



Lords of Darkness

A Book for Those with Ears to Hear

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To My Lord, Jesus Christ;

and to my wife, Cindy:

Thanks.

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All Scriptures, unless otherwise noted, are New King James Version (NKJV).

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to expose, as much as is possible and with as much detail as is practical, the schemes by which the devil and his assistants keep Christ's followers from attaining to the fullness of His call upon their lives. Too many of Christ's followers are ignorant of Satan's devices against them - some even deny there is a devil and are completely unaware of how successful the devil has been in robbing them of their divine heritage in Christ.

This work should not make you fear the devil. Rather it should stir you to vigilance, wariness and wise resistance to his schemes wherein victory over the devil is assured *in Christ*. If you find yourself becoming very upset or angry at something written in this work, please, ***please***, turn immediately to the Afterword on page 226.

Paul warned us that those who do not love the truth will be - *by God* - given over to strong delusion so that they too will perish along with those who don't believe and obey righteousness. (2 Ths. 2:10-12) Truth - absolute, final, ultimate truth - has the unique ability to stand up to all scrutiny and to any and all challenges. In fact, scrutiny and challenge of such a truth only serves to confirm, reinforce and establish that truth for what it is.

When we first hear such a truth, the Holy Spirit of God (also called the Spirit of truth) speaks to our innermost being, calling upon us to receive, accept, believe, embrace and obey that truth. Whether that truth is something new to us or a contradiction of something we previously believed to be true (but which was really false or mistaken), we are instantly forced to make a decision: to change or not to change. If we love the truth, we will change toward obeying that truth. If we do not love the truth, we will reject the truth, setting ourselves on a course of rebellion against God and the result will be that we come under further deception. The only remedy for this is to repent (decide to change) from our acts of rejecting the truth *and* our lack of love for the truth.

There are many things which war against our ability to walk in God's truths (pride, fear, tradition, reputation, etc.) and, as we will see in this work, the enemy of truth - Satan, the devil, his angels and the demonic - has been hard at work setting up stumbling blocks that can cause the unwary soul to fall from his steadfast place in the grace, knowledge and Person of Christ. I pray that God would instill within all of us an ever-growing love for truth and a fearless resolve to go and do and be whatever He might lead us into.

In this work, we will often be discussing false counterfeits of the true things of God. When discussing a religious counterfeit, the term will be in “quotes.” One of the devil’s most effective deceptions is to get us to believe that because we know a certain thing is wrong, we could not possibly be participating in that kind of behavior. Let me warn you now against seeing the “quotes” and assuming the statement is about someone else. Ask the Holy Spirit - whose job it is to convict of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:8) - to show you if you have, through ignorance, negligence, deception, or whatever, been a participant or perpetuator of any of the devil’s counterfeits. May your first question in response to any and all that is written herein be, “Lord, is it I?” If He tells you it is so, then be equally diligent to seek His forgiveness and cleansing that we may all walk forward together in greater light and purity.

Peter wrote:

...those who are untaught and unstable twist [the things Paul wrote which are hard to understand] to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Pet. 3:16-18)

This work is an attempt to unravel some of the deceptive threads that have wound themselves around the straight-forward gospel of Christ. In some cases it challenges long-held, deeply-cherished doctrines by exposing the hidden fallacy the doctrine has added to God’s Word. The Scriptures have been twisted, mangled, misused and manipulated in multitudes of ways for centuries. It will be very surprising if any reader does not find at least one of his religious toes stomped on rather well. It takes a great deal of courage to face the fact that for years you have been living some lie in the name of Christ. Your response to the glaring light of Christ’s truth - whether one of humble confession and repentance or one of dismissal, denial and ridicule - will largely indicate whether you are a wheat or a tare. (see Mt. 13:24-30,36-43) He who has ears to hear will hear the truth. Those who consider the truths herein to

be too extreme or too radical are either in denial as to how deep the problems go or else they prefer themselves (and not God) to be the one who controls their own religious beliefs and behaviors. Let it be clearly stated now: God still commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30) and He will not change Who and What He really is just to fit into some man's theology or doctrine. (Heb. 13:8)

This work is, in many ways, a compilation of the milestones my wife and I have encountered in our exodus from the "church" and of nearly a decade of interacting with people who have left the "church" behind but who have managed to bring along at least one or more pieces of leftover religious baggage that taint and sour their expression of the life of Christ within. As we have tried to simply abide in Christ, He has revealed many things to us that have masqueraded for centuries as the way of Christ and He has led us into ever greater light and liberty to truly live in Him. We are not yet perfected by any stretch of the imagination but we have a greater access to a freedom from the lords of darkness than ever before.

Be Careful!!! This work may cause you to question your salvation. Unfortunately, those who - *in spite of their adamant claims of following Christ* - really need to question their "salvation" are the least likely to do so. And those who have no need whatsoever to question the validity of their salvation are the most likely targets of demonically-inspired fear that they have already lost their salvation. Beware!

Be Prayerful!!! If this work does cause you to question your salvation, with the help of the Spirit of God, look carefully at your life. Are there *any* signs that you *are* growing - not *have grown* (past tense) but *growing* (present, ongoing action) - in Christ's grace (life-changing power) and knowledge (true, saving, experiential understandings that conform you to His likeness)? If these signs are present, you are on the road to life and continued diligent application will keep you on that road. If these signs are completely absent or completely in the distant past, you are indeed in danger of being on the road to destruction and you need to repent and draw near again to God who is Light and Life.

Be Watchful!!! Though the subject matter should make this quite obvious - reading this book and embracing the truths contained within it will cause the spiritual warfare around you, your family, your friends and your acquaintances to heat up. Please be prepared and be wary!

Section I: Know Your Enemy

Peter wrote,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Pet. 5:8-9)

What can we glean from this description?

The devil is not our friend - he is our enemy.

He does not want to help us in any way - he wants to kill us and eat us for food (that is, use us as a means to further his war against Christ).

He is neither idle nor passive - he is actively looking for victims.

We are engaged, not in a mild arm-wrestling contest, but in a life and death struggle with eternal consequences.

Since our sober, vigilant resistance against him is accomplished by our steadfast faith, we can infer that he always wants us to forsake our true faith and exchange it for something false.

And experiencing his attacks against us in this regard makes us suffer, something which God uses to bring the power of sin in our lives to an end. (see 1 Pet. 4:1-2)

But there is something else here as well. In this passage, the devil is said to be a roaring male lion. In nature, the alpha-prime male lion walks around, roaring, making his presence known and being everything but a stalker of prey. Why? Because the male lion's pride, his cadre of female lionesses and subservient male lions, is lurking all around him waiting for some animal to remain too close or be too weak to escape their subtle, quiet stalkings and sudden, vicious assaults. The alpha-prime male lion has only one job: to distract the prey's attention away from the real threat. The real threat is the pride, the lesser males and the lionesses.

Death by Deception

In a passage we will look at in more depth later, Jesus describes the devil as

...a murderer from the beginning, [who] does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. (Jn. 8:44)

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This is Satan's weapon against us: deception. He wields this weapon in order that he might ultimately render us dead - physically or spiritually whenever God and/or our own actions give him authority and power over us. As a believer matures beyond the temptation to commit the obvious sins of the flesh (adultery, murder, theft, lust, deceit, etc.), the devil relies more and more upon the work that his assistants have been doing for centuries, even millennia, to render the believer ineffective, inoperative and ultimately dead.

How is this possible? Would God allow Satan to destroy us, physically and spiritually? Paul wrote,

Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are His," and "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." (2 Tim. 2:19 NIV)

The New King James Version uses the phrase "depart from iniquity" for the New International Version's "turn away from wickedness." The idea is the same as when the Israelites were told to quickly depart, get away from, the tents of Korah and his rebellious followers before the earth opened and swallowed them up. (see Num. 16:26-32)

As descendants of Adam we are born destined for judgment. (Rom. 5:18) If Satan can deceive us in such a way that we do not actually depart

from some iniquity, we have effectively removed ourselves from the protections of God's grace in Christ Jesus. We will see this in more depth as we pursue this line of revelation about Satan's schemes throughout the New Testament. Let us note with all seriousness, though, that our turning away from iniquity is linked to God's solid, firm foundation - of which there is no foundation other than Christ. (see 1 Cor. 3:11) This is not peripheral or optional - it is absolutely essential that if we would remain His, we must depart from all iniquity.

James also wrote:

Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (Jas. 1:21-22 - emphasis added)

Many people listen to hours upon hours of Bible teaching each year and do not do all they have learned. This is a snare but it is not the focus of these verses. The focus is upon the implanted word. Teachings merely listened to are not necessarily implanted. (see Mt. 13:19-23) Where is the word implanted and why is this significant?

The writer of Hebrews tells us:

For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. (Heb. 8:10-11)

God, who dwells by His Spirit in the secret place deep within our hearts where no other human may enter (Mt. 6:6), writes His laws - implants His word - on the very structure of our hearts. It is as we obey this inward work of God - quickly departing from all iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19) and laying aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness (Jas. 1:21) - that we are then free to do

the implanted word and persevere in the process of the saving of our souls.

But Satan, the deceiver and counterfeiter, is not idle here. He too will attempt to get us to write false definitions (misbeliefs) into our *internal dictionary*. “Church” “pastors,” “priests” and institutions are many times unwitting tools in this regard as they indoctrinate

their crowds to not even dare to question how that particular sect practices its version of “Christianity.” This enables the devil to write deceptive and covert definitions of concepts like “church” and “leadership” or any other personally-tailored deceptions into a young believer’s heart long before the new convert has sufficient ability to discern the truth of that concept. And, should any future challenge arise, the convert will not easily relinquish that false definition because he has come to believe that lie or incomplete, inadequate definition to be what God is doing in his life. (see Lk. 5:39) These misbeliefs are an opening into that convert’s defenses against the demonic and are an area which the demonic may later use to nullify and even eliminate any real work of God in that believer.

We ought not be surprised - this is simply the devil’s usual strategy. Look at our culture, our educational system, television and any other source of information and values which the devil can taint and distort. The more he can implant his deceptive definitions and concepts into people’s hearts - especially in young children - the more God will have to overcome to draw that person to Himself, the more that person will have to overcome to truly follow after and serve God in spirit and in truth, and the more places of entry the devil and the demonic will have into that person’s soul and life at a later time. When the demonic has any level of control over the information disseminated by the leadership of a “church,” it is a win-win situation for them - unless and until the people of Christ turn in repentance to the Lord and change the direction of their “worship.” The deceptions of the devil and the demonic are much more geared toward and effective against the people of Christ than most realize.

In sharing these insights about the deceptions of the demonic with various believers, many strange “theological” objections have been raised -

**Truth - absolute, final,
ultimate truth - has the
unique ability to stand
up to all scrutiny and to
any and all challenges.**

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objections that completely shield the one raising the objection from entering into the light and liberty of being able to recognize and be free from the schemes of the demonic. Let us first peel away some of the layers of deception the rulers of darkness have shrouded around the whole of their deceptive schemes.

The Gates of Hades

There are those who will immediately turn to something Jesus said to deny even the possibility that the Satanic (or demonic) could actually deceive us to the point where we might end up experiencing the second death which is the lake of fire reserved for the devil and his angels. (Mt. 25:41; Rev. 20:10,14; 21:8) Jesus said,

**May your first question
in response to any and all
that is written herein be,
“Lord, is it I?”**

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...on this rock I will build My ekklesia [Greek, English - *church*], and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. (Mt. 16:18)

There, they say, is no way the demonic schemes against us can ultimately succeed. Let's look more carefully at the terms Jesus uses and see the subtle substitutions being made by those who deny that genuine believers in Christ might ultimately experience the second death.

First, Christ's ekklesia, His chosen people called out of the world's darkness, is built on a *rock*. That rock is not Peter (in spite of the Catholic "church's" claims) but rather the divine, spiritual revelation from God that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Mt. 16:16) If our life is not built on that rock but is built on a network of lies and deceptions, whatever we are involved in is not Christ's ekklesia and we are not eligible to receive the promise of prevailing over the gates of Hades. We are not Christ's ekklesia but rather Satan's "church." If the underlying structure of our religious activities contains even one facet of deception we can know, beyond doubt, that the infallible God of the Bible is not the author of that structure (no matter how much "good" we imagine, believe or claim that it does).

Perhaps the singlemost successful deceptive scam Satan works against us is to lead us into redefining Christ or God according to our own ideas, doctrines and theological predispositions. If we have a friend whom we know to be a certain way (perhaps introverted, shy, reflective), would we be wise if we expected him to be the opposite (extroverted, outgoing, verbose) just because we wanted him to be different than he actually is? No, thrusting a friend into a circumstance that requires him to be different than what he truly

is most often has only embarrassing results. It is no different with God - He is as He is - and we have no right to ask Him to be anything other than what He is. We have even less right to change and distort what He has said about Himself so we can feel better about following "Him."

There is a monstrous arrogance quite prevalent among believers. It is the attitude that says *my* expression and understanding of Christ, the Bible and the way of following Christ is *the* definitive standard by which all Christians are to be judged. There is validity to this attitude *if* our expression and understanding is genuinely and completely based upon what the Scriptures really say as it has been brought to life to us by the Spirit of God. But to the extent our expression and understanding of the way of Christ is perverted or distorted by our own intellectual, emotional and/or religious presuppositions (which, many times, are simply the result of the persistent work of the demonic in our lives), then this attitude is the impetus that propels us into lawlessness (doing what is right in our own opinion) and becomes a monstrous arrogance (self-righteousness) by which we justify our own sense of superiority and our own right to exclude and reject others. Make no mistake - there are many circumstances in which we are right to exclude and reject those who falsely claim to be "brothers" in Christ. (see Mt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:11,13; 2 Ths. 3:6,14; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 3:2-5; Tit. 3:10-11) But unless that exclusion and rejection is based on revelation from God's Spirit, we are guilty of wrongfully dividing the body of Christ (condemning others according to our own notions and not according to the judgments of God). This is a most serious offense.

It is thus in the area of our paradigms, our partially submerged presuppositions about how we think things really are, that we are the most vulnerable to the work of the demonic. Paul wrote:

For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. (Gal. 6:3)

If the demonic lures us into wrongful thinking, our lives will bear the fruit produced by the thoughts of our hearts. (see Mt. 12:34-35)

Religious doctrines and theological positions, wherever they distort the truth of Christ in their varying degrees, present the demonic with a lodging place in the human soul from which they can launch their further schemes and

assaults. It can begin as “innocently” (subtly) as insisting on calling God and Christ by their more rightful names of Yahweh and Yeshua. Instead of simply leaving it at that, many have developed wrongful

It is absolutely essential that if we would remain His, we must depart from all iniquity.

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doctrines (teachings) about God or have relieved Christ of some of His godly attributes (usually judgment, wrath, justice, etc.) and have recreated Him according to their own idyllic version of “Deity.” So instead of worshiping and serving the Most High, transcendent, eternal God of glory in spirit and in truth, they worship and serve “Yahweh” or “Yeshua” (figments and constructs of their own imaginations and desires and not the product of Spirit-revealed Scriptural truths). These people really only serve the cause and interests of the devil and the demonic. We must, with the aid of the Holy Spirit, read the Scriptures for what they plainly say and cease filtering them through the stained-glass lenses of religion and the “church” (religious creeds, dogmas, doctrines and theological positions that distort the truth of Christ). Only in this way will we be free to become the spotless bride of Christ.

The second misunderstanding built up around Jesus’ statement that the gates of Hades would not prevail over His ekklesia is that gates are a *defensive* device, either for keeping enemies out or for keeping prisoners in. In this case, the gates of Hades are both. The gates of Hades (the realm of underworld darkness in Greek mythology) keep the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ out of our lives (see 2 Cor. 4:3-4) and they hold prisoner those who are content to remain in the darkness where their evil deeds are not exposed. (see Jn. 3:19-20) However, for those who receive even the tiniest flicker of Christ’s light and refuse to remain in darkness but rather insist on departing from iniquity, the gates which the demonic has constructed to keep them held prisoner cannot prevail over them. If we really want victory over the realms of darkness, it cannot be denied to us by the enemy of our souls. But if we are content to remain in darkness, let us not even attempt to demand the heritage that belongs only to the sons of light. This enablement to escape the grasp of sin and death is precisely why Isaiah prophesied that Christ would come to set the captives free. (Isa. 61:1; Lk. 4:18)

God Rules - Or Does He?

Some who are under the deceptions of the demonic turn to, believe it or not, the “sovereignty of God” as a reason to not be concerned about error, heresy and darkness as if these things were incapable of harming us in any way. It is very likely that this fuzzy mis-notion about the sovereignty of God is the very point of access for the demonic into these people’s lives! If this “sovereignty of God” causes us to believe that we need not actively, carefully and persistently depart from all iniquity, we have taken the elements of truth within this notion too far and we have believed a lie from the demonic.

This mis-notion is based in misunderstanding the difference between sovereignty and control. The argument is that because God is sovereign, He is in total and complete control of all actions everywhere and at all times. There are two questions that one should ask - and the answers to these two questions completely unravel the deception contained in this notion.

The first question is: Does God get everything He wants? Peter wrote,

The Lord is...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

God does not want or will for *anyone* to perish. God wants or wills for *everyone* to come to repentance. This is a plain declaration in the Scriptures!

Is *no one* going to perish? Is *everyone* going to repent? Obviously not. John wrote,

And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. [the second death] (Rev. 20:15)

As an aside, some base their hope in their “eternal security” in the belief that their name is already written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. However, Jesus said to the ekklesia of Sardis:

I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead... He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life... (Rev. 3:1,5)

Whatever else we might glean from this passage, let us note that one may have a reputation that speaks of life in Christ but the spiritual reality is that of death. Such a one who is in truth dead will have his name blotted out, covered over, *removed* from the Book of Life. One cannot blot out what was never written in!

This one, at some point,

held genuine life in Christ and his name was in the Book of Life, but, for whatever reason, he exchanged life for death. As we will see throughout this study, the “once saved, always saved” deception simply does not bear up under the light of the Scriptures.

