from Galilee (quoted here immediately above) and the first collective meeting on the night of the first Easter Sunday (Lk.24:36-53). The portion of the text in verse 51 of Luke chapter 24 which says “and He was taken up into heaven” is not a part of the original text but a later addition, added no doubt in an attempt to homogenize the end of Luke with the beginning of Acts (i.e., making Luke end with the ascension just as Acts begins with it). But as we saw above, these are two separate meetings, the former occurring on Easter night before the trip to Galilee, the latter occurring some forty days later on the day of the ascension. The special focus our Lord places on the baptism of the Spirit, and especially His contrasting of Spirit baptism with the water baptism of John, should be noted carefully (particularly as many churches continue to baptize with water as if these verses meant little or nothing). The passage above constitutes the final post-resurrection appearance of our Lord before His “glorification” (cf. Jn.7:39), for it concludes with His ascension (followed immediately by His session at the right hand of the Father in heaven: Ps.110:1ff.; see section 5.0 directly below).

13) To Paul (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:9-18; 1Cor.9:1; 15:8), and to John (Rev.1:10-20)

Am I not an apostle? Have I not see Jesus our Lord?

1st Corinthians 9:1

Actually “seeing” the Lord in resurrection and thereby being a witness to the resurrection was an essential prerequisite for the office of apostle (Acts 26:16; cf. Acts 22:15),(100) of whom there are and will only ever be twelve (cf. Rev.21:14). Paul saw the Lord “in glory” (Acts 9:3; 22:6; 22:11; 26:13), as did John on Patmos (Rev.1:12-17), so that these post-ascension appearances are significantly different from the prior ones, and demonstrate the magnificence and the magnitude of the glorification that took place when our Lord ascended in the presence of the Father.

Matthew 28:18-20 (NASB)

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

*

A1: This brings us to the consideration of Matthew 28:19-20, which is really the crux of the entire issue. For, no matter what we might feel about it, even if water-baptism does not seem to make theological sense, if our Lord were really commanding us to be water-baptized, that would certainly settle the issue. In fact, that is not at all what this passage, an admittedly difficult one to interpret, really relates. What this passage actually commands is for us to "make disciples" (the only imperative in the Greek), that is, to teach mankind about Jesus Christ, how to come to Him and how to follow Him. The two participles ("baptizing" and "teaching") are clearly instrumental in nature (i.e., they show the method of carrying out the order: "by baptizing" and "by teaching"). "Baptizing" and "teaching" therefore reflect the means to these two parts of the process, namely 1) entering into Christ, and 2) properly following Him thereafter. "Baptizing them into the Name of ..." thus must refer to the mediation of the gospel message by which we all are baptized by the Spirit through faith into all three Persons of the Trinity (Rom.6:3; cf. Is.30:27), while "teaching them" clearly concerns the post-salvation process of growth and discipleship which is equally essential. Beyond all question, it is the baptism of the Spirit which places us into union with God, union with Christ - and it is the indwelling Holy Spirit which is the pledge of this (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30). Water-baptism has nothing to do with either. Therefore, in my view, the main point behind the baptism referred to in Matthew 28:19 is the same as the one made in 1st Corinthians 12:13 where we are all "baptized into one Body (of Christ, His Person, His Name)".

It is well to note here that Matthew 28:19-20 is not our Lord Jesus Christ's last communication with His disciples. For that mandate was given in Galilee. But we know that Jesus ascended into heaven from Jerusalem, from the Mount of Olives, the very place to which He will return at the end of this Age at the conclusion of the Tribulation (Lk.24:48; Acts 1:4-5; 1:7-8). Here are Christ's final words to them and to us before He returned to the Father:

And He said to them, "It was written for the Messiah [the Christ] to suffer and rise from the dead on the third day in just this way [that it has happened], and for repentance [leading] to the forgiveness of sins on the basis of [faith in] His Name to be preached to all the nations. Once you have begun [to do so] at Jerusalem, you are [My] witnesses to [all] these things. And behold, it is even I Myself who is about to send the promise of My Father upon you (i.e., the Holy Spirit). So stay in the city [of Jerusalem] until you are endued with power from above (i.e., the baptism of the Holy Spirit).