But from the above two Scriptures (2 Pet. 3:9; Rev. 20:15) it is obvious that God does not get *everything* He wants! If everything automatically happened as God wills or wants it to, then there is no rational reason or genuine need for us to pray that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (see Mt. 6:10) Those who would argue that

...My word...shall accomplish what I please... (Isa. 55:11)

fail to recognize that there is nothing pleasing about saving someone who doesn’t want to be saved or about having a love relationship with someone who does not love in return. God, like most people who were created in His image, is not overly interested in a one-sided love affair. It is those who learn to love Him in return for His gracious love that are the primary recipients of His protections and provisions. It is also true that if God did get absolutely everything He wanted, His character would be marred - He would be like a spoiled, pampered child. And He is certainly not that!

God, who dwells by His Spirit in the secret place deep within our hearts where no other human may enter, writes His laws - implants His word - on the very structure of our hearts. But Satan, the deceiver and counterfeiter, is not idle here; he too will attempt to get us to write false definitions (misbeliefs) into our internal dictionary.

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All this simply means that the God who is sovereign over all is not choosing to control all actions everywhere and at all times. He is not micro-managing this world though, when He does choose to do so, He intervenes on even the smallest of scales to accomplish His overall purposes. It is also true that because He knows exactly what will happen in every time frame, He knows exactly when, where and how best to accomplish what He has purposed while still allowing people to get exactly what they really want most.

This is precisely the place God has reserved for our free will. We must choose and continue to choose to follow Christ. If we become negligent or deceived about our departure from iniquity, we will fall again into the snares of the devil and we may not be able to escape. (see 2 Tim. 2:26) We must work out our salvation with fear and trembling (see Phlp. 2:12) and we must

...give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ...how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...? (Heb. 2:1,3)

And we are to regularly pray that God will

...*deliver us from* the evil one. (Mt. 6:13 - emphasis added)

If the *sovereignty of God* meant that God absolutely controlled all things (like He does in heaven), then righteousness would dwell here (like it does in heaven - see 2 Pet. 3:13; Mt. 6:10) But, for now, iniquity is permitted to remain in our world and, as Jesus said,

For what advantage is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? (Lk. 9:25)

If the whole world is not worth being destroyed or lost for, how much more of a tragedy will it be if one is destroyed or lost for the sake of just one small part of the world, especially when that small part is retained only because the devil has deceived us into believing that something wicked is really righteous. We must not forget James' warning:

...friendship
with the world is
enmity with God[.]
Whoever therefore
wants to be a friend
of the world makes
himself an enemy of
God. (Jas. 4:4)

**It is in the area of our
paradigms, our partially
submerged presuppositions
about how we think things
really are, that we are the
most vulnerable to the work
of the demonic.**

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We must not allow the idea that God is “in control” to relieve us of our responsibility to depart from all iniquity! (see 2 Tim. 2:19)

Now, God is never surprised by any event in human history and He *does* intervene to protect His own and to draw all men toward Himself. As Paul wrote:

...all things work together for good to those who love
God, to those who are called according to His purpose. (Rom.
8:28; also see Jn. 12:32)

Let us carefully note that this promise is not for everyone - it is available only to those who are called by God and who love Him. Those who really love God obey Him in all things. (1 Jn. 5:3) And even for those who meet these two conditions, the promise is that all things will work for our *good* - not necessarily the best, but only for good. Though God works all things for good for His own, we can still rob ourselves by not actively, carefully and persistently pursuing His best and highest will for our lives. For those who do not meet both conditions - perhaps called by God but not obedient - there is no promise whatsoever to rely upon. The New Testament is too clear (for those who have ears to hear) in its warnings about our responsibility to exercise our wills toward God if we would receive His rewards.

We must not mistake God’s sovereign provision and protection as a license to walk in error, heresy or darkness. We know that God is greater than the demonic - and we know that He uses even the very schemes and activities of the demonic to open up ways for us to depart from iniquity. But

if we neglect or refuse to step into His way of escape and overcoming, then our faith is misplaced onto the lie that “God is in control of me” when, in fact, He is not.

This is the second question that stops this “sovereignty of God” fallacy cold: Does God control *me*? If God were truly in complete control of *my* every action, I could not sin. Obviously, I do sin and God does not control my every action - nor does He control every action of every other individual in the world. If He did, there would be no sin - and no free will. Conversely, if God did control me even in my sin, then *He* would be the origin and source of my sin. Thus I must confess my sins to the “One” who originated my sin and then rely on that “One” to cleanse me of all the sin “He” originally intended me to do! No! God is not in total and absolute control of me or this world - that is the whole essence of the human problem! God will not be thwarted in His overall purpose - to have children in the family of His Firstborn! - but whether *I* become an eternal, remaining member of that family depends on *my* ongoing, progressive obedience to the Father! God rules over (or perhaps better stated, after) all but He does not reign over those who don’t want His direction.

God does not control - He commands. And He foreknows. My disobedience does not thwart His will for anyone else but me. If I practice disobedience because someone else - either human or demonic - has deceived me, I have still practiced disobedience and I must still face the consequences of my disobedience. (Ezek. 18:20) If my own religious or philosophical understandings, opinions and beliefs have caused me to reject the quiet contacts of God’s Spirit within my spirit that point me toward His truth and righteousness, what irrational logic must be invoked to foster my belief that I am entitled to receive eternal life! (see Rom. 2:7-10) God still frequently touches men’s spirits and souls (even those who will ultimately reject Him!), relaying to them on many levels their need to repent and turn to Him who is the only way to eternal life. (see Acts 17:30-31; Jn. 14:6) Those who ignore and disobey those quiet gentle spiritual contacts from God’s Spirit are those who disobey truth, who practice unrighteousness and who self-centeredly pursue their own agendas (practice lawlessness).

It is in this light that God’s judgments against a people are more readily understood. His judgments - especially early judgments when people are carelessly and negligently ignoring and drifting away from His ways - are

many times simply His refusal to protect those people. When the people walk in true holiness, many times the trouble is diverted by a specific intervention by God. When the people walk in darkness, error and sin, God often does not protectively intervene but instead uses the trouble as a chastisement to remind the people of their need for true repentance and holiness. If we investigate our troubles carefully - especially

Because God knows exactly what will happen in every time frame, He knows exactly when, where and how best to accomplish what He has purposed while still allowing people to get exactly what they really want most.

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large-scale disasters - most often, the devastation and tragedies have two main roots:

- 1) the sin of man (usually greed and lust for power);
- and
- 2) the withdrawal of God's specific protective intervention (which is usually reserved for those who love and obey Him).

There are, of course, exceptions where God specifically sends destruction (especially in relation to peoples who have repeatedly refused to repent and change their deeply wicked ways) but this is the overall pattern God often follows in His just dealings with wicked men.

When one submits to God, unlike when one submits to the demonic, the Spirit of God does not move in and take over the controls. In fact, it is precisely here that we can most clearly see the source of our motivations for our behaviors and actions. If we pursue a certain course of action under some unexplained compulsion, there is great chance our compulsion comes from a demonic source. On certain rare occasions, God does implant an inexplicable desire to do a certain thing but, more often, He leads us through the exercise of our God-given liberties in Christ. He *commands* us to submit so that we might receive and partake of all that pertains to life and godliness. But if we

refuse to submit, He will call to us, commanding us to repent and return to Him, but He will not violate our will to choose between light and darkness. If we do submit to Him, He causes all the things that happen to us, no matter how seemingly random or microscopic, to work for the good in our lives, primarily our progressive conformity to the likeness of His Son, Christ Jesus.

There are those who use this “sovereignty of God” fallacy to practically ignore the demonic. But this only results in a foolish denial of the hazards the demonic poses to our life in Christ and/or a lazy or cowardly refusal to take up our place in the spiritual fight against the spirits of darkness. No. *We* wrestle and *we* stand against the demonic - it is not God’s responsibility. (Eph. 6:11-13) *We* are called to fight the good fight and *we* must lay hold of eternal life - it is not God’s place to do these things. (1 Tim. 6:12)

We must not sit back and blindly endure the attacks of the enemy and say, “Well, Jesus is still Lord.” If we do not personally consult with Him regarding each of these attacks to find out His strategy for each particular battle, how can we believe He is our *Lord*? If we don’t personally consult with Him, He is only our superstition, a good luck charm (like a medallion of a “saint” worn around our neck) to “protect” us from evil occurrences - He is not our Commander-in-Chief and we are not good soldiers in His army. (see 2 Tim. 2:3) Let us not fool ourselves nor allow the demonic to fool us any longer in this regard. An interactive relationship with God based in trust in His superior, keeping power is simply not the same thing as a blind presumption that, because I participate in certain religious acts or functions, I am thus entitled to receive and enjoy God’s “sovereign,” carte blanche, blanket protections over my life.

Four Kinds of Enemies

In the passage where Paul describes our spiritual armor, he writes,

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Eph. 6:12)

We must not allow the idea that God is “in control” to relieve us of our responsibility to depart from all iniquity!

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Let us notice that the Satanic beings listed here are not flesh and blood beings but spiritual beings. Through the work of the Holy Spirit of God in our lives we can wrestle against and even overcome their works by standing steadfast in the face of their assaults wearing the whole armor of God. (see Eph. 6:11,13) Knowing that these are spiritual beings who wield deception against us, it is significant that Paul differentiates four types of Satanic beings:

- 1) principalities,
- 2) powers,
- 3) rulers of the darkness of this age, and
- 4) spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Let us briefly acquaint ourselves with the differences of each type.

1) *Principalities* are the evil spiritual beings behind the governments of nations and regions. They manipulate leaders and peoples into courses of action that further the cause of Satan.

The angel Gabriel, while delivering interpretation to Daniel, spoke of being withstood in his mission for twenty-one days by the prince of the kingdom of Persia, of having been left alone with the kings of Persia and of

being unable to complete his assignment until one of the chief princes of God, the archangel Michael, came to assist him. (Dan. 10:13) The Old Testament also speaks of the spirit of the Philistines and the Arabians being stirred up by the LORD to invade Judah (2 Chr. 21:16-17) and of the spirit of the kings of the Medes being raised up by the LORD to destroy Babylon. (Jer. 51:11)

Every nation established among men, along with its leaders - including our own - is influenced in one way or another by the principality assigned to it. This is one of the reasons Paul wrote,

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications,
prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all
men, for kings and all who are in authority... (1 Tim. 2:1-2)

With these powerful spiritual adversaries working their deceptions behind the scenes, is it any wonder that men in positions of authority need to be prayed for?

Principalities work to insert their deceptive and destructive influences into the workings of human government. Where there are despotic rulers, the job for these principalities is somewhat easier in the sense that there are fewer players they have to influence than in a democracy. (Perhaps this explains why there is so much apathy in democracies: if a principality can instill political indifference in a significant portion of the democratic population, he has fewer potential threats to his work.) If the principality cannot instigate immorality, ungodliness and oppression in the nation, it will, especially in a "Christian" nation (a nation under a strong Christian influence - no nation of peoples can be Christian in the sense that an individual can be), it will deceive people into putting their faith into the leaders, the institutions, the policies and/or the practices of their government as if the government were capable of providing some sort of ultimate salvation. This has been particularly true in America where the nation is seen as the policeman of the world and there is a strong history of doing right and being good. The times when evil has been done and prevailed have really (and rightly!) shaken the faith of the people in their government.

That supposedly good governments perform evil deeds ought not surprise us. In the end, it will get even worse. Jesus has told us that one day *every* nation will hate His true followers. (Mt. 24:9) Every principality will

one day succeed in causing the nation he influences - the government and the people - to turn against Christ and His people. We must be prepared for that day and not be surprised by the growing darkness in our own nation. Indeed, America is a nation that looks like a lamb but speaks like a dragon. And those who trust in democracy may be the most surprised - democracy may well be the very means by which the whole world is ultimately brought under Satan's end-time rule. (see Rev. 13:11-12)

God still frequently touches men's spirits and souls (even those who will ultimately reject Him!), relaying to them on many levels their need to repent and turn to Him who is the only way to eternal life.

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2) *Powers* differ slightly from governmental principalities in that they are the evil spirit beings who manipulate what we would call systems or organizations (i.e., legal, medical, educational, political, etc.)

The Sanhedrin, the legal/religious body that "governed" Israel but still bowed to the Roman government in the time of Christ is a Scriptural example. Modern political parties (i.e., Republican, Democrat, etc.) and the organizations that run the systems (universities, schools, hospitals, etc.) are assigned powers who attempt to influence that group's actions to further the cause of Satan.

Powers also use deception to bring people into bondage to the Satanic. When a system or organization does not lend itself to oppressing people, the power operates behind the scenes to cause people to rely on the system in some way and then makes ways for that system to further enslave people to the Satanic kingdom. The medical system offers a clear example. Much good is done through doctors and health care but the system of delivery is loaded down with bureaucracy that demeans people and traps, especially, the poor. The government subsidizes the health care industry and soon will insist that everyone who receives governmental health care benefits receive a

computer chip or tattoo (at the least, this will be something very much like the Universal Product Code - the UPC bar code - the *mark of the beast*, with its three sixes - see Rev. 13:16-17) in order to track and maintain their accounts with “security” and “privacy.” Those who rely on medications to remain alive or healthy will one day be faced with the choice of taking the mark (receiving the chip or tattoo) or of trusting Christ with their very lives - leaving it to Him whether He allows their life to end or whether He will sustain them without the medications or provide them with needed medications from outside the world’s system. The system, in this case, is manipulated by the power behind it to facilitate, encourage and ultimately enforce the taking of the mark.

3) The *rulers of the darkness of this age* is a phrase which requires some opening up. Paul tells us that the god of this age has blinded the minds of men who are perishing so that they cannot experience the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, the personification and very likeness of God. (2 Cor. 4:3-4) The darkness of this age is the spiritual blindness of unregenerate mankind. The rulers of that blinding darkness are the spiritual beings whose job it is to construct, institute and maintain elaborate deceptions that effectively prevent the light of Christ from penetrating their darkness. In short, this is the propaganda ministry of Satan. We will probe the depths of their identities and strategies later.

Let us simply note, with all sobriety, that the veil the god of this age places over men’s minds is a sign that those men are perishing. While there is life there is hope and opportunity for repentance. But he who fails to come out from behind the veils of darkness will perish. As we will see as we continue to study this line of revelation through the Scriptures, these veils are in use much more widely than most believers realize.

When the Lord opened my understanding to the overall strategy of the enemy, I was sitting in front of a kitchen table. As I tried to explain what I was seeing to my wife, I made use of the objects that were on the table as they lent themselves very nicely to the concept at hand. The table, I explained, represents the whole of one’s existence - spirit, soul and body. The hot pad lying on the table represents some lie - a misbelief we have held onto in

ignorance of some spiritual reality. That lie might be anything untrue - a false religious notion, a mistaken idea gleaned from traditions of men (science, philosophy, psychology, etc.), a baseless fear - anything untrue will suffice. The demonic comes in at this very place - I placed my hand on the hot pad - and from there - I reached with my fingers and touched the salt shaker - the demonic begins to exert its influences deeper into that one's life.

He will torment that one as

much as he can in the area of the salt shaker, the coffee cup and the spoon - each representing his interference with our spirits or his domination over our soul and body - but he will never say or do anything that will expose the hot pad, the lie which gives him a place to remain hidden within our sphere of existence. He will not even mind particularly if he or one of his companions is removed (cast out) of the areas of the salt shaker, coffee cup and spoon so long as he can remain firmly entrenched on that hot pad.

This is the particular work of the rulers of the darkness of this age. They propagate lies through the various people and organizations they lurk behind and deceive people into grabbing onto false notions. The demonic then is able to further infiltrate and control the individual's life because that one believes his actions to be right and good. If that control remains unchecked, though, the control will become more pronounced and extreme, becoming what we more usually think of as demonic possession.

4) *Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places* is a reference to the lesser beings who inflict their damage upon individuals and on a smaller scale. Legion (Lk. 8:30) was a group of such beings. So too the unclean being cast out

An interactive relationship with God based in trust in His superior, keeping power is simply not the same thing as a blind presumption that, because I participate in certain religious acts or functions, I am thus entitled to receive and enjoy God's "sovereign," carte blanche, blanket protections over my life.

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by Jesus in the synagogue. (Lk. 4:33) When Jesus rebuked a fever (Lk. 4:39) and the wind (Mk. 4:39), He may have been speaking directly to the wicked spirits creating those effects.

Jesus' three-year ministry was characterized by his face-to-face confrontations with these spiritual hosts of wickedness and His complete authority over them was consistently and clearly displayed. I believe that the deepest challenge the people of Christ will face in the last days will not be a test of power as Christ faced but rather a test of our abiding in Christ - that is, remaining in His Spirit (not our own or some other spirit), in His truth (not our own or someone else's opinions and notions) and in His character and attributes. This is to say that Jesus faced an enemy who controlled their victims from inside them and made them do things that were sometimes against their victim's wills - and Jesus consistently overwhelmed that control. In the last days there will certainly be some of this same commanding and casting out of the spiritual hosts of wickedness. But, as we will see throughout this study, only the truth will set us free of all the bondages the demonic has brought upon most, if not all, of the people who claim to believe in and follow Christ. (see Jn. 8:30-32) In essence, we will be facing an enemy who has so refined his tactics that he engages the will of his victims so that the victims - precisely because they believe their thoughts and actions are of Christ and God - are blindly zealous to do the work and will of Satan. The end times will be a dark time indeed so that those who truly walk in the light will shine like the sun in their day. (see Mt. 13:43)

How Jesus Dealt With Each Type

Much study has been devoted to Jesus' encounter with the devil (Mt. 4:1-11), the roaring male lion himself. And indeed, there is much there that anyone who contends with the devil should be aware of if he intends to survive, spiritually if not physically, the encounter. Jesus' reliance on the word of God was His primary weapon. And when Satan began misappropriating and misapplying God's words as he had done with Eve (Gen. 3:1,4-5), Jesus, by way of the

revelation given Him by the Spirit of God, rightly divided the word of truth and avoided the snares of the devil. This is why Paul refers to the word of God as the sword *of the Spirit*. (Eph. 6:17) Anybody - even Satan or anyone under the sway of the demonic - can quote Scripture at you. But only the Holy Spirit of truth can bring you the revelation that enables you to rightly divide between truth and deception.

Yes, there are things we could examine more closely in that encounter but, in our time, most people are not even being successful in surviving their encounters with the devil's pride. By the time most believers meet the devil nowadays, they are already laid out as his next meal. Unless one has been singled out as *the* Son of God - and no one else ever will be God's Firstborn! - it is only after one successfully overcomes Satan's cadre of assistants that he need be concerned about encountering their master. While it remains true that the assistants are easily capable of rendering the believer dead, what need is there for the devil to do more than walk around, roar and show up for lunch? Let us first learn how to overcome Satan's assistants because what we learn there will aid us in overcoming their master in due time. (see Rev. 12:11) For now, let us look more carefully at how Jesus dealt with these four types of Satanic beings so that we may become more proficient in our wrestlings against their schemes.

Principalities work to insert their deceptive and destructive influences into the workings of human government.

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Principalities

When Jesus was brought before Herod and Pilate, we can be certain the principalities assigned to Israel and Rome were on full alert status. Before both Herod, the Jewish king, and Pilate, the Roman governor, Jesus remained silent throughout the official proceedings. (Mt. 27:14; Mk. 15:2-5) Herod gave up in disappointment rather quickly and sent Jesus back to Pilate. (see Lk. 23:6-12) When Jesus is returned to Pilate and the Jews begin to apply pressure on Pilate to crucify Jesus, we read,

Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself on this, or did others tell you this about Me?”

Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.”

Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?”

Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.” (Jn. 18:33-38)

Jesus broke His silence and answered Pilate in what appears to be a more private, perhaps more unofficial moment. Why? Was Jesus bargaining for His own life? No, He knew what was coming and He was determined to go the whole way. (see Mk. 8:31; Heb. 12:2) He was reaching out to Pilate! He told Pilate the way out of his personal demonic bondage - embrace truth. Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” betrays perhaps his hard-boiled Roman

cynicism but his persistent defense of Jesus, "I find no fault in Him," tells us that Jesus' Person, presence, demeanor and few words had penetrated at least to some degree the darkness in Pilate's heart. Let us read on.

[Pilate tries to release Jesus but, at the insistence of the Jews, releases Barabbas, an insurrectionist, instead. Then he has Jesus beaten and clothed in purple and the crown of thorns placed on His head.]

Pilate then went out again, and said to [the Jews], "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no fault in Him."

Then Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. And Pilate said to them, "Behold the Man!"

Therefore, when the chief priests and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, "Crucify Him, crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him."

The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid... (Jn. 19:4-8)

The light is shining very brightly now. Whether Pilate fully understood the Jewish monotheistic God or looked upon Jesus in a Roman polytheistic way, Pilate knew that Jesus was more than an ordinary man - and he was afraid because he had to sentence Him to death to appease the Jews. He was trapped between the truth of Jesus' deity and the pressure the Jews were

Powers operate behind the scenes to cause people to rely on some system (medical, educational, legal, etc.) in some way and then makes ways for that system to further enslave people to the Satanic kingdom.

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putting on him. As we read on, let us notice what angle the Jews use to push Pilate past his reluctance to execute Jesus.

...[Pilate] went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. (Jn. 19:9)

Again, Jesus is not concerned with His own life. Pilate has the information he needs. He knows Jesus is God and that the Jews are wrong. Jesus sees no need to say anything further in this regard.

Then Pilate said to [Jesus], "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

From then on Pilate sought to release Him... (Jn. 19:10-12)

Our Lord is so gracious! Pilate is struggling with his conscience and Jesus, rather than condemn Pilate for executing Him, lays the greater burden of guilt on the Jews and on the demonic operating behind the scenes. A lesser man - especially one bargaining for his own life - would have manipulated Pilate's guilty conscience and secured his own release. But not so with Jesus. Jesus knows He must go to the cross and die. Pilate is just caught in the middle, neither guiltless nor completely responsible - merely a pawn in the war between God and Satan.

...but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." (Jn. 19:12)

The demonic beings stirring up the crowd see that Jesus' claim to deity and His gracious demonstration of love and mercy is only making Pilate

defend Him more. So they press another button - a button that has been pushed over and over again as the principality behind Pilate felt it necessary or beneficial for Satan's cause. The demonic beings seeking to kill Jesus shift the focus to the principality's "strong suit," loyalty toward Caesar and Rome, an area where their control was more certain.

**The rulers of the
darkness of this age
are the propaganda
ministry of Satan.**

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When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"

But they cried out, "Away with Him, away with Him! Crucify Him!"

Pilate said to them, "Shall I crucify your King?"

The chief priests answered, "We have no king but Caesar!"

So he delivered Him to them to be crucified. (Jn. 19:13-16)

Whether Pilate finally agreed with the Jews' assessment of Jesus as a traitor against Caesar or he feared what Caesar might do to him if he didn't execute this One the Jews proclaimed as a traitor to Caesar, the result is the same. Jesus is condemned to die. The light of Christ had penetrated Pilate's heart to some extent but did not break through the darkness the principality had built up in Pilate's soul. Loyalty to Caesar and Rome - the central focus of the work of the principality assigned to Rome - was more important to Pilate than this Person of truth.

We know, however, who really won the victory that day. Paul wrote,

...none of the rulers of this age knew [the hidden wisdom of God]; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Cor. 2:8)

Powers

When Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin, He also remained silent except to give His accusers opportunity to repent. Let us read the account.

And those who had laid hold of Jesus [in the Garden of Gethsemane] led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled... Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it that these men testify against You?"

But Jesus kept silent. (Mt. 26:57,59-63)

Let us note that Jesus doesn't even bother to refute the distortions these false witnesses have placed on His sayings. (see Jn. 2:19) John gives a little more detail regarding this aspect of Jesus' encounter with the Sanhedrin:

The high priest then asked Jesus about His disciples and His doctrine. Jesus answered him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said." (Jn. 18:19-21)

Indeed, when Jesus speaks to the hearts of men, it is impossible to forget what He has said! The two false witnesses then either had not personally heard what Jesus had said about the temple and raising it up (making their testimony hearsay) or, acting under the direct influence of the evil powers assigned to manipulate the Sanhedrin, they lied about what they had heard (making their testimony perjury). A third option is that these two witnesses misquoted Jesus precisely because of their own preconceived

religious paradigm (the temple Jesus spoke of raising up simply *had* to be Herod's temple) a paradigm which the demonic had worked long and hard to bring these men under. Either way, this legal body threw all the precepts of justice out the window so they could execute Jesus! And this is the hypocrisy that is seen in all who are deceived and dominated by the demonic.

Spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places are the lesser beings who inflict their damage upon individuals and on a smaller scale.

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Let us return to Matthew's account:

And the high priest answered and said to [Jesus], "I adjure You by the living God that You tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."
(Mt. 26:63-64)

Whether Jesus was inwardly required to answer by His godly obedience to authority or He was simply making it clear to them who He was, the result was the same. The truth was out there in plain sight. The Jews had to choose to believe or reject Him. The power manipulating the Sanhedrin had done its job well though because, as is evident from their mindset (Mt. 26:59) and previous discussions (Jn. 7:50-52), Jesus was already guilty in their minds of blaspheming God. God had given these Jews over to the delusions wrought by the demonic, delusions they preferred over the truth.

Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, "He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?"

They answered and said, "He is deserving of death."
(Mt. 26:65-66)

For this blindness which the members of the Sanhedrin would not allow the light of Christ to penetrate, they would bear on themselves and their future generations the guilt of murdering their Messiah. (see Mt. 27:25) Yet, in the end, as Paul wrote,

[Christ] disarmed principalities and powers [and] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in [His being nailed to a cross]. (Col. 2:14-15)

The Rulers of the Darkness of This Age

To see how Jesus dealt with these lords of darkness, we must turn to John's account of Jesus' encounter with some Jews who asked Him who He was. (see Jn. 8:25-29)

Let us first learn how to overcome Satan's assistants because what we learn there will aid us in overcoming their master in due time.

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As He spoke these words [in answer to their question, "Who are You?"], many believed in Him. Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (Jn. 8:25,30-32)

There is a monstrous deception being taught in Christian circles that a Christian cannot be demon possessed. There are two layers of deception in this teaching which need to be examined one at a time.

First, what is a Christian? A genuine Christian is one who has received and is living the life of Christ by rejecting his own sin and self-centered nature. Merely attending a "church" or being in moral or intellectual agreement with the teachings of Christ does not make one a true Christian - it only puts that one under a Christian influence.

Some have tried to draw a theological distinction between *believing* and *believing in* (as is used here in Jn. 8:30,31) and being *saved*. This theological distinction exists only in the minds of scholars who have found it necessary to justify their own or someone else's lack of Christ's life within by resorting to some manipulation of the Greek text that allows them to convince themselves that one can somehow follow Christ while in truth remaining apart from Him. The demonic is very happy to assist such ones reach these erroneous interpretations.

We *must* rethink what salvation really means. Paul wrote:

[God] "will render to each one according to his deeds"
[Psa. 62:12; Prov. 24:12]: eternal life to those who by patient

continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:6-11)

There are two types of people here:

- 1) Those who receive from God eternal life, glory, honor and peace; and
- 2) Those who receive from God indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish.

Those of the first group are characterized by:

- patient continuance in doing good to attain to glory, honor and immortality,
- being attentive to the needs of others, and
- being obedient to truth and righteousness.

This is salvation! Let us notice that the notion of beginning with a “sinner’s prayer” and maintaining a superficial religious “Christian” facade by routine “church” attendance is not even mentioned as part of the lifestyle of the first type of people.

We ought to notice too that, in one sense, this is a Christ-less gospel. That is, those who have no contact with the truth of Christ (the unreached “heathens,” etc.) may still enter into eternal life with God by virtue of what they do with their lives. Those who, when presented with the truths of Christ, reject or disobey those truths for whatever reason are those who place themselves into the second group and they will receive indignation, wrath,

tribulation and anguish. Those who embrace the facts of Christ but whose lives do not change from evil and self-seeking are still within the second group who will receive indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish. Woe to those who possess the truths of Christ but who do not obey them!

Jesus' Person, presence, demeanor and few words had penetrated at least to some degree the darkness in Pilate's heart.

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And woe to those whose minds have grasped the concepts of the gospel of Christ but whose lifestyle is so embedded with deception that it causes one who seeks truth to be turned away from Christ! Christ Himself *is* the source and epitome of all that brings men into eternal life - it is not just the facts of the gospel by which we are saved. False religion has deceived us into looking at this backwards. It is not so much that those who hear the facts of the gospel are suddenly changed (though in outward mannerisms and appearances this may certainly be so) but rather

...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...shall be filled. (Mt. 5:6)

The soul that, deep down where no one else can enter, hungers for the things that are truly God will come into His light. Those content in evil darkness will not - no matter how many facts of the gospel of Christ they subscribe to!

The absence of one's connection to the facts of Christ's gospel in relation to that one's eternal consequences is also found in the book of Revelation. God says:

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. (Rev. 21:7-8)

There are two classes of people here:

1) those who overcome evil by means of whatever light and truth they possess, and

2) those who practice some form of wickedness so much so that it is the primary characteristic by which they are labeled.

The “believer” in Christ (even though he claim to be a “pastor” or “elder” or whatever), if he habitually and regularly practices any of the wickednesses listed here, he will be condemned to the lake of fire. Let he who has ears hear.

This perspective of the saving grace of God is also echoed in the prophecies given to Ezekiel. The Lord GOD said:

“Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is Mine; the soul who sins shall die.

“But if a man is just and does what is lawful and right; if he has not eaten on the mountains [pagan, idolatrous rituals], nor lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, nor defiled his neighbor’s wife, nor approached a woman during her impurity; if he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to the debtor his pledge; has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing; if he has not exacted usury nor taken any increase, but has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man; if he has walked in My statutes and kept My judgments faithfully - he is just; he shall surely live!” says the Lord GOD. (Ezek. 18:4-9)

The main point of Christ’s salvation (from an individual’s point of view) is that no man is capable - in himself - to practice the fullness of this kind of righteousness. (Rom. 3:23) Even where there is outward conformity to these things, God weighs the heart which is deceitfully wicked. (Jer. 17:9; Prov. 16:2; 21:2) Only in Christ may we truly practice - in ever increasing godliness - this kind of righteous living and that only because God gives us the righteousness of Christ. (1 Cor. 1:30)

Those who embrace the slogan “Christians aren’t perfect; they’re just forgiven,” have one element of the truth. But this looking only at past forgiveness ignores the need for present tense transformations that point toward and confirm future glorification. (2 Cor. 3:18)

Loyalty to Caesar and Rome - the central focus of the work of the principality assigned to Rome - was more important to Pilate than this Person of truth.

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Saved is a word that introduces cloudiness into our thinking about salvation. Hyper-evangelistic people will ask, “Are you saved?” The obvious answer - even for a genuine believer in Christ - is, “No, I’m not dead yet! The process is not yet complete. My salvation will not be past tense until I am in that place where time has no more power over me.” We have been called, appointed, reserved, set apart, and imbued with new life in Christ but we are not *saved* (past tense) from ultimate destruction (the second death) until we pass before the judgment throne of Christ and God. We are *being* saved (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15) and, if we remain in Christ, we *will be* saved (Jn. 10:9; Acts 16:31; Rom. 10:9; etc.) There are a few Scriptures that refer to believers as already *saved* but every one of these Scriptures also points to a condition that could change that *saved* status. We must *continue* to hope (Rom. 8:24), *continue* to hold fast (1 Cor. 15:2), *continue* to live (abide, remain) in Christ (Eph. 2:5,8), *continue* to trust in His keeping power (2 Tim. 1:9), *continue* to experience His washing and regenerating in this life (Tit. 3:5) if we would enter into the fullness of His salvation in the next life.

The idea of “once saved, always saved” is therefore flawed from its beginning. We are not *saved* (that is, fully, finally and completely) at our conversion to Christ - merely diverted from the direct route to the lake of fire and placed on the narrowing road that leads to life. If we persist in selfishly living our life in ways that really only follow the ways and deceptions of the devil - even if we had some real encounter with Christ and truly followed Him during some portion of our life - by what irrational logic might we suppose ourselves entitled to receive from God eternal life, glory, honor and peace? Let he who has ears hear.

Even when one believes that Jesus is the Christ, as did these Jews with

whom Jesus was having this encounter (Jn. 8:30-31), one can still be in bondage to demonic deceptions - as we will see was still true of these Jews who had believed in Him. The second layer of deception is in our understanding of the term *demon possessed*. The Greek word is better rendered *demonized*. That is, they are under the influence or control of a demonic being, one of the four types we are now studying. Whereas the spirit of a man has been brought to newness of life by being joined to the Spirit of God, the soul of that man, his soulish mind, will and emotions, by virtue of his refusal to depart from some iniquity, is still controlled to some degree by a Satanic being. The man's refusal to depart from iniquity may indeed be the result of believing some lie, the result of deceptive blindness, and not the result of stubborn, willful rebellion against God - but it is a refusal to depart from iniquity nonetheless. The resultant failure to depart from iniquity is the ground or basis upon which the demonic gains control of the man, even if he is a believer in Christ. Being demonized begins with a single deception and builds up to the extreme control over a person's will and actions that is most commonly associated with demonic possession. But being demonized refers to any point within the spectrum of being deceived, influenced and/or controlled by the demonic - not just the extreme cases of complete control.

Jesus points out the way to freedom from all Satanic beings and schemes when He says,

You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. (Jn. 8:32)

Many people want to claim this promise but neglect to notice the condition we must fulfill in order to receive this promise.

If you abide... (Jn. 8:31)

This is the condition we must meet. We must abide in Him and His word. (see Jn. 15:4-7; 1 Jn. 2:27) This is not an intellectual knowledge of Christ's teachings, nor an emotional attachment to our concept of Christ, nor even a willful choice to do what we think Christ would do. It is a total immersion into the Person of Christ through His Spirit living within us in our spirits. It is a rejection of one's self and a following only after Him. (see Lk. 9:23-24)

Anything less is not abiding in Him and will render us ineligible to enter into the truth that will free us from all demonic control and manipulation.

Let us read on in John's account to see how these Jews, who had both believed and believed in Christ, respond to Jesus' instructions on how to become free of the demonic control over their lives.

Hypocrisy is seen in all who are deceived and dominated by the demonic.

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They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?"

Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." (Jn. 8:33-36)

Here we see the first layer of their bondage to deception. They believed the lie that being physically descended from Abraham, that is, being Jewish, made them exempt from slavery. Had they never heard of Egypt, Babylon or even Rome? Or, as Jesus' answer might suggest, did they believe that even though the Jews might have been forced to physically bow down and serve these human masters, their Jewish souls and spirits had remained unconquered? Jesus cut past all the human elements and spoke directly against the sin nature that is present and prevalent in all men, pointing out the deepest inconsistency between reality and the words of these Jews. Slavery to sin, though it is the curse of all mankind, has its epitome under demonic control. We are all born into this slavery but the demonic works very hard to get us to "upgrade" our chains, as it were, into ever deeper levels and ever greater forms of bondage to sin. Being unable to grasp reality, especially the deep realities of the spirit, that is, unable to walk freely in the light of truth, is a sign of being demonized.

There is a chilling warning in this passage that strikes at the heart of the "once saved, always saved" deception. Jesus said,

...a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. (Jn. 8:35)

If we refuse or neglect to forsake our slavery to sin so that we may truly enter into our sonship with God, there will come a day when we are no longer welcome in His house, that house built with *living* stones. (1 Pet. 2:5) One who is still a slave to sin is dying and one day will fully die in his sins. Corpses have no place among the living. Let he who has ears hear.

Jesus continued:

“I know that you are Abraham’s descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father.”