Luke 24:46-49

And gathering them together [Jesus] commanded [the disciples] not to depart from Jerusalem, but to await the promise of the Father (i.e., the Holy Spirit) "which you heard about from Me. For John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Spirit not many days from now".

Acts 1:4-5

And He said to them, "It is not for you to decide the times and occasions which the Father has ordained on His own authority (i.e., the Second Advent et al. will happen on His timetable, not yours). But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth".

Acts 1:7-8

The significance of the symbolism of water-baptism (excluding the unique case of the water-baptism of Christ which portrays His death for our sins) is essentially two-fold: 1) it portrays the individual's repentance, turning away from sin and death and toward God instead (cf. Acts 22:16); and 2) the pouring out of the Spirit which "baptizes us" into Christ (cf. Acts 19:5). But in the passages above our Lord is talking about actual repentance and the actual pouring out of the Spirit – the reality in each case clearly being the only really important thing (not the ritual which represents them). In Acts chapter 10, the gentiles who were listening to Peter repented and

believed just as soon as the gospel message passed his lips, and the Spirit fell upon them in dramatic fashion (Acts 10:39-46). To which Peter remarks "can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water now? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have." To which we may well ask, what was the added benefit of water-baptism now that these gentiles had 1) repented and believed and been saved, and 2) been baptized with the Spirit, baptized into the Person of Jesus Christ? Certainly in this case (and in every subsequent case I might add), it was a matter of mere ritual following powerful reality, and while a consideration of this passage does not necessarily mark out water-baptism as improper, it certainly does at least suggest that it was an after-thought that could in no way compare with the baptism they had already undergone.

Taking all this into consideration in light of our Lord's final words in the Luke and Acts passages quoted above where He stresses the reality of repentance-faith and the reality of Spirit-baptism (with no mention of water-baptism), I believe we would be in great and dangerous error to take the clearly parallel Matthew 28:19-20 passage "baptizing them into the Name" as purely or even predominantly concerned with water-baptism (and should instead see it, as explained above, as mediating the baptism of the Spirit by proclamation of the gospel). All indications are that this passage is referring to the reality of our union with Him and with the Father and with the Spirit through faith and through the baptism that really makes a difference to our Christian lives and eternal futures, the baptism of the Spirit. This, after all, is exactly what John had predicted: "I baptize you with water for repentance He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit - and with fire" (Matt.3:11).

1st Peter 3:21 is also pertinent here, a passage which indicates exactly what we have been discussing above. Later in his life, Peter came to understand this issue very clearly (as Paul had: 1Cor.1:17), and was prompted to discuss the matter, possibly also as Paul had from personal observation of the questionable influence that the continued use of this ritual was having in the Church:

And it is this true baptism [of the Spirit] which saves you (lit. as an "antitype" or analogy to the ark's bringing of "salvation through water"). Not any [literal] washing away of filth from your flesh, but an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e., repentance and faith result in Spirit baptism).

1st Peter 3:21

We may compare Paul's injunctions against the continued participation in Jewish temple ritual which is the whole theme of the book of Hebrews. No true restoration is possible for those who

"continue to crucify the Son of God afresh, exposing Him to open shame" (Heb.6:6). This is a change for him, of course, with Hebrews having been written after the incidents in Jerusalem which led to Paul's captivity. He may not have fully understood that sponsoring those young men and their vows and making sacrifice was wrong at that time, but he certainly proclaims it as wrong in Hebrews. There is a parallel here to baptism, for just as continuing with animal sacrifices has the effect of saying Jesus' death was of no effect, so there is a sense in which water-baptism seems to be saying that the baptism of the Spirit never happened (in both cases the ritual looked forward to a far greater reality). Once this principle is understood (as it was not at first in the earliest days of the Church), are we to operate as if we did not in fact understand?