They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” (Jn. 8:37-39)

Notice two things here. First, Jesus exposes their desire to kill Him - a direct manifestation of the hatred the devil has for the Son of God - and points toward this link with the devil. And second, their clinging to their faith in being Jewish is their way of denying both of Jesus’ charges against them. This refusal to relinquish their misbelief is the source of their blindness, their inability to receive the truth that only Christ, not their Jewishness, could set them free from sin.

Jesus’ words,

...you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you... (Jn. 8:37)

point again towards our option of abiding in Him or risking coming under demonic control. These Jews had believed in Him (Jn. 8:30-31) yet they were experiencing and manifesting the devil’s hatred for Christ. Why? Because their souls could not keep in step with what their spirits had grasped. Though light had come to their spirits, it had not penetrated the darkness in their souls.

Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children,

you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father.”

A genuine Christian is one who has received and is living the life of Christ by rejecting his own sin and self-centered nature.

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Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father - God.” (Jn. 8:39-41)

For those of us who hold the advantage of looking back over the centuries and studying it from afar, this exchange is becoming painful. The blindness under which these Jews languish is causing them to lash out at the One who loves them enough to die for them. And more of their misbeliefs are exposed. Though they have believed in Jesus (Jn. 8:30-31), they also still believe the rumors of Jesus’ “premature,” “illegitimate” birth. (see Mt. 1:18-19) As Jesus’ words stirred their conscience, they had the opportunity to repent of having believed evil of Him. Instead, because the rulers of darkness still held them under their sway, they were stirred up to lash out at Jesus. Jesus’ words of truth were exposing the demonic’s *hot pad* - that misbelief that afforded them a secluded nest within these men’s souls (see pg. 22) - so the demonic stirred these men to anger to keep out the light.

Their claim to have only God as their Father is still only an extension of their Jewishness. God is their Father because He was Abraham’s Father. They are still denying their link to the demonic. Persistent denial of what the Lord is exposing is a sure indicator of demonic enslavement.

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.” (Jn. 8:42-43)

Why could they not listen to and hear Jesus? Because if the lords of

darkness allowed the light to penetrate the minds of these Jews, they would know the truth and be freed from their control. The battle rages as, in effect, Jesus was saying in their one ear, "I can set you free," while the demonic was screaming in their other ear, "Kill Him!" And these Jews had chosen long ago to place their faith in their Jewishness and were now unable to transfer that faith to Christ. They had misappropriated the law that was supposed to lead them to Christ (see Gal. 3:24) and used it instead to practice a smug, self-righteous sense of moral superiority. This false sense of self-righteousness was the open door for demonic entry and the ground or place where they attached themselves within these men's souls and exercised near-complete control over them.

Jesus continued:

"You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God."

Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" (Jn. 8:44-48)

If these were mere literary characters, the irony of this interchange would be laughable. People claiming to be God's grandchildren who are deeply ensnared under demonic control deny the real Son of God's sonship and accuse Him of having a demon! But these were real people and this situation, with minor variations on the theme, has been re-enacted countless numbers of times over the centuries, especially in "church" splits!

Again we see more of their misbeliefs surfacing. Not only did they believe Jesus was illegitimate, His human father was really a Samaritan, the worst kind of half breed known to a Jew. And, worse still, Jesus was

(according to their gossip mill) really demonized, deceiving all those who followed Him. The closer Jesus gets to the real link with the demonic, the more the demonic goads them into fury - all in the attempt to keep light out of their stronghold of darkness, to keep these Jews from receiving the truth that would set them free from the demonic's control.

God requires of us a total immersion into the Person of Christ through His Spirit living within us in our spirits and a complete rejection of one's self and a following only after Him. Anything less is not abiding in Him and will render us ineligible to enter into the truth that will free us from all demonic control and manipulation.

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Jesus' words here point to the root of the problem. He said,

“...if I tell you the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear because you are not of God.” (Jn. 8:46-47)

Here we see how these Jews have listened to men (the scribes, the rabbis, etc.) for so long that they cannot hear God. They have claimed allegiance to some man's ideas and are now unable to hear God because they (their thoughts, opinions and beliefs) belong to that man and not to God. Today people claim allegiance (or practice it while denying the connection) to some teacher, sect, denomination or cult and do not really belong to God. In fact, when God's truths are presented to them, because His truths contradict these people's preconceived notions, they reject God's truths. The one who would follow after only God must first learn to think for himself and then must learn from God how to discern and differentiate between what truly comes from God and what comes merely from men or the demonic.

This may indeed be one of the “church's” most effective deceptions: the pulpiteer speaking down to a passive audience - even when he speaks truth - produces a zombie-like group mentality that precludes original and independent thinking. The most one can do at even some of the more relaxed

“churches” is call out a hearty “Amen!” - and even that must be supplied at appropriate moments. It is true that original thinking, when not truly surrendered to the Spirit of God, can lead to heresy and error. But no man has ever thought the thoughts of God by thinking and regurgitating only the thoughts and words of men. (see 1 Cor. 2:10; Mt. 4:4)

Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.”

Then the Jews said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?” (Jn. 8:49-53)

Though these Jews had believed in Him (Jn. 8:30-31) they certainly did not understand Him; they had not received divine revelation about who He was. (see Mt. 16:16-17) Now Jesus says something that requires Holy Spirit illumination to apprehend and it only serves as confirmation to them that Jesus has a demon!

This is a typical demonic ploy. The demonic gives a false “revelation” to the demonized one that acts as a smoke screen to keep the light of Christ from penetrating the darkness that clouds the mind of that demonized person. Most often, that false revelation is simply that the person genuinely speaking the truth is “deceived” while the one truly deceived and demonized has “the better grasp on the truth.” This false revelation is the more readily believed when the alternative is to be forced to admit that what the genuinely demonized person has invested so much time, effort, energy and passion into has always been mere deception. It takes a great deal of courage to admit being wrong. When one has been wrong for decades and has received the aid of the demonic in being wrong, it takes the grace (the liberating power) of God - something which is given only to the humble and not to the proud (Jas. 4:6) - to embrace the truth and overcome the strength of the lies. These Jews

were more interested in maintaining their facade of religious superiority than they were in being truly righteous before God. This is equally true of many so-called “Christian” “leaders” today.

Being unable to grasp reality, especially the deep realities of the spirit, that is, unable to walk freely in the light of truth, is a sign of being demonized.

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As confused as these Jews are, though, they ask the right question. It is highly likely that this question is only a setup prompted by the demonic. They know the truth about Jesus being the Christ (see Lk. 4:41) and they also know these Jews will consider the truth to be blasphemy against God.

Jesus answered, “If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, ‘I do not know Him,’ I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” (Jn. 8:54-56)

Jesus responds to their taunt because He knows the truth, that He is truly the Son of God, is the only thing that will set them free of their entrenched Jewishness - and from the demonic’s control. In effect, Jesus is saying, “You question My eternal nature? The truth about My eternal nature will set you free. Here it comes because your being liberated is more important than My life.”

This passage also strikes at the “gentle Jesus, meek and mild” myth. In a situation where His life is being threatened, Jesus is not at all soft or nice or gentle or meek or mild or anything that might be remotely labeled effeminate with these guys. No, He straightforwardly calls them liars - just as in other places He straightforwardly calls them vipers (Mt. 12:34) and hypocrites (Mt. 15:7). Grace is still reserved for the humble while the full weight of the law is meted out to the proud. The Spirit of God within is a lot different than many “Christian” sects have taught. Yes, there is place for self-

control - but there is also place for the truth that offends.

Then the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” (Jn. 8:57-58)

To any Jew who knows the story of Moses, this is a direct reference to the name of God. (see Ex. 3:14) In short, Jesus said, “Before Abraham was born, I am God.” It is a direct challenge to their blind misplaced faith as well as an insight into the nature of eternity - both concepts requiring Holy Spirit illumination they were not prepared to receive. (see 1 Cor. 2:14) It is an offense to their religious notions - just as the truth about how much the demonic really controls modern followers of Christ offends many. The question we must ask ourselves whenever we are offended is “Just who is offended here?” Is it a) Christ within me or b) my own notions, opinions and beliefs (in which my own security and identity are founded) which are being challenged? The honest, truthful, accurate answer to that question exposes the root of the offense - and opens the way for liberation for those whose purpose in life is to follow only truth.

Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (Jn. 8:59)

The response of these Jews to His answer proves that they were never really interested in the whole truth, a problem that afflicts most people today who claim to follow Christ. Some consider Jesus’ departure a miracle - and it is - but it is also a statement against these Jews who, when forced into a position whereby they *had* to choose between light and darkness, chose very poorly. They were so blinded with the devil’s fury and hatred that they could not see and understand who Jesus really was. Jesus simply extended that blindness over their physical eyes and so passed them by - just as today Jesus still leaves people in their blindness and passes them by so long as they refuse to relinquish their preconceptions and misconceptions so that they can be led into all truth. Let he who has ears hear.

Spiritual Hosts of Wickedness in the Heavenly Places

With the exception of the devil himself, the spiritual hosts of wickedness - called demons and unclean or evil spirits in the Gospels - were the first Satanic entities with which Jesus had to contend. Throughout the Gospels, demons cause muteness, deafness, blindness, paralysis, epilepsy and other unspecified illnesses and torments. For the most part, Jesus commanded the demons to leave their victims with a word (Mt. 8:16) though, on at least one occasion, prayer and fasting were required to command them to leave. (Mt. 17:18-21) However, there is no difference indicated between rebuking or casting out the spirit and healing the victims of these demonic beings. Winds (Mt. 8:26) and fevers (Lk. 4:39) also received similar rebukes and the winds ceased and the victims were healed.

One of the interesting facets of His encounters with demons was the way in which the demons tried to announce His identity. Luke records,

And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!” And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. (Lk. 4:41)

There are two reasons for this. First, Jesus did not need or want the testimony of *men* (Jn. 5:34) who believed that any time one might choose to pronounce one’s self as God would be a good thing (Jn. 7:6) - He certainly would not receive the testimony of the *demons* who opposed Him at every step. Allowing the demonic to push Him into the limelight would be to step outside the will of God for His life. Jesus steadfastly refused to do anything other than what He saw His Father doing. (Jn. 5:19) What bondage to the demonic such a step would have wrought in Jesus’ life can only be imagined. And second, it was a temptation to see His own deity as something separate from God. Only in unity with the Father could Jesus preserve His identity as the Son of God. Similarly, only as we abide in unity with Christ and God by

Persistent denial of what the Lord is exposing is a sure indicator of demonic enslavement.

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His Spirit can we preserve our status and identity as sons of God. But let us note that even though the demonic had to flee at His command, using deception, they still attempted to sink their hooks into Him as they fled. In the end, however, Jesus was able to say to His disciples the night before He died,

...the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. (Jn. 14:30)

We should note carefully that the demons did not consider it a problem to announce Jesus as the Son of God. (Lk. 4:41) Nor did the demonic consider it a problem to announce Paul and his companions as:

...servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation. (Acts 16:17)

The demons are not particularly affected even when we believe in the one God! James wrote:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble! (Jas. 2:19)

James then goes on to say that faith (belief) without works is dead. (Jas. 2:20) The demonic's strategy is simply to use deception to keep us in the realms of believing in God without actually obeying God. Let he who has ears hear.

Do we really think that today the demonic would hesitate to preach a deceptive, polluted version of the gospel using any of the pulpiteers they control? Those who claim to belong to Christ yet continue to look to the "church" "pastors" for the truth we need for life and godliness really need to wake up! The demonic will not hesitate to "evangelize" or "preach the gospel" if we are gullible or deceived enough to listen to them!

Jesus gave the authority to cast out demons to His disciples (Mt. 10:1), commanded them to do so (Mt. 10:8) and promised that casting out demons would be one of the signs that would accompany those who believe in Christ. (Mk. 16:17) We see the apostles (especially Peter), the evangelist Philip and the apostle Paul recorded as casting out demons in the book of

Acts. (Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:18; 19:12)

There are two practices regarding the casting out of demons in modern Christian circles that bear some examination. First, there are those who engage the demonic beings in conversation in order to secure information from the enemy, particularly the name of the demon. This is an

extremely dangerous and unwise practice. Demons speak fluently in deceit because it is their native language. (Jn. 8:44) Is there some piece of information, including the demon's name, that the demon knows while the Spirit of truth, the Holy Spirit of Christ and God who lives within our hearts, does not?

The only time Jesus asked for a demon's name, He did not get a name by which to call the demon but a *body count*. There were hundreds, if not thousands, of demons within the man - and, when asked, they responded with the name *Legion*, a designation of Roman soldiers numbering three to six thousand foot soldiers plus cavalry. This legion of demons were cast out of the man and allowed to enter into a herd of pigs who promptly self-destructed by drowning themselves in a lake. (see Mt. 8:28-34; Mk. 5:1-20; Lk. 8:26-39) There are simply too many ambiguities in these passages about the legion of demons within the man (or men!) to support the customary practice of needing to call out a demon by some name and there is certainly nothing there to support asking the demon for a truthful answer!

Beyond calling the demons unclean or evil spirits, the New Testament itself is very short on other names for demons. What the father of a boy called a *mute spirit*, Jesus cast it out of the boy calling it a *deaf and dumb spirit*. (Mk. 9:17,25) Luke also speaks of a woman having a *spirit of infirmity* for eighteen years. (Lk. 13:11) The slave girl who announced Paul and those with him as *servants of the Most High God* was said to have a *spirit of divination*. (Acts 16:16) Paul writes of a *spirit of bondage to fear* (Rom.

The one who would follow after only God must first learn to think for himself and then must learn from God how to discern and differentiate between what truly comes from God and what comes merely from men or the demonic.

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8:15), of a *spirit of fear* (2 Tim. 1:7) and of *the spirit of the world* (though this one is not a reference to a demonic entity but to the worldly mindset toward disobedience - 1 Cor. 2:12) Quoting from Isaiah, Paul also speaks of *a spirit of stupor* or *deep sleep*. (Rom. 11:8; Isa. 29:10) He also warns of *deceiving spirits* in the last days. (1 Tim. 4:1) And John writes of *the spirit of Antichrist* (1 Jn. 4:3) and of *the spirit of error*. (1 Jn. 4:6) These are all the Satanic spirits given a specific name in the New Testament - and, as we will see, casting them out by verbal command is not the cure to be rid of most of them.

The Old Testament, aside from two references to specific principalities (which we have already seen - 2 Chr. 21:16-17; Jer. 51:11) and two references to one of the rulers of darkness we will study later (Hos. 4:12; 5:4), gives no names at all of Satanic or demonic beings. In fact, *distressing spirits*, *lying spirits* and even a *perverse spirit* are said to be from God and not Satan. (see 1 Sam. 16:14-16,23; 18:10; 19:9; 1 Ki. 22:21-24; 2 Chr. 18:20-23; Isa. 19:14) Of course, by labeling these evil spirits as being from the LORD, these Old Testament references point out the sovereign protection of God for His followers. Satan and the demonic, as is clearly illustrated in the story of righteous Job (Job 1:12; 2:6), are given specific limitations as to what they may and may not do to an individual. The sovereign protection of God is not a carte blanche protection for everyone at all times and in all circumstances but rather God's use of the demonic to further refine a righteous man to a greater degree of righteousness. We never know, if we walk in careless negligence to the things of God (and not in true righteousness), when God will say to Satan, "Since this one no longer cares about My way of salvation, you may have him back until he should again repent of his own ways." (see 1 Cor. 5:4-5) At any rate, all other references to specific spirits are clearly references to God or to godly characteristics. There simply is no real basis in the Bible for "the spirit of this" and "the spirit of that" which is so rampant in the hyper-charismatic circles.

We must recognize too, though, there can be a legitimate labeling of demonic spirits. When the father of the boy called the demon a *mute spirit*, Jesus, whom we know was led by the Holy Spirit, referred to it as a *deaf and dumb spirit*. (Mk. 9:17,25) If the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth - gives us a label to use on a particular demonic entity, we are quite correct and safe in using that label for the purpose the Lord intends. But if we

apply the label on the basis of our own observations or reasonings or, worse, at the leading of a deceiving spirit, we are only bringing trouble upon ourselves.

The second unwise practice regarding the demonic in modern Christian circles that we need to be wary of is based in the belief that casting out the evil spirit is all that needs to be done. Many who “specialize” in “deliverance ministries” routinely advise those so delivered to submit themselves to people, systems and organizations dominated by the rulers of darkness! If these people succumb to the slow, numbing work of these lords of darkness, the last condition of those people will be worse than the first! (see Mt. 12:43-45) If we cast a demon out of someone and then direct them to people or places that do not point them to the truth that will finish their liberation from demonic control (Jn. 8:32), the loss of that soul will also be held to our account. (Mt. 12:36)

No man has ever thought the thoughts of God by thinking and regurgitating only the thoughts and words of men.

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Captives Set Free

Sergius Paulus: Luke records:

Now when [Barnabas, Saul and John Mark] had gone through the island [of Cyprus] to Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man. This man called for Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. (Acts 13:6-7)

Sergius Paulus, as proconsul of the island of Cyprus, was the governor or military commander of that province - a position similar to that of Pontius Pilate in Judea. Like many others of his day, Sergius Paulus appears to be what church historians call a *God fearer*. These God fearers were Gentiles whose hearts were drawn toward the God of the Hebrew Scriptures but who were repelled by the traditions and practices of the Jews, especially circumcision. This group of God fearers was one of the key factors in the quick spread of the gospel in the first century as God had prepared Gentile hearts to receive what the Jewish people would by and large reject - Jesus the Christ.

Sergius Paulus, just like Pontius Pilate, was undoubtedly assigned a principality to influence his decisions and actions. Apparently, though, he was a good man and not as susceptible to evil influences as the demonic would have liked him to be because the demonic had thought it necessary to bring into the picture a false prophet who, in the name of God, would advise the proconsul with demonic utterances and insights. Now Sergius Paulus wants to hear the word of God from these traveling preachers, Barnabas and Saul.

Luke continues:

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so [Bar-Jesus'] name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. (Acts 13:8)

Let us recall Peter's instruction about the devil:

Resist him,
steadfast in the
faith... (1 Pet. 5:9)

**The Spirit of God within is
a lot different than many
“Christian” sects have
taught.**

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The demonically-inspired sorcerer demonstrates clearly the intent of the Satanic (to prevent anyone and everyone from entry into the life of faith in Christ Jesus) and their strategy (deception). As we will see in this account, the demonic has no way to forcibly overcome the power of Christ (also see Col. 2:15; Mt. 16:18) so they use deception to pervert the way of following after Christ.

Luke’s record continues:

Then Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, “O full of all deceit and all fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.” And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done, being astonished at the teaching of the Lord. (Acts 13:9-12)

Sergius Paulus no doubt wrestled against the principality assigned to Cyprus all the days he held power as a Roman proconsul. But the scheme of the demonic to influence him through this false prophet was destroyed and Sergius Paulus, that intelligent, sincere seeker of truth, entered into a much greater light of the glory of the gospel of Christ.

Nicodemus: John records:

Then the officers [of the Temple guard] came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why have you not brought Him?”

The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this Man!”

Then the Pharisees answered them, “Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed.” (Jn. 7:45-49)

Here we see yet again how those under demonic blindness accuse others of their own exact ailment. John continues:

Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night [Jn. 3:1-2], being one of them) said to them, “Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?”

They answered and said to him, “Are you also from Galilee? Search and look [in the Scriptures - see Jn. 7:40-44], for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee.” (Jn. 7:50-52)

Whereas the chief priests and Pharisees had succumbed to the work of the power assigned to the Sanhedrin, Nicodemus, who would later help bury Jesus’ body (Jn. 19:39-40), was at least free enough of the demonic blindness to extend toward Jesus His right to a fair trial. Nicodemus enjoyed a greater light, a greater freedom from the power assigned to the Sanhedrin, than did the chief priests and Pharisees.

Let us also note with grave sobriety how the demonically-deceived Jewish leaders relied on *the Scriptures* to reject Jesus as the Christ. The Christ was indeed to come from Bethlehem (Jn. 7:42; Mt. 2:4-6; Mic. 5:2) but the Jewish rulers did not correctly interpret the Scripture and apply the prophecy to Jesus’ unusual birth in Bethlehem. In the same way, religious “Christian” leaders today routinely reject Christ, His truths and His genuine followers because they are unable to spiritually discern the truth of the matter. Jesus still comes to those who label themselves “His own” but “His own” still refuse to receive Him. (see Jn. 1:11)

Saul of Tarsus: Luke records:

And Ananias [after being so instructed by the

Lord]...entered the house [where Saul was]; and laying his hands on [Saul] he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately there fell from [Saul’s] eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. (Acts 9:17-18)

The question we must ask ourselves whenever we are offended is “Just who is offended here?” Is it Christ or me?

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Saul, who was so dominated by demonic deceptions that he thought he was doing service for God by persecuting and destroying what was known as the Nazarene sect (see Acts 7:58; 8:1,3; 9:1-2; Gal. 1:13-14; Jn. 16:2), was liberated from the blindness the lords of darkness had built up in his mind so that he could not see and walk in the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. (see 2 Cor. 4:4) His transformation from a son of darkness to a son of light was demonstrated by scales falling from his eyes - a physical picture of the spiritual reality he was experiencing.

Section II: The Lords of Darkness

Paul wrote,

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. (2 Cor. 4:3-4)

As we saw in John, chapter 8, though the Jews in that encounter had believed in Jesus as the Son of God (Jn. 8:28-31), they also believed Him to be illegitimate (Jn. 8:41) and of Samaritan descent and filled, not with the Holy Spirit of God but with a demon. (Jn. 8:48; also see Mk. 3:28-30) Since these Jews had falsely believed a lie for decades - the lie that merely being a descendant of Abraham made them righteous in God's eyes - they had no difficulty believing evil of Jesus. Decades of interacting with the demonic combined with their contradictory beliefs about Jesus had produced a blindness that prevented the light of Christ's glory from penetrating the blindness the rulers of darkness had built up in the souls of these Jews.

This is the rulers of darkness' *modus operandi*, their usual method of operation. Wherever there is misbelief, faith misplaced onto a lie, the rulers of darkness build upon that misbelief using deception until that person dies in their sin. They don't move into the soul and "possess" it, forcing their victim to do things against their will. Rather, using deception, they convince their victims that their actions are done in obedience to Christ and God when, in fact, they are not. And the more misbeliefs these dark lords can bring into existence within a person's soul creates more *hot pads* - those secluded hiding spots and nests from which they and other demonic beings can launch further assaults and deceptions against their victim. (see pg. 22) Even when Christ brings light and truth and liberty from the demonic in a certain area, if that person persistently clings to some other misbelief, the dark lords may yet win the battle for that soul.

So, who are these lords of darkness?

False Religion

We will begin with the most dangerous and the most successful of these Satanic beings. When we understand what this evil spirit does and has accomplished among men, it will make it easier to understand the roles the other rulers play.

The first mention of this spirit is found in the Old Testament. Hosea prophesied in the name of the LORD:

My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they have played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery... They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the LORD... With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn Himself from them. They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, for they have begotten pagan children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage. (Hos. 4:12-13; 5:4,6-7)

Before we examine the symbology of this Old Testament prophecy, let us jump ahead to the New Testament to find the name given to this spirit there, for that name will make it easier to grasp this spirit's place in human history. John wrote:

And I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and

Do we really think that today the demonic would hesitate to preach a deceptive, polluted version of the gospel using any of the pulpiteers they control?

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adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY,
BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND
OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

And I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. (Rev. 17:3-6)

Because even this description is filled with imagery that has been taught in various ways (tainting it with “baggage” that is not necessarily true), let us give this evil spirit a more usable name, that is, a name more usable to our modern ways of thinking. Drawing from Paul, Hosea and John, let us call this evil spirit *the ruler of false religion*. This being does not enter into a person, possess them and force them to practice false religion. No, she (to continue the symbology used by John - whether this being is actually female is doubtful) uses deception to cause men to believe they are pursuing God when, in fact, they are not.

James gave us the definition of true religion when he wrote,

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (Jas. 1:27)

If this does not describe our religious practices, the ruler of false religion has deceived us and taken us as prey and the devil is eating us for food, that is, using us to further his war against Christ.

A caution must be sounded immediately. Jesus also said,

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

We can, in a frenzy of religious duty, visit orphans and widows all day long and tend to their troubles until we are exhausted and penniless. But unless the Spirit of Christ within us is leading us to that particular orphan or widow at that particular time and He has equipped and provided us with precisely what that orphan or widow needs, it amounts to

If we apply a *demonized* label upon someone on the basis of our own observations or reasonings or, worse, at the leading of a deceiving spirit, we are only bringing trouble upon ourselves.

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nothing. Likewise, in trying to be spotless from the world, we can work ourselves up to a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5) but only God truly cleanses us from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:9)

Put bluntly, the goal of the ruler of false religion is to get us to do anything but abide in Christ, using deception to cause us to believe we are pursuing God when, in fact, we are not. The more “noble,” the more “self-sacrificing,” the more “sacred” these acts seem to be, the better as far as she is concerned. But if it is done apart from obedience to the Spirit of Christ within, it is nothing. Worse, it is the means by which the ruler of false religion blinds us to the real gospel of Christ.

Let us return to Hosea’s symbology and examine from the Scriptures just how this ruler of false religion, the spirit of harlotry, deceived and enslaved Israel.

My people ask counsel from their wooden idols...
They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops... (Hos. 4:12-13)

These are things one ought to turn to God with. Instead of seeking the wisdom of God and bringing the sacrifice of a pure heart, these people practiced the rituals of the pagan people around them and paid homage to gods who are really demons. (Lev. 17:7; 1 Cor. 10:20)

They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their
God... And they do not know the LORD. With their flocks

and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they shall not find Him... (Hos. 5:4,6)

They still obey the law, they still bring their sacrifices to Jerusalem, giving lip service to God, but a pure, contrite heart is missing. They neither know God nor turn to Him. They merely practice an empty form of religion in His name. And though they go to His temple with their sacrifices, God is simply not available to them. They have been conned, robbed of a precious heritage.

They have dealt treacherously with the LORD, for they have begotten pagan children. Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage. (Hos. 5:7)

Whether taken literally or figuratively, the result is the same: God is deprived of His heritage. In a literal sense, the parents' practice of false religion produces children who see nothing wrong with false religion and the downward spiral toward lawlessness (doing what is right in one's own eyes, pursuing one's own agenda) has begun. In a figurative sense, their practice of false religion produces "children," more acts of false religion and hypocrisy and God is robbed of those who might otherwise worship Him in spirit and truth. (see Jn. 4:24) The picture of a New Moon is one of darkness while the reflective side of the moon faces the sun as it rotates around the earth. The light of God's face and glory is turned away and men stumble in darkness or, at most, with flickering torches of demonic or man-made light (religion, rituals, traditions, etc.). Darkness swallows up the heritage of the sons of light when false religion is practiced and the true ways of God are neglected and ignored.

Let us fast forward again to John's vision. We are isolating some insights about this ruler but we must not completely forget that this vision also represents a city (Rev. 17:18; 18:4), one that is destroyed by fire in one hour. (Rev. 18:9,15,17) Whether this element of the vision is literal or figurative or some combination of both, it does not negate the insights we can glean about this ruler of that city.

John was told about this woman that she *was*

...that great city which reigns over the kings of the

earth...[her] merchants were the great men of the earth, for by [her] sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on the earth. (Rev. 17:18; 18:23-24)

Jesus still comes to those who label themselves “His own” but “His own” still refuse to receive Him.

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This spirit’s activities go all the way back to Abel whom Cain killed, in part, because God accepted Abel’s sacrifice but not Cain’s. (see Gen. 4:3-8) False religion has never been acceptable to God and the ruler of false religion has always stirred up its participants to a murderous fury against those who practice true religion acceptable to God. The way of false religion *is* the way of Cain. (Jude 11; also see Heb. 11:4; 1 Jn. 3:12)

The ruler of false religion has inspired great men throughout the centuries to head up movements and religions that mislead people away from the truth of Christ in varying degrees - Mohammed, Marx, Hitler, Ghandi to name a few obvious examples. These are the merchants of Babylon the Great (Rev. 18:23) and the sorcery she practices is the power she exercises to blind the peoples of the earth to the light of Christ. Her activities over the centuries have established an institution that is cherished among men but is an abomination to God.

One of the most poignant types (pictorial representations or applications) of the work of the ruler of false religion is found in the story of Samson, the strong man of God, and Delilah, the harlot or prostitute for hire. Let us remember who Samson was:

Samson was to be set apart with special vows unto the Lord from the time of his birth. (Jdgs. 13:5) This is a picture of every believer who, upon his new birth from above (Jn. 3:3-8), is to be totally and completely set apart to Christ. (1 Cor. 6:20)

Samson was gifted with incredible strength and, armed

only with a jawbone of a donkey, killed a thousand men who were most likely better armed than he was. (Jdgs. 15:15) The believer in Christ can do all things through Christ who gives him strength (Phlp. 4:13) and is more than a conqueror through Christ who loves him. (Rom. 8:37)

One night, Samson walked away with the very gate to the city of Gaza right under the noses of his enemies. (Jdgs. 16:3) The gates (schemes and devices of the enemy meant to deceive and imprison believers) will not prevail against the ekklesia, the true people of Christ. (Mt. 16:18)

But what was Samson's weaknesses? Women - and flirting with impurities. Though according to his Nazirite vows he was never to approach a dead body (Num. 6:6), he did not hesitate to scoop honey from the carcass of a lion. (Jdgs. 14:8-9) And though he was a leader among his people and could have probably chosen any Hebrew woman as his wife, his tastes ran toward the women of the Philistines. Interestingly enough, Samson's sinful taste in women was used by the Lord as an opportunity to inflict judgment upon the people of the Philistines. (Jdgs. 14:4) Also quite interestingly, Samson's feat of removing the gate of Gaza was performed after he spent the night with a prostitute! (Jdgs. 16:1) In the same way, many believers live their lives seeing how close they can come to sin without actually willfully touching it (or they are completely unaware of how sinful their attitudes and actions really are) - and then they find themselves enticed by worldly principles, luxuries and/or comforts more so than they are drawn by the Spirit of God. God will hold guiltless neither the demonic forces who deceive nor the human participant in that deception - but the fact that a child of God has been deceived by the demonic gives God an opportunity to move against the works of the demonic (that's how transcendent God is in this matter!) And even though a believer has given into sin, he is still able to overcome the

schemes of the enemy if he will but get up and move away from his place of sin and back to his rightful place in Christ. This is the superior power of God's grace over sin and the deceptions of the demonic).

Decades of interacting with the demonic combined with their contradictory beliefs about Jesus had produced a blindness that prevented the light of Christ's glory from penetrating the blindness the rulers of darkness had built up in the souls of these Jews.

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Delilah is the epitome of the prostitute or whore for hire. Samson (having failed to learn his lesson about sleeping with the women of the enemy's camp - Jdgs.

16:1-3) committed fornication with Delilah (who received but obviously did not reciprocate his love) and she continued sleeping with him even as she utilized her feminine charms to ferret out the secret of his great strength so that she might receive the handsome monetary reward of the lords of the Philistines. (Jdgs. 16:4-5) Most "believers" today do exactly as Samson did. They love to go to a "church," sit silently in a pew and practice the rules and traditions of their own religious club, having little or nothing to do with Christ as they are lulled to sleep so they can be brought into further slavery to the Satanic. The spirit of false religion, as did Delilah with Samson (Jdgs. 16:19), lulls her victims to sleep so that they might be turned over to their enemies, have their eyes plucked out and be tormented for the remainder of their days. This is a picture of the believer's lost discernment and inability to overcome his tormenters. (see Rev. 3:17-18; Mt. 18:34-35)

The story of Samson ends with his regaining his

strength just long enough to destroy more of his enemies than he had done in his whole life (Jdgs. 16:30) - and I believe Samson is a picture of the whole of the body of Christ throughout church history and into the Great Tribulation where saints overcome the devil by the giving of their own lives. (Rev. 12:11) There is nothing in the Scriptures, however, that requires the spiritual life of each and every individual believer to conform to the pattern of Samson's life.

Ritualism and Hypocrisy

The ruler of false religion's first great victory in the church age (that is, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost - Acts 2:1-4) was convincing men they needed to hold regular meetings and practice rituals in the name of Christ. In the book of Acts we read that the disciples of Troas met on the first day of the week to break bread. (Acts 20:7) Prior to this, there is no mention of *weekly* activity whatsoever among the apostles, disciples and believers (other than weekly visits to the synagogue to reason with the Jews,

giving the Jews an opportunity to escape the darkness that surrounded the Jewish religion - see Acts 17:2 for example). Prior to this practice at Troas - which comes perhaps some ten to fifteen years after the initial outpouring on Pentecost - things were done *daily* (see Acts 2:46; 5:42; 14:3; 17:11,17) By around 90 A.D., when John wrote The Revelation, one day of the week was being called *the Lord's Day*. (Rev. 1:10)

It is interesting, in this context, that the English word *church* is derived from the Greek word *kuriakon* (English - *Lord's*) that is used for the first day of the week. (Or, at least, it is generally assumed among theologians and scholars that this is a reference to the first day of the week!) From these obscure beginnings, Sunday "church" attendance has evolved. At times various factions have even punished, ostracized, exiled or even executed those who would not attend Sunday "church" "services." Paul wrote:

One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. (Rom. 14:5-6)

That men would ignore this clear instruction, violate one another's

Wherever there is misbelief, faith misplaced onto a lie, the rulers of darkness build upon that misbelief using deception - they don't move into the soul and "possess" it, forcing their victim to do things against their will.

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liberties in Christ and enforce Sunday “church” attendance demonstrates the demonic source and the devilish roots of this foundational tenet of nearly every “church” in existence today - that one day a week is all God requires of us and that day should be characterized by presenting one’s self to the temple building (the “church”) and subjecting one’s self to the words of the clergy who have somehow attained to a position somewhere between the people (the laity) and God. Do not be deceived - the “church” is nothing less than a demonic lie whose primary purpose is to keep individuals from attaining to true Christlikeness.

When Jesus rebuked the Pharisees of His day, He exposed a long list of the rituals and hypocritical behaviors, behaviors that are typical of all people who are in extreme bondage to the ruler of false religion. Please keep in mind here as we examine these behaviors in today’s context that, of course, there are exceptions to the examples given. No rule of thumb ever applies completely across the board to everyone. But also remember that the exceptions do not negate the validity of the examples given - that is, the relatively few exceptions do not negate the use of the example as the common, general rule of how things occur now. As in Jesus’ day, there were those Pharisees and leaders who heard the truth and were set free (see Jn. 19:39) but, from what we can see in the New Testament, the vast majority of religious leaders remained so demonically deceived that they crucified Christ and persecuted His apostles and disciples. The same is true of the “church” leaders today - and persecution of Christ’s true followers by the established sects will become even more pronounced in the end times.

We must carefully guard against the ruler of false religion’s most insidious bondage: “This is true about *those* people *over there* but could not possibly be true about *me* and the people around *me*.” This misbelief may very well be the most common “broken window” the demonic uses to gain access into individual believers, building upon that deception to bring on further blindness and ultimately death. Let us examine carefully Jesus’ rebukes of the religious hypocrites of His day and apply them to “Christian” circles today. Jesus said:

And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues

and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ...when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. (Mt. 6:5,7)

The goal of the ruler of false religion is to get us to do anything but abide in Christ, using deception to cause men to believe they are pursuing God when, in fact, they are not.

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Praying as a ritual - whether long and eloquent for mere public show or repeated religious chants or memorized forms of prayers - is only a symptom of either hypocrisy or ignorance. Jesus' instructions are clear: don't do it. Once ignorance is replaced by rebellious disobedience, long prayers, chants and memorized, lifeless speeches become an expression of hypocrisy. And hypocrisy is a wide open door for demonic deception leading to control and, ultimately, death. This is why so many hypocrites hold so many positions of power in worldly "church" structures. The ruler of false religion has carefully raised these people up so they might better do the works of the devil in the very context of where many people naively go looking for the things of God.