Therefore there is a sense in which water-baptism may indeed be an offense for those with knowledge (e.g., Paul and Peter after the early days: 1Cor.1:17; 1Pet.3:21). It can also be dangerous for those without it. For the early Church may be forgiven for failing to understand that this was a ritual now replaced by reality, a shadow of the true pouring out of the Spirit (cf. Heb.10:1). But for us, how can it be justified, especially if all we are really operating on is fear? The fear of the Lord is indeed healthily (Ps.19:9; Prov.1:7; Eccl.5:7; Is.11:2-3), but our faith in Him and His Word must be strong enough to give us the courage to triumph over all other fears (Rom.8:28-39). Nearly two millennia of tradition across the board can still be wrong (and, sadly, that is more often the fact than not). This, then, is my main objection to a point of view that water-baptism is something we ought to indulge in as Christians. For, whether overtly expressed or not, it is essentially a means of providing a "feeling" of security in salvation. That is a terribly dangerous proposition in and of itself, and is especially so when one considers that this "security blanket" is always administered by an organization (a fact which has the effect of shifting loyalty and confidence away from Christ and to that organization instead; see Peter #27, "Three Doctrines which Threaten Faith"). Indeed, over the course of history the controversy and the false teachings revolving around water-baptism have led many astray from the faith.

Walking in the Spirit with whom we have been baptized is not always easy. Jesus, after all, told us to count the cost before making the commitment to follow Him (Matt.7:14) - there would be costs. To submit to water-baptism in order to fit into a particular organization is easy enough, for it is always easy to rely on some ritual well within one's own control. What is often not so easy, however, is following the Lamb wherever He leads, even when this takes us as it took Him outside the camp to suffer at the hands of those who place false traditions in the place of truth.

Let me close by returning to the words of that most famous "baptist", John, in Matthew 3:11: "I baptize you with water ... He [the Messiah] will baptize you with the Holy Spirit". For, indeed, it is

exactly this ministry of the Spirit which is so important in Jesus' life and ministry, and it is not water baptism, but the baptism of the Spirit which Jesus emphasizes over and over (e.g., Lk.4:18; 11:13; 12:12; 24:48; Jn.7:39; 14:15-26; 15:26; 16:5-15; 20:22; Acts 1:4-8, etc.). The emphasis in the epistles is also consistently focused upon Spirit baptism rather than water baptism (which is hardly even mentioned). Even in our famous passage on Paul's regrets about water-baptism, we find in 1st Corinthians 2:4 a clear contrasting of the power of the Spirit on the one hand with earthly wisdom as demonstrated by earthly proofs such as water baptism on the other (cf. with 1Cor.1:17). Against this universal emphasis and testimony (once we take the examples in Acts as historical rather than dispositive), there is really only Matt.28:19, the meaning of which we have discussed at length above. All things considered, it would seem prudent for us as followers of Christ to place the emphasis where He placed it, where the Word of God places it, namely, on the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

I apologize for the fact that this is not an exhaustive exposition of the topic. Eventually, that will be available in part 6 of the Bible Basics series (a long time in the future at this point, I fear).

However, you may also find the following e-mail responses helpful to supplement the details:

*Baptism: Water and Spirit.

Baptism and Following Jesus.

How important is baptism?

Does baptism play a role in being born again?

Sin, Baptism, and the Book of Revelation.

Yours in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Bob Luginbill

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A2:

Excerpt from BB 5a Pneumatology - The Spirit's Baptism of Believers into Christ (baptism "by the Spirit")

(a) Definition:

(18) Then Jesus came over and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, (19) so go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them [by the Spirit] into the Person (i.e., "name") of the Father and [into the Person] of the Son and [into the Person] of the Holy Spirit, (20) and by teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you".

Matthew 28:18-20a

Spirit baptism is the means by which the Church is formed. It is the means by which those who believe become one with Jesus Christ, being made thereby part of His Body, part of His Bride, part of His Church, "in Him" or "in union with Him" from that point onwards. It is called "Spirit" baptism because it is the Holy Spirit who accomplishes this supernatural union. It is called "baptism" because, as previously explained, the new believer (A) is entered into Christ (B) so as to be intrinsically identified with Him (the result of the "dipping"). This is the most essential element of Spirit baptism, because on the one hand, even though it is entirely invisible, it is the foundation of all of the Spirit's unique Church Age ministries, and, on the other hand, there has never been a case of anyone believing in Jesus Christ since the first Pentecost of the Church who has not benefitted from this "baptism by" the Spirit: all believers in this age are "one with Christ" from the moment of trusting in Him, even in the case of some very early believers for whom the visible "gift of the Spirit" was not instantaneously coincident with salvation (e.g., Peter's audience at Pentecost: Acts 2:38; and the Samaritans: compare Acts 8:12 with Acts 8:16).