...[the scribes and Pharisees] bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries [small boxes containing Scriptures worn on the forehead and arm] broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. (Mt. 23:4-5)

When a "pastor" stands behind the pulpit (a furnishing which has no place in either the Old or New Testament) and preaches things he does not live out, he is laying heavy burdens on others which he himself will not even attempt to move. All his works - especially those "pastors" of mega-"churches" with television and video "ministries" - are done to be seen by men. But no one, usually not even the "church" staff (unless they are solidly

confirmed sycophants, yes-men), get to know the real man behind the pulpit.

The picture of long and broad phylacteries is another way to say that these men wear the Scriptures well on the outside but they are not really written on their hearts. (see Heb. 8:10-11) The deceptive work of the ruler of false religion has been so successful that the average person's idea of a good Christian is identical to their idea of a "church" "pastor" - someone who stands in front of a crowd of people looking good and telling good, entertaining stories. (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4) And since the pulpit is already filled with the "pastor" and his friends (the staff), there is no real need for anyone to try to be a good "Christian" - merely listening to the eloquent words of the "good" "Christian" (the "pastor") is enough. A deception so intricate and sublime - yet so effective!

Jesus, on the other hand, clearly left two examples which we are commanded to imitate: humble service (Jn. 13:14-15) and suffering persecution. (1 Pet. 2:21-23) No other Scriptures in the New Testament speak of any other example of Christ that we should imitate. But because humble service and suffering genuine persecution actually bring about growth of the character of Christ in a true believer, the ruler of false religion works very hard to convince believers that merely attending a "church" "service" and hearing a Bible-based story ("sermon") given by a perhaps well-meaning but certainly deceived and therefore hypocritical speaker (the "pastor") is all that Christ really requires. The ritual of "church" attendance is probably this ruler of darkness' greatest accomplishment for Satan and it could not be accomplished without the puppet in the pulpit.

Enlarging the borders of one's garments is a picture of expanding control over the lives of others. Jesus told His followers not to lord over anyone. (Mt. 20:25-26; Lk. 22:25-26) Today's "pastor" lords over all those who place themselves within the realm of his control.

They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, "Rabbi, Rabbi..." But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. (Mt. 23:6-7,13)

Today's "pastor" cultivates the attitudes of respect from others as did the rabbis of Jesus' day. He wants to sit in the places of honor and he wants to hear that tone of reverence and respect one gives to a king, a president or at least a mayor. "Pastor" Smith is such a nice sounding title to them but they don't recognize the deceptions they've bought into. A true pastor is a shepherd, one who truly takes care of

The ruler of false religion's activities over the centuries have established an institution that is cherished among men but is an abomination to God.

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sheep. He is not a Bible lecturer nor an administrator. He is one who loves the sheep enough to lay down his life for them - not one who uses the sheep so that he might display his aura of infallibility in front of them a few times a week and clothe himself in the best and finest this world offers. That is only the hireling who comes to steal, kill and destroy. (Jn. 10:1,10)

The idea that a shepherd could, let alone would, feed a flock of sheep by holding one or two blades of grass out in front of the flock is ludicrous at best. This only results in fights between the sheep and bloody stumps where fingers used to be for the "shepherd." And this is the picture presented where "pastors" try to "feed the flock" with Bible stories from the pulpit. No, a true shepherd guards the sheep and leads them into safe pastures where the sheep eat all they want all by themselves. In other words, the shepherd *listens* to what the sheep have learned from their experiences, their readings of the Bible and from their quiet times with the Lord, (sometimes receiving instruction, correction or reproof for himself!) and providing clarification, direction and correction for the sheep only as the Lord prompts him to do so. As godly parents are to teach their children the ways of God

...when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up... (Dt. 11:19),

so too the true pastor will be with the sheep entrusted to his care. (also see Acts 5:42 where the apostles visited *every* house) But again, because this personal care actually reproduces the character of Christ in other believers,

the ruler of false religion works very hard to keep the “pastor” in the pulpit as being “the man through whom God speaks” in the eyes of his listeners.

Though he puts forth this aura of godliness from behind the pulpit or up on the platform, in truth the “pastor” is often no different from the religious leaders in Jesus’ day who stood in front of the door to heaven, neither going in themselves nor letting anyone else in either. The false roles they play are one of the primary tools used to keep the people passive and malnourished. Instead of leaving the ninety-nine in the fold to look for the lost hundredth sheep (Lk. 15:4), these “pastors” cater to the majority or to the regular and largest tithers. This presents something other than the Person of Christ to the crowd who listens to this “pastor” and it only demonstrates that the “pastor” is a hireling who got into the fold some way other than through the Door who is Christ. (see Jn. 10:1,7)

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. (Mt. 23:14)

It is not really all that difficult for a “church” and its “pastor” to devour a widow’s home - even when done with the best of intentions, to build God yet another nice house. But the truth is that everyone (except the attendees) knows He doesn’t want or need a nice house (see Acts 7:48) and that it’s really a place for “His” people to waste their time, resources and spiritual lives away in - but that’s a whole lot more truthful than any “church” building program director will be able to readily admit! It is a truth that abandoning the pulpit, pews and the “church” building would be a good first step in liberating the people who attend there - the sad part is that there are only a few who want to be liberated. But widows who don’t know any better can drop a few pennies into the offering plate and give of their very life. Then the building fund still needs thousands of dollars so the widow, in a misplaced sense of love for God, coughs up even more money, money she really needs for rent, food or heat. (Also see Lk. 21:3-4) All this while the “pastor” and staff maintain a high level of financial “respectability” before the world, eating foods, wearing clothes and driving cars the widow could never even think of affording. Then they waste yet more money buying the latest, “greatest”

technology and the nicest toys for “God’s” “house” and “His” “servants” - all while the orphans, widows and the least of Christ’s brothers languish alone in their torments. And then the “church” leaders make long prayers of thanksgiving to “God” who built their building! Woe to those who are in this much bondage to the ruler of false religion!

The “church” is nothing less than a demonic lie whose primary purpose is to keep individuals from attaining to true Christlikeness.

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Some people, whose minds are undoubtedly clouded by the ruler of false religion, have tried to defend the building up of “church” buildings by referring to Jesus’ statement,

The poor you have with you always. (Jn. 12:8)

The callous indifference to the plight of the poor this line of thinking reveals is incredible! It is saying, in effect, “Yeah, we know there are poor people around us who are starving, cold, naked and lonely. But look at our wonderful building that cost us thousands and thousands of dollars!” John wrote,

But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth... (1 Jn. 3:17-19)

And James wrote,

If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? (Jas. 2:15-16)

Those who have wasted their possessions on a “church” building and its professional staff, instead of pouring it out on their brothers’ needs, do not have the love of God abiding in them, they are not of the truth and there is no profit or gain for anyone in their “religion.” This is clear to those who walk in the light. Those content in their religious darkness won’t understand what the fuss is about and don’t even know that they are (let alone *why* they are) resisting the Truth. Let he who has ears hear.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.
(Mt. 23:15)

The modern evangelism thrust is no different from the Jewish proselytizing of Jesus’ day. The large scale “crusade” events boast of only a 3-5% conversion rate at best. And they base that statistic on whether the convert joins a “church” or not! No doubt some have been truly converted to Christ as a result of the evangelistic preaching done at crusades (see Rom. 8:28) - and I for one am grateful for every brother and sister truly added to the body of Christ - but more harm than good is accomplished. Instead of young and immature believers being told to simply let Christ shine through them and allow Him (who alone can save) to reproduce Himself in others as He wills and as He uses those young believers to accomplish this, pressure is placed on them to bring their “unsaved friends” to hear this speaker who, like as not, is just as deceived and hypocritical as the “church” “pastor.” After all, this “evangelist” must also devour the widows’ houses so he can afford to rent that huge arena and pay for all the expenses of taking himself and his entourage of sycophants (yes-men who adoringly believe him to be “the man God is now using to speak to the lost”) to all those faraway places.

But, as Jesus said,

...without Me you can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5)

How much more could be accomplished if we would allow Christ, and not the ruler of false religion, to fashion our understanding of real evangelism! Those who would want a clearer view should begin with a study of Philip, the only

evangelist spotlighted in the New Testament, and end with sitting quietly at our Lord's feet awaiting specific revelation and instruction. For anyone converted to the "Christian" religion but not converted to Christ Himself is twice the son of hell as the "evangelist" who converts him and the "church" "pastor" to whom the convert is sent for "discipleship."

Hypocrisy is a wide open door for demonic deception leading to control and, ultimately, death.

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In order to understand the real work of an evangelist, we must first recognize the conditions a person must fulfill in order to receive eternal life. Paul wrote:

[God will give] eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality...who are [not] self-seeking and...[who] obey the truth [and]...righteousness... [And He will give] glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good... (Rom. 2:7-10)

We must not separate out one of these characteristics and pin our hopes on our attaining to one of these as if that were salvation. No, the *whole* picture is salvation. Let's review that list:

- patient endurance,
- doing good,
- others oriented,
- obeying truth, and
- living righteously.

These *five* characteristics *are* the elements of genuine salvation.

The work of an evangelist then is to assist another into a greater and clearer expression of truly living in closer harmony with God. It is not a confrontational encounter where by the evangelist convinces sinners to forsake the road to hell (though there are some elements of truth in that idea

and occasionally under rare circumstances that might occur). The primary role of an evangelist is to come alongside a person and both explain and display a fuller picture of the way to attain to eternal life, glory, honor and peace with God. Few indeed are able to truly do this.

This is exactly the picture we see in the book of Acts. Luke records:

Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert. So he arose and went.

And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet.

Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go near and overtake this chariot.”

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him...

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at [the] Scripture [where the eunuch was reading], preached Jesus to him. (Acts 8:26-31,35)

The eunuch was a man already seeking God when Philip provided a clearer picture of the way of Christ. We find a similar picture when Peter preaches the gospel to Cornelius. Luke records that Cornelius was

...a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always. (Acts 10:2)

Peter did not even get to finish his preaching before the Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household just as He had come upon the waiting disciples

in the upper room - an event that presented a broader application of Christ's sacrifice than even Peter and those of the circumcision were eager to make. (Acts 10:44-45)

It is in this light that Jesus' words,

For many are called,
but few are chosen. (Mt.
22:14),

**A true shepherd
guards the sheep
and leads them into
safe pastures where
the sheep eat all
they want all by
themselves.**

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finally make sense. The many who are called are those who have eternity in their hearts.

(see Eccl. 3:11) The few who are chosen are those who have pursued, found and obeyed that eternity, those who have worked out their salvation with fear and trembling. (Phlp. 2:12-13) Again,

...those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...shall be filled. (Mt. 5:6)

and

...everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God. (Jn. 3:20-21)

and

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Rom. 8:14)

Let he who has ears hear.

Don't be fooled, though. Manufacturing sons of hell is not just done at evangelistic crusades. Large scale factories, called seminaries, are set up in nearly every denomination. Most denominational "churches" have begun as a breakaway from some older, more established sect or denomination.

Quite often, one of the complaints about the older sect is that their seminaries, the schools whereby they educate their preachers, “pastors” and leaders in their peculiar doctrines and creeds, produce only lifeless sermonizers - the source of the derogatory jokes about the seminary really being the cemetery! Yet, not many years down the road, the new sect is establishing schools that produce yet more lifeless sermonizers. This is evidence that the ruler of false religion is more in control at denominational headquarters than most will admit to. Seminaries remain the most efficient way for the “churches” to produce and promote more sons of hell (tares - Mt. 13:38) that run the “church” so that the wheat continues to receive regular inoculations of “truth” so that everyone so inoculated will remain quiet and passive in their pews.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! (Mt. 23:23-24)

The notion of tithing, an element of the law, is one that has been taken up by “churches,” “pastors,” “prophets” and “apostles” all because it is a sure-fire means of funding whatever work these “men of God” want to do in the name of Christ. We have been freed from the law and its requirements by Christ’s death on the cross (Col. 2:14) - except for the tithe (or so these deceived men teach). Bringing believers subtly back under legalistic requirements is another one of the ruler of false religion’s most successful strategies and we will address it in detail in the next section. Suffice it to say that the notion of tithing, giving a set percentage of one’s increase or income to a particular class of people (most often clergy), is totally absent from the New Testament.

Rather, we have been totally and eternally bought at a precious price (the life and blood of Christ - 1 Cor. 6:19-20) *Everything* we have and are is His. If He tells us to sell all that we have and give it away, that is His right as our Lord. If we refuse to do that or anything else He might command us, then, just as He did with the rich young ruler, He will watch us walk away and He will do nothing to stop us or to get us to come back on any other terms

than our complete and total obedience to Him. (see Mk. 10:17-23)

The ruler of false religion has worked long and hard to re-install the tithe because it allows us to wrongfully think of the other, larger percentage as our own to dispose of as we wish. The tithe is the temptation and opportunity to practice lawlessness, doing what is right in our own eyes, with the resources God has graciously allowed us to steward. The tithe also allows us to feel like we have done our

religious duty - after all, we have given what we believe is required of us to support our own notions of "God's work." But the orphans, widows and least of Christ's brothers are still in need and we have personally done nothing to help them. Justice, mercy and faith are neglected as we obey a law the ruler of false religion has deceived men into believing is still part of the gospel of Christ.

Anyone converted to the "Christian" religion but not converted to Christ Himself is twice the son of hell as the "evangelist" who converts him and the "church" "pastor" to whom the convert is sent for "discipleship."

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Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like white-washed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Mt. 23:25-28)

There are some words here that Jesus uses to characterize the works of the Jewish leaders under extreme bondage to the ruler of false religion. They are *extortion and self-indulgence* (Mt. 23:25) and *hypocrisy and lawlessness*. (Mt. 23:28) Hypocrisy is proclaiming one thing while practicing

its opposite. Lawlessness, as we have already seen repeatedly, is doing what is right in one's own eyes, pursuing one's own agendas. When we combine this latter pair of words with the former pair, we find a rather ugly picture. The religious leaders preached one thing but practiced another. They preached obedience to God, even with threats of judgment (extortion), but practiced, in their own private thoughts and lives, all manner of self-serving, truly wicked acts (lawlessness). Today's "church" with its exalted clergy and passive crowds, is producing the same kinds of people - only on a larger scale. So long as one makes his appearance at the weekly "church" "service," that one is a good "Christian" - no matter where he goes or what he does or how he behaves the rest of the week! What a lie!

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!
Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, "If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? (Mt. 23:29-33)

The modern "church" system also builds its versions of "tombs of the prophets" and adorns its versions of "monuments to the righteous" - the "church" building. What was the result of the Jews' tombs and monuments? They looked backward upon a religion that only brought death and condemnation (2 Cor. 3:7,9) and failed to be able to look forward and receive Christ, their Messiah, when He arrived. In the same way, those building up "churches" but not the body of Christ are not going to be ready to receive Christ when He returns. The past is never more important than the present and certainly never more important than our ongoing relationship with God. The tombs and monuments allowed the Jews to sink vast amounts of time, money and resources into buildings (thus stroking their religious egos) but the orphans, the widows and the poor were still unattended to. In the same way, we can invest our time and resources into buildings and programs that stroke our religious egos or we can, by the Spirit of Christ, attend to the poor, the

orphans, widows and least of Christ's brothers.

It is significant that one of the signs Jesus pointed to when reassuring John the Baptist that He was the Christ was that the good news was being preached *to the poor*. (Mt. 11:5) When the Spirit of Christ is truly in control of the

people of God, the poor have their needs met. (see Dt. 15:7-8; Acts 4:34; Gal. 2:10) When the ruler of false religion is successful in deceiving people, time, money and vast amounts of resources are diverted into buildings and programs that, in the end, don't matter at all. The people of Christ have forgotten too many times that God does not live in temples made by human hands (Acts 7:48) and that we, the people of Christ, *are* His temple (1 Cor. 3:16), a temple built with *living* stones. (1 Pet. 2:4-5) The temples - "churches" - built by the machinations of the ruler of false religion only heap up judgment for their builders.

What is a *living stone*? Hot flowing magma is probably the easiest comparison to make, especially in contrast to blocks and bricks which have had the life baked out of them in some kiln and which are then cooled into a lump useful only for things like building a wall to keep things on one side or the other or for being a stumbling block for someone to trip over. If we really think about it, what substance other than magma would make a fitting house for our God who is a consuming fire? (Heb. 12:29) Those who would build God a house with wood, hay or straw will find first that He will not move into the house they have built for Him (Acts 7:48) and then, one day, to complete the waste and futility, all their work will be destroyed by His fiery presence. (1 Cor. 3:12-15; also see 1 Cor. 3:9-10; Psa. 127:1)

Most people are ignorant of the origins of the "church" building and its accompanying rituals. It has no place in the New Testament but is rather a descendant of the Jewish synagogue. It is not a coincidence, in light of the fact that one of the ruler of false religion's names is Babylon the Great, that the synagogue (which has no place in the Old Testament either) was a by-product of Israel's Babylonian captivity. Jewish men, trying to preserve God's law and the Jewish traditions, built schools where they could teach

We have been totally and eternally bought at a precious price - the life and blood of Christ - *everything* we have and are is His.

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what they knew to the younger generations. In contrast to God's command to *parents* to teach His ways to their children (Dt. 11:19), children were now sent to these "public schools" to be taught by the professional teachers, the rabbis. The rabbis then produced the various, often contradictory traditions about the law of Moses. By Jesus' time, as the Gospels clearly attest, the traditions had become of more importance than the word of God. In fact, the traditions of the rabbis and elders were considered a "hedge" around the law - something which "protected" the law from being broken. The fallacy of such a notion is quite obvious to one who knows the strength of God's word. The LORD said to Isaiah,

...My word...that goes forth from My mouth...shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isa. 55:11)

The primary purpose of the law was to bring people to Christ. (Gal. 3:24) By building a "hedge" around the law, the ruler of false religion has been able to divert many from that primary purpose. (see also Mt. 13:31-32)

The first "church" building that we know of was in use around 200 A.D. It was originally someone's home (possibly willed to the people of Christ in that area after the original owner died but that is not certain.) At any rate, the "church" building was used to house the growing use of liturgies and more "church" buildings sprang up. In the third century, under Constantine who brought "Christianity" under the auspices of the Roman empire, many gaudy "churches" were built throughout the empire. These "churches" incorporated sections that separated the laity (the people, the disciples) from the clergy (the "bishops," "elders" and "deacons"). The platform (which visibly demonstrated the elevation of the clergy between the god of the temple and the people, the laity) and the "amba" (the lectern from which the words of the god of the temple were proclaimed, the pulpit) were borrowed from the pagan temples and made a part of the "church" building. This gave orators a place to practice Greek eloquence and the "pastor"/"bishop"/orator took his place on the elevated platform so as to speak down to men and be seen as a "superior" example of Christian knowledge and living - a new development in church history - and replaced the prophets, apostles and elders as the ones speaking God's messages for that time and season to the less mature, less

vocally gifted people. This has led to the mistaken notions that we must have a “sanctified” building in which to meet, that God only speaks to His people through the clergy, and that the words of the clergy are above challenge and above reproach. Advances in architectural techniques later enabled the “church” building, with its vaulted domes, arches and pointed steeples, to give forth the idea that God dwelt in unreachable heights when, in truth, He meets with us in *the secret place* (Mt. 6:6) deep in

The past is never more important than the present and certainly never more important than our ongoing relationship with God.

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our innermost being. All of these things combine together to rob us of our close, personal relationship with Christ - and there is too consistent a pattern of malicious deception for this all to be just a quirk of human history.

Needless to say, this transition, which spanned generations, being the subtle work of the ruler of false religion, has resulted in many people never attaining to the full measure of Christ and has resulted in many people who hunger for truth turning away from the “church” because of its many lies. (see 2 Pet. 2:2) This is also why church history is filled with reformers and martyrs who broke away from *hardened wineskins* (Lk. 5:37-38) seeking purer expressions of the body of Christ. But only a tiny handful have been able to completely break away from the “church” paradigm with its attending clergy. At times, the ruler of false religion has even revealed the truth about the “church,” in whole or in part, to bizarre extremists and false cults so as to keep the truth in reproach. The ruler of false religion is very good at what it does, keeping the followers of Christ away from the truth of Christ, and the “church” has become the modern day “hedge” around the gospel of Christ which keeps many people from being reconciled to God and from remaining obedient to Him.

The “church” in the last days, will be (and in many ways already is) the vehicle for the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith. (Mt. 24:10; 2 Ths. 2:3) People will be (and even already are) able to attend “sermons” filled with jokes, anecdotes and fables (some even about God and Jesus), feel like they’ve done their religious duty for the week and feel smugly superior because they are so tolerant of other people’s religion - after all, there are no

substantive differences between their version of “Christianity” and Judaism, Islam, Hindu, Buddhism or New Age philosophy. Everybody just needs to get along with each other and be “good” or “nice” to each other. The only thing intolerable will be those Christians who insist that Jesus alone - not another “Jesus,” not another gospel and not another spirit - is the only way, the only truth, the only life, the exclusive way to attain to reconciliation with God. (Jn. 14:6; 2 Cor. 11:4) These “narrow minded” people will be so intolerable that these “good” “church” folk will persecute and even kill these true Christians supposing they are doing service for God. (Mt. 23:34; Jn. 16:2) That is powerful deception.

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, 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, that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Mt. 23:34-36)

Those who have attempted to lay all the blame for deception and persecution on one sect (i.e., Catholic, Orthodox, etc.) as the sole repository of Babylon the Great’s religious influence have failed to grasp the vast scope of her work. The Jews would bear the guilt of blood spilled from Abel to Zechariah. (Mt. 23:35-36) Babylon the Great will bear the guilt

...of *all* who were slain on the earth. (Rev. 18:24 - emphasis added)

She *is*

...that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. (Rev. 17:18)

These kings are the principalities that have ruled or will rule the earth in their turn - and the text can be interpreted as meaning either human or demonic

beings. In addition to her religious propaganda work, this spirit may exercise authority over other demonic beings, particularly the principalities. This is a powerful being indeed. This is a much larger picture than what is presented by limiting her influence or presence to only one “Christian” sect.

Jesus said,

The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened. (Mt. 13:33)

The ruler of false religion has mixed the leaven of hypocrisy into the dispensing of God’s word in every organized (and disorganized) “church” that exists or has existed to this day. Anyone who has ever submitted to such a “church” is tainted by this ruler’s machinations to one degree or another and needs to repent and seek God’s complete deprogramming. Those who refuse to recognize this truth will be further enmeshed in this ruler’s darkness, perhaps irretrievably so.

Since most “Christians” are more familiar with the spirit of false religion through their “church” background than they are familiar with the Spirit of Christ, they either don’t know how to (or even to!) discern the spirits or else they fail to recognize the true Spirit of Christ when He manifests in some way that contradicts their preconceived notions about “Him.” Thus one truly walking in the Spirit of Christ (however imperfectly) is of a totally different spirit (the Spirit of God!) than the majority of people who claim to follow Christ. (see 2 Cor. 11:4)

Paul commanded us,

When the Spirit of Christ is truly in control of the people of God, the poor have their needs met. When the ruler of false religion is successful in deceiving people, time, money and vast amounts of resources are diverted into buildings and programs that, in the end, don’t matter at all.

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Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor. 5:7-8)

These words are spirit and they are life. Let he who has ears hear.

Legalism and Tradition

Rituals that mask over hypocrisy are only one of the ruler of false religion's grand schemes. Legalism and its twin, tradition, are some of the most insidious deceptions afoot. Legalism is to obey a law out of one's own resources. Tradition is simply law formed over time. So when we speak of law now, it really doesn't matter what source the law comes from. It can be God's law (the Mosaic law), "Christian" law (codes of morality and ethics based, however loosely, on Christ's teachings), religious law (denominational creeds and by-laws), social law (Southern gentility, the "gentlemen's club" rules, even diets and budgets are some examples) or even just one's own personal list of do's and don't's. The result is the same, though of course, the greater the source of the law that is misused, the greater the demonic control will be. That is, the demonic gains much greater control over one who obeys God's laws apart from Christ than they do over one who obeys some diet or code of conduct apart from Christ. Let us read the Scriptural warnings against legalism:

All of these things combine together to rob us of our close, personal relationship with Christ - and there is too consistent a pattern of malicious deception for this all to be just a quirk of human history.

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...the letter [of the law, that ministry of death] kills...
(2 Cor. 3:6-7)

...the law entered that the offense might abound...
(Rom. 5:20)

...the strength of sin is the law. (1 Cor. 15:56)

For sin, taking occasion by the commandment [law], deceived me, and by [the law] killed me. (Rom. 7:11)

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse... (Gal. 3:10)

You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace. (Gal. 5:4)

...you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. (Mt. 15:6)

...if those who are of the law are heirs [of God's promised righteousness and eternal life], faith is made void and the promise made of no effect... (Rom. 4:14)

Let us review that list before we move on. Trying to keep the law (when we cannot)

brings death (not life),

makes the offense greater (than when we acted in ignorance),

increases sin's power over us (brings us into greater bondage),

kills us (causes us to abide in death instead of life),

deceives us (into thinking we are better than we actually are),

places us under a curse (the same curse Jesus broke when He went to the cross),

separates us from Christ (because we, in our "goodness," don't think we need Christ's redemptive sacrifice),

removes us from the reach of God's life-changing power (His grace),

makes God's word have no effect on our hearts when we hear it,

voids or cancels our faith and

m a k e s u s ineligible to receive what God has promised because we really don't believe God (mostly because we don't have to).

Anyone who has ever submitted to such a "church" is tainted by this ruler's machinations to one degree or another and needs to repent and seek God's complete deprogramming.

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Yes, law and our attempts to live by law, is more than capable of rendering our spiritual life null and void.

This is the reason the ruler of false religion works so very hard to get us to obey laws, any laws: We don't need a personal connection with God to obey a list of rules. That list of rules, however broad or narrow in focus, creates a spot in our souls where we neither see nor feel the touch of the demonic as they reach their talons and tentacles into our hearts and minds, bringing about ever greater levels of darkness and control. All this can happen because we can practice that list of rules in varying degrees of success and failure and have absolutely nothing to do with God. We exercise our own knowledge of good and evil just by simply having such a list and we open up our lives to the demonic in the same way as did Adam and Eve. (Gen. 3:12-15) Most people end up practicing lawlessness (doing what is right in their own eyes) precisely because they maintain their own list of do's and don't's and practice whatever *they* feel or think is right or important. Though many of these things produce what appears to be good results, that which is done apart from Christ is nothing and is truly just something which wars against God and His will for our lives. (Jn. 15:5; Gal. 5:17)

Paul wrote,

Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. (Gal. 3:24-25)

If we properly apply the law, it leads us to the light of the good news of the glory of Christ. There is a way (Him) out of the darkness and into His light. He becomes our Head and we become His body. (1 Cor. 12:27) He commands and we do. By His power, He transforms us and we are transmitters of His light and life into the dark world around us.

Paul also wrote,

But if you are led by the Spirit [of God], you are not under the law. (Gal. 5:18)

If we are led by the Spirit of Christ, we will fulfill all of God's laws - we need not fear that the Holy Spirit of God will command or lead us to do an evil thing to someone. That is an absurd notion it is so impossible. Any spirit that would command or lead us to do something truly evil is a Satanic being. And this is why we must continue to walk *beside* (not under!) the law of God, letting its light and perfection reflect upon us and reveal where we walk in obedience to God and where we do not.

Perhaps the most damaging form of legalism Christians practice is in our relationships with one another. Any and all who claim to believe in Christ are to be received as brothers - or so the "law of brotherly love" is interpreted and applied. Or we are supposed to "look for Christ" in one another and overlook all sin, error and selfishness. These are nothing less than laws we have concocted to control our relations with other self-proclaimed "Christians."

Paul wrote:

...from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. (2 Cor. 5:16)

This verse is a favorite among those who practice obedience to the laws of tolerance and acceptance of one another. But the very act of having a law by which we receive one another is proof positive that we are indeed regarding

these “brothers” according to the flesh! Whether they truly are brothers or not only Christ and God know. Unless we rely on the Spirit of Christ to provide discernment, we have no hope of regarding anyone according to God’s perspective. When we adhere to some law by which we receive any and all who claim to be followers of Christ, we fail to discern Christ’s body - an act which makes us eligible for deception, sickness and even death. (see 1 Cor. 11:30-32) - and we remove ourselves

One truly walking in the Spirit of Christ (however imperfectly) is of a totally different spirit (the Spirit of God!) than the majority of people who claim to follow Christ.

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from His power, returning only to our own notions of good and evil. Our only hope of discerning the body of Christ or of knowing how to deal with each and every individual we meet as God would deal with them is to rely on the Spirit of God who lives within, not by relying on some rule or standard by which we judge, tolerate and/or accept others.

There are some who object to using the quantity of truth that one possesses as a standard by which to judge the validity of one’s claims of having real Christianity. That is, these say, we cannot judge a person as not being a genuine follower of Christ simply because they do not recognize, for example, the lies that make the “church” such an effective scheme of the devil to keep people from being conformed to the likeness of Christ. Whether another person is walking in the same truths as we are, these people say, cannot be the standard we use to extend or deny fellowship with that other person. There is merit to this objection - but in examining why there is merit, we will discover yet another misbelief which undoubtedly has crippled many believers in their walk with Christ and which offers the demonic yet another well-secluded hiding place from which to further attack and deceive souls.

The first merit to this objection is found in the fact that *no* standard will ever suffice by which we will be able to rightly judge those who claim to be our brothers and sisters in Christ. That is, no law or creed or standard will *ever* be capable of enabling us to spiritually discern the thoughts of Christ about any given person. Not only that, but obedience to any law, creed or standard in connection with our relations to one another virtually *guarantees*

that we will not be able to spiritually discern what the judgments of God are regarding that other person. Only the Spirit of Christ within knows whether we should embrace or reject, encourage or rebuke, comfort or reprove, listen to or instruct that person before us who claims to be a brother in Christ. Using any codified standard to gauge the validity of another's genuineness in Christ is short-sighted and misguided - as church history clearly attests. There simply are no rules by which we may rightly include or exclude one who claims to be our brother – there is only a Head, Christ Jesus, who knows very well whom He has received and whom He has not.

The second merit to this objection is found in the fact that God does not judge any of us by how much truth we have at any given moment but rather by the attitudes of our heart toward truth, of which Christ is the epitome, the ultimate expression of truth. If all we have is a little bit of genuine truth, a little bit of genuine light, if we keep that, it will be enough. (1 Jn. 2:24) But what happens when we are exposed to more light, more truth - especially light or truth that contradicts what we think we know or that requires us to deny ourselves so that we might follow after Christ - is a very real indicator of the validity of our Christianity. One who resists and rejects genuine truth is not going to be one who receives eternal life, glory, honor and peace from God (Rom. 2:7-10) but rather will receive from God a strong delusion that enables them to believe Satan's lies. (2 Ths. 2:11-12) One who claims to be a Christian but who resists and/or rejects genuine revelation from the Spirit of Christ is one who is in the process of removing himself from the narrowing road that leads to life and is returning to the wide, smooth, slippery highway that leads to eternal death.

What is really exposed by this objection is the misconception that salvation is a static condition or an unchanging state of existence. True salvation is life. It is the *process* of *being transformed* from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18), of *growing* in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:17-18), of *being renewed* in spirit and transformed ever more into His likeness (Rom. 12:2), etc. Using the amount of truth that one possesses at any one time to gauge the validity of that one's salvation is like trying to understand and evaluate a movie (motion picture) by looking at only one picture frame from that movie. If we need an indicator right now of another's genuineness in Christ, we should ask Christ who will tell us all we really need to know. (Jas. 1:5) Then let us encourage one another to carefully walk in truth and light for

one who resists and rejects God's truth is not going to fare very well on judgment day and is certainly not a good role model to follow or imitate today. With such a one, it is impossible to have genuine fellowship in Christ (1 Jn. 1:7) though we can certainly expend a great deal of time and effort trying to manufacture some kind of "Christian" "unity."

Law, and our attempts to live by law, is more than capable of rendering our spiritual life null and void.

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Once we know Christ, to return to *any* list of rules is to reject Him as our Head in direct proportion to the scale to which our laws apply. The success of the ruler of false religion can be seen:

first in the fact that so few who name the name of Christ know what the proper place and function of law is (namely, prior to conversion, to show how sinful sinners really are - Rom. 7:7-8 - and, after conversion, to remain as a mirror to confirm or deny our likeness to Christ's characteristics and His requirements - compare Psa. 19:7-9 with Eph. 5:25-27);

second in the prevalence of trying to live by portions of the "Christian" code (the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, etc.);

third in the reliance upon creeds and traditions rather than the personal leading of the Holy Spirit of Christ; and

fourth in the widespread failure of many to recognize when we are subtly adhering to some law (in contrast to truly living only by the leading of Christ's Spirit).

If we would be free of the ruler of false religion in this regard, we must set aside our own opinions of what is good and evil, right and wrong, etc. and set ourselves at the feet of our Master Christ and allow Him to dictate our actions. An illustration might be helpful here.

In olden days, a king kept a retinue of servants on hand who simply sat in his presence awaiting orders. One servant would be sent on this errand, another on that and so on. The servants were to listen not only to the particular instructions for their own mission but to everything the king said so that when they were sent on their mission, they would know the heart of the king and could respond accordingly to unforeseen circumstances. Some days no servants would go out, other days they would all be sent out - it did not matter. Their responsibility was to simply sit there and listen until they were sent out.

So too are we to sit at our King's feet. We are to know His word, the Bible, as best we can - and not as men are teaching it. We live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of *God* - not the mouths of men. (see Dt. 8:3; Mt. 4:4) Then, when our turn to serve arises - and it will - we carry the treasures of our King in our earthen vessel and share them as He dictates so that

...the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Cor. 4:7)

Adhering to some law or tradition out of our own resources simply means that we are not sitting quietly at our Lord's feet. We are loudly telling Him what we ought and ought not be doing. This only produces confusion, the work of the devil, and does not produce the fruits of righteousness in our lives. It also opens doors for the demonic to enter in and control more of our lives by bringing us into more bondage to their lies.

Displacing Christ

The second ruler of the darkness of this age we will examine is the one John calls the spirit of antichrist. For the purposes of our study (and to get away from preconceptions as to who and what this spirit is), let us call him the ruler of displacing Christ. Here is why. The word *anti* in Greek has two elements. First is *against*, the

element of antagonism and enmity. Second is *in the place of*, the element of substitution and replacement. The goal of the ruler of displacing Christ is to get us to put any man or any thing in any rightful place of Christ and/or His Spirit without our noticing the switch in any way. This, as are all the works of the Satanic rulers of darkness, is done by deception and not coercive force.

In attempting to define this ruler's scope of activities, we are immediately confronted with the impossibility of exposing every place he might strike at us. Why? Because Christ is to be our all, our everything, our total sufficiency for life and godliness. This evil being uses one stratagem to displace Christ in one victim one way but with another victim he works another way. Let us examine his most common deceptions and trust the Holy Spirit to expose any further deceptions not covered here.

The most blatant scheme of this ruler is that of dividing the body of Christ into the distinctions of clergy and laity. This division carries with it an inherent over/under element that is antithetical to Christ's teachings and that is particularly offensive to God. Jesus said to the ekklesia of Ephesus,

...you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (Rev. 2:6)

and to the ekklesia of Pergamos,

...you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent... (Rev. 2:15-16)

There has been no exclusive sect throughout church history that has ever been conclusively shown to be the Nicolaitans. Some early writers tried

Any spirit that would command or lead us to do something truly evil is a Satanic being.

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to link them to the Balaamites in the ekklesia of Pergamos but that link is not in the Scriptures. (see Rev. 2:14) When we analyze the Greek word, we find their identity. *Nico-* is *to conquer or rule over* and *-laitan* is *people*. That Jesus would hate the deeds and teachings of those who would rule over His people is very consistent with His earlier teaching.