It is very important to note that in the case of the baptism by the Spirit this "dipping" into Christ has nothing to do with water. The Spirit (who is spirit) takes the new believer (his/her spirit) and makes him/her one with Jesus Christ so that the new Church Age believer immediately becomes a part of Him in a supernatural union not capable of being seen by human eyes. The Spirit accomplishes this union, making the new believer a part of the Church, the Body and the Bride of Christ, in each and every case where the gospel is heard and responded to in faith. John has proclaimed – and our Lord reaffirmed – that Spirit baptism, rather than water-baptism, would be the rule for the coming Church (Matt.3:11; Mk.1:8; Lk.3:16; Jn.1:23 with Jn.1:26; Acts 1:4-5; 11:16). It is precisely to this event, namely, the Spirit baptizing the new believer who is given and responds to the gospel, to which our Lord Jesus refers in the so-called "great commission" when He says, go and make all nations my followers by baptizing them [by the Spirit] into the Person[s of the Trinity]" (Matt.28:19).²⁴ Similarly, the "baptism which now saves" in 1st Peter 3:21 is Spirit baptism rather than water-baptism.

(18) For Christ died once for us on account of our sins, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in [His] flesh, but having been made alive by the Spirit. (19) It was also by means of the Spirit that [Christ] visited the [angelic] spirits in prison (i.e., in Tartarus in the Abyss), and proclaimed [His victory]. (20) [These are the angels who] were disobedient in the days of Noah at the time when God patiently waited (i.e., delayed judgment) while the ark was being built. [Having entered] into this ark [as a sort of baptism "into it"], a [precious] few, specifically, eight people, were brought safe through the water. (21) And it is [this true] baptism [of the Spirit] which saves you (lit. as an "antitype" or analogy to the ark's bringing of "salvation through water": just as they were saved by being "baptized" into the ark, we are saved by being baptized into Christ). Not any [literal] washing away of filth from your flesh, but an appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (i.e., repentance and faith result in Spirit baptism, union with Christ and resultant salvation).

1st Peter 3:18-21

As is clear from the context, Peter is not talking about water-baptism here but about the atonement of Christ, the gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit (in both verses 18 and 19) on behalf of those who believe; and at the end of the passage he says in no uncertain terms that it is "not any washing away of filth from your flesh" which saves us, but instead the "appeal to God for a clean conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" – a clear statement of response to the gospel. Christ was "made alive" by the Spirit in resurrection, and it is analogously through the Spirit that we are spiritually reborn though previously spiritually dead (see section II.B.2.a above). Literal water only enters into the discussion above through Peter's use of the analogy of the ark: just as Noah was brought safely through the waters of the flood by being brought "into the ark", so also we are saved by being brought into Christ. This is the true "baptism which saves you" – "not any washing away of filth from your flesh" (v.21), but the baptism of the Spirit whereby we are entered into Jesus Christ. Just as Noah's entrance into the ark is not a "wet" baptism (indeed, he and his are preserved from water, not by it), so the baptism which saves us and which is the antitype to Noah's "ark baptism" is the baptism of the Holy Spirit who enters us into union with Christ when we believe, and thereby are we saved (i.e., by means of Spirit baptism, not water-baptism).

(3) Or do you not realize that as many of us as have been baptized [by the Spirit] into Christ have been baptized into His death? (4) Therefore we have been buried with Him through this baptism [of the Spirit] into His death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead

through the Glory of the Father, so also we might walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been joined together with Him in respect to the likeness of His death [– and we have by being spiritually baptized into Him –], then we certainly will be [joined together with Him in the likeness] of His resurrection also.

Romans 6:3-5