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you... (Mt. 20:25-26)

In a parallel account, Luke records Jesus as saying,

The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called “benefactors.” But not so among you... (Lk. 22:25-26)

The idea of one believer passing edicts and commands down to other believers, even when done “for the benefit of the younger believers,” is a concept foreign to the gospel of Christ. It has been imported from some place else. Where? The ruler of displacing Christ has been hard at work since the first century.

John wrote,

...this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 Jn. 4:3)

This ruler of darkness has been working hard at his job since the time of the apostle John. And again, it is one of the Satanic’s best deceptions that causes us to believe that the demonic is not very effective at what it does.

When the first believers met, they recognized the apostles because the Spirit of God had clearly chosen them. (see Acts 5:12-14) Because the apostles could not handle the word of God and watch over the distribution of food to the growing multitudes of believers at the same time, they recognized seven men, deacons, whom the people had nominated. (Acts 6:1-6) Similarly, Paul, on his missionary journeys, recognized elders in the cities and towns to which he traveled. (Acts 14:23) Paul gives specific qualifications for both

elders and deacons in the New Testament. (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Tit. 1:5-9) And Peter echoes the teaching of Jesus when he writes,

The elders who are among you I exhort... Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers... [not] as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock... (1 Pet. 5:1-3)

There simply are no rules by which we may rightly include or exclude one who claims to be our brother – there is only a Head, Christ Jesus, who knows very well whom He has received and whom He has not.

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Had the followers of Christ stayed within this simple framework, there would be no room for the clergy.

The confusion begins because two Greek words are used for elder: episkopos (rendered *bishop* or *overseer*) and presbuteros (rendered *elder*). Throughout the New Testament these words are completely interchangeable and they have no separate meanings but rather a differing emphasis: episkopos, what he *does* (watch or guard, not lord over, the flock) and presbuteros, what he *is* (an older, wiser, more experienced man in the faith). The depth of confusion and contention these two words have wrought over the centuries can be seen in that two whole denominations - the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians - have taken these names and divided from one another and the rest of Christendom.

But, as time went on and the usage of koine Greek died off, the “bishop,” probably because he was more involved with the money aspects or because he was the more gifted public speaker, began to have more pre-eminence than the other elders. (also see 3 Jn. 9) The position of “bishop” became a “first among equals” of sorts (in spite of the fact that this is an oxymoron, an unintelligible contradiction in terms) and, before 200 A.D., the position of “bishop” over the people was in place in every city to which the gospel had spread. No sect or practice of Christianity since has been

completely free of this insertion of a second lord over the people of Christ. It was and still is a tremendous victory for the ruler of displacing Christ.

Believe it or not, the roots of the word “clergy” come to us from Peter’s instruction to the elders to not be lords over the flock!

...neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. (1 Pet. 5:3 KJV)

The word rendered *heritage* (Greek *kleros*) here is rendered *lot* or *portion* elsewhere (Acts 1:26; 8:21) and refers to the portion, goods, advantage or wealth incurred through inheritance, gambling, ministry or even war. The flock, the whole flock, was God’s portion or share of the prize in the New Testament. But from that Greek word, (*kleros*), within two centuries, the clergy would be “more prized” by God according to the “church” “fathers.” The extent to which the ruler of displacing Christ has been successful in blinding men’s minds to the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ is never so apparent as here. He takes the very command to not lord over the flock and concocts a “Scriptural” basis for lording over the flock! Thus, it is not a rare occurrence today for a “pastor” or his assistants (all members of the clergy class) to denounce the evils of clergyism - all while they hate for anyone to call them clergy! The blind are never so blind as when they refuse to see.

Paul wrote,

Whenever you come together, each of you... (1 Cor. 14:26)

Each of you! Not just the bishop or the elder and certainly not the clergy’s counterfeit version of these people!

...*each of you* has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. (1 Cor. 14:26 - emphasis added)

The glory of Christ is severely squelched when only one person is permitted to present Christ. And the lords of darkness love that this is so! Christ is

present in *every* member of His body and desires to shine forth from *every* believer, especially when we are gathered together in His name. Nothing has preserved the darkness around believers so well as being regularly spoken down to by some man who has ignorantly and/or arrogantly stepped into a place reserved for Christ alone.

What happens when we are exposed to more light, more truth - especially light or truth that contradicts what we think we know or that requires us to deny ourselves so that we might follow after Christ - is a very real indicator of the validity of our Christianity.

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How has this deception gone on for so long? In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the wheat is said to be the sons of the kingdom and the tares are the sons of the wicked one. (Mt. 13:38) The owner of the field (representing God) instructs his servants,

Let both grow together until the harvest... (Mt. 13:30)

and Jesus clarifies the point by saying,

...the harvest is the end of the age... (Mt. 13:39)

Though there are no ambiguities in the New Testament regarding such topics as faith, love, salvation, etc., there was a window of sorts left open regarding leadership so that the sons of light and the sons of darkness could grow to full maturity side by side until the end of the age, a day that is now fast upon us. Angels are soon to be dispatched to

...gather out of [Christ's] kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness [pursue their own agenda]... (Mt. 13:41)

With time so short, God is making it very apparent now just what makes a

wheat a wheat and a tare a tare. If we want to be counted among the wheat - and not removed with the tares to the furnace of fire where there will be wailing and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 13:42) - we must purify ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.

What is the difference between the wheat and the tares? John wrote:

In this the children of God [the wheat - Mt. 13:38] and the children of the devil [the tares - Mt. 13:38] are manifest [displayed, made apparent]: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love [agape] his brother. (1 Jn. 3:10)

Living rightly before God in all our ways and laying down our lives for our brothers are not optional qualities for the sons of light. These are *the sign* that one *is* a son of light and not a child of the devil!

Assembling Together

It has been rightly said that our relationship with Christ has two elements - vertical and horizontal. The vertical element is our relationship with God and, as we have seen, the ruler of displacing Christ has erected mighty schemes to deceive us into bringing into our life with God some substitute for Christ. But there is also a horizontal element to our life in Christ, our relationships with one another, and the ruler of displacing Christ is eager to insert his deceptions here as well.

John wrote,

...if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another... (1 Jn. 1:7)

As we have already been seeing (and our study is far from complete) most people claiming to follow Christ are steeped in the deceptions of the lords of darkness. If our life with God is devoid of truth - or, at the least, severely compromised with webs of deceptions we have believed to be true - what can be said for our relationships with one another? If our relations with God are not founded on truth as we suppose, what hope is there for our human interactions? Yet we have the audacity to call our gatherings “fellowship”!

The average “Christian” gathering is so far off the mark that many have tried to make “church” attendance under the tutelage of the clergy mandatory - at times persecuting, ostracizing, oppressing or even executing those who would not comply with that sect’s “Sabbath laws.” “Forsake not the assembly...” (Heb. 10:25), they say. Let’s look at that passage more carefully so that we may be freed once and for all time from that lie of the rulers of darkness.

When we examine this passage in Hebrews, we must first notice that this instruction to assemble is given in two contexts: First, we may boldly

Using the amount of truth that one possesses at any one time to gauge the validity of that one’s salvation is like trying to understand and evaluate a movie (motion picture) by looking at only one picture frame from that movie.

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enter the Holiest (a reference to the innermost part of God's dwelling place) because Jesus' blood has purified us. (Heb. 10:19) That is (to use John's vernacular), because Jesus has removed the barrier between sinful man and holy God, we may abide in Him. Second, we *have*

...a High Priest over the house of God... (Heb. 10:21)

We don't need a priest (clergy) ruling over the house of God and we certainly don't need a substitute god because the role of priest over the people of God has been completely filled by Christ. There is neither need nor place for any other - neither man nor spiritual being - in that capacity. (see also 1 Tim. 2:5)

With these two understandings in place, the writer gives three instructions, the third of which is the one about assembly.

1) *Let us draw near* to God. (Heb. 10:22)

2) *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope* in Him who is faithful. (Heb. 10:23)

3) And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day [of the Lord's return and His judgment] approaching. For if we willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:24-29)

It is indeed amazing how much different this passage sounds when one

reads it in its proper context! Let us analyze it further by turning it into a formula that shows the direction of thought of the author. It would read something like this:

Because of
[A,B], let us
[1,2,3], not [-3]
but [3a] or else
[C]. [C₁] = 10;
[C₂] = 10¹⁰. [C₂]
= [X,Y,Z]

Now, let's put that back into English.

Because:

[A] we may boldly enter into the fullness of
God and

[B] Christ is our High Priest,

let us:

[1] draw near to God,

[2] hold fast our faith, and

[3] stir one another to love and good works;

not:

[-3] forsaking
our assembling
together

but:

The goal of the ruler of displacing Christ is to get us to put any man or any thing in any rightful place of Christ and/or His Spirit without our noticing the switch in any way.

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[3a] exhorting
one another

Or else:

[C] expect judgment from God that devours
His enemies.

[C₁] The judgment for
rejecting Moses' law was
death.

[C₂] The judgment for:

[X] trampling
Christ
underfoot,

[Y] devaluing
the blood of
Christ, and

[Z] insulting
the Spirit of
grace

is exponentially worse.

If we look at the penalty alone -

...a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery
indignation which will devour the adversaries... (Heb. 10:27) -

we must conclude that this is indeed a serious offense. If we were to apply
the "church's" spin - that the weekly lecture given by the clergy is "the
assembly" and "not being in church" is "forsaking the assembly" - then we

could reasonably conclude that those exiting the “church” building should be the ones to expect to be hit by lightning or, at least, a speeding truck! After all, every time they leave the “church” or miss a sermon, they’re “forsaking the assembly.” (This is often exactly how this passage is explained by “church” leaders!) But, as we examine the passage in its context, since there are three exhortations, we must conclude that the penalty applies to those who fail to obey all three exhortations, not just one of the three. Under the “church” spin, the penalty - fiery judgment - does not match up to the crime and the “church” application breeds only fear and guilt.

**Living rightly before God
in all our ways and laying
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light. These are *the sign*
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and not a child of the
devil!**

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So what does it mean to *assemble*? While there is not a point for point comparison, it can nonetheless be stated that points [X], [Y] and [Z] correspond to points -[1], -[2] and -[3]. That is, one who does not [1] draw near, does not [2] hold fast and does not [3] stir up *is* one who [X] tramples, [Y] devalues and [Z] insults. Using the same kind of comparison of the text to itself, it is thus true that [3] stirring up and [3a] exhorting one’s brothers and sisters in Christ *is* the same activity as *assembling together*. Now we have a much more clear definition, from the Scripture itself, just what *assembly* means.

So with this correct view of *assembly*, let us now picture ourselves in a usual “church” “service.” Unless one is the “pastor” or someone who enjoys his favor, is there any chance we might truly *assemble* in that “church” “service”? That is, could we actively stir up and exhort the other people in the audience? (And that’s assuming we actually know somebody in that crowd well enough to *consider* what might stir them into godly, loving action! - Heb. 10:24) No! We would quickly be the recipients of the zealous attentions of the “bouncer ministry”! One simply *cannot assemble* (that is *consider, stir up and exhort*) within a modern “church” “service” - it is forbidden to do so in the average “church” gathering today.

However we might view this passage, one clear result stands out: The writer is *not* speaking *in any way* of attending a “church” “service” dominated by a Nicolaitan clergy and characterized by a silent, passive audience. Such notions would be an abomination to the writer of Hebrews.

Do any other New Testament passages touch on this issue? Yes. Paul gives a clear picture of genuine assembly when he writes,

...that we...may grow up in all things into Him who is the head - Christ - from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. 4:14-16)

What does Paul say causes growth of the body? When Christ Himself sits up in heaven with His spiritual Crazy Glue and joins body parts together like some divine Dr. Frankenstein? No. The body grows and is built up together, Paul says, when the “pastor” supplies and the “church” staff does its share? Again, no. In fact, when the “pastor” and staff attempt to do this, they step into a place that actually *prevents* the body of Christ from being built up - and the rulers of darkness love that this is so! When *every* joint takes what it has received of the Spirit of grace and supplies it to the adjoining joint and when *every* part does its share - then and only then will the body of Christ be assembled together and grow.

Now, if we take this passage and compare it back to the passage in Hebrews about assembling, the one who fails to stir up his brothers to love and good works (Heb. 10:24) and who will not exhort them (Heb. 10:25) - the joint that fails to pass on what he has received from Christ, the part that refuses to do its share (Eph. 4:16) - that one *has* trampled the Son of God (especially His body) underfoot, he *has* treated Christ’s blood (which paid for us all) as a cheap, common thing (his brothers and sisters certainly aren’t worth his time and effort) and he *has* insulted the Spirit of grace (by failing to function in the power that brings forth the life of Christ from within - Heb. 10:29) Such a one *is* worthy of judgment and this is the only interpretation that makes sense: Forsaking the assembling of ourselves together means that we are refusing or neglecting to be the body part that God made us to be.

(also see 1 Cor. 12:24-25) This is what the writer of Hebrews is referring to, not a “church” “service.”

The sadly ironic part is that the one who routinely attends a “church” “service” dominated by the Nicolaitan clergy, who relies on the “pastor” to “feed the sheep,” is the one who routinely forsakes the assembling of ourselves together because he fails to be the body part Christ would have him be. Instead, he is in “church” every time the doors are open! He relies on the “pastor” to “feed” him and all the others around him and he does not do his share. The ruler of displacing Christ has done his deceptive work all too well in this category.

When we tie the concept of assembling being the building up of the body of Christ (Heb. 10:24-25; Eph. 4:14-16) to John’s statement that

...if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another... (1 Jn. 1:7),

we find a seamless connection here as well. As we walk in the light, we will receive from the Spirit of Christ and we will, because the other is also in tune to receive from Christ, be able to pass along what has been supplied to us. We will do our part and the others around us will receive what we give and pass it along to others in turn. We will also receive from these others in the same way. *This* is fellowship - a unity with the Person and purpose and actions of the Spirit of Christ by every member of Christ’s body present at that time and in that place. Anything else is just “church” - a lie practiced in Christ’s name.

Merely herding bodies into and out of the lecture hall (“sanctuary” in most “churches”) does not constitute fellowship in Christ. At best, it constitutes a mixed multitude, the kind Jesus most often had to get away from so that He could pass on the deeper things of God to His closest disciples and friends.

We don’t need a priest (clergy) ruling over the house of God and we certainly don’t need a substitute god because the role of priest over the people of God has been completely filled by Christ.

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The LORD spoke through Isaiah:

Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies - *I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting*. (Isa. 1:13 - emphasis added)

Through the prophet Amos, the LORD God of hosts, the Lord, said:

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies... Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Amos 5:21,23-24 - emphasis added)

Has God changed? Does He now tolerate iniquity in the sacred assembly of His people? Is it now appropriate and acceptable to God to be unrighteous and hypocritical in one's "private" life but outwardly "sacred" and "holy" when gathering for "church" with other "Christians" for "Sunday worship"? No! A thousand times, *No!!!* So why do we continue to gather large crowds of wicked, semi-wicked, somewhat holy and holy people together in the name of Christ? Because in such arenas, the demonic can do much more of their work even while Christ does His work to keep the true wheat from being completely corrupted by the tares and the demonic. In short, we do the work of the demonic by building large halls to comfortably seat the mixed multitude so we can entertain and amuse them on their way to hell!

Jesus did not say, "Where two *or more* are gathered in My name, there I am in the midst." He did say,

For where *two or three* are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. (Mt. 18:20 - emphasis added)

This is the gathering of Christ's ekklesia - two or three believers and Jesus!

It is a concept of the world that more is better. Not so with Christ. Gather more than two or three people and someone becomes a spectator. It is significant that the earliest apostles, probably in twos, went to *every* house - and probably stayed there a few days - to serve the word of God to every household. (Acts 5:42;

Lk. 10:1,5-7) Following Christ is most decidedly not a spectator sport though the rulers of darkness would love to have us believe that it is.

Some decades ago, the shepherding movement began because some people recognized that a true pastor was a lot more than a distant Bible lecturer displaying an aura of infallibility from behind a pulpit on a platform that visibly proclaimed his spiritual superiority over the crowd. Unfortunately, these people were not completely free of the ruler of displacing Christ's influences and the "personal pastor" system quickly became as abominable as the "church pastor" system. The "church pastor" ruled over many; the "personal pastor" ruled over only a relative few. But there was still a second head over people of Christ; someone had arrogantly and/or ignorantly stepped yet again into the place reserved for Christ alone. Only Christ is the head of His body. Receive no substitutes!

While the shepherding movement (the "personal pastor") did produce (in some fortunate few) deeper relations between men truly seeking God than did the "church's" clergy/laity fixed-gulf dilemma, it still falls short of the basis on which our fellowship is attained. Again,

...if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we *have* fellowship with one another... (1 Jn. 1:7 - emphasis added)

Since we are Christ's body (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27) and Christ is the head of the body (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18), we may turn to modern medical science's discoveries as to how God created the human body to provide us an

When *every* joint takes what it has received of the Spirit of grace and supplies it to the adjoining joint and when *every* part does its share - then and only then will the body of Christ be assembled together and grow.

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insight into the role and function of the Holy Spirit. He is the nervous system that is the command pathway between the brain and all the body parts. As such, the Holy Spirit not only links us to the Head but He also links us to one another. The over/under relationship of the “pastor” (whether “church” or “personal”) is a disease or appendage that attaches itself to and interrupts the flow of the Spirit between brothers who truly hold equal standing before God. God still *hates* the deeds and practices of the Nicolaitans (Rev. 2:6,15) though He has tolerated them for the sake of His true wheat. (Mt. 13:30) God’s forbearance and tolerance should not be mistaken for approval or license - His judgment upon those who lord over His flock will surely come and soon. (see 2 Pet. 2:9)

Tolerance or Unity

The ruler of displacing Christ works extremely hard to get us to relate to one another by any means other than the Spirit of Christ. This is the source of the denominational “churches.” One group agrees with one teacher or creed but the second group adheres to another teacher or creed - in truth neither group is completely abiding in Christ. Thus now two more divisions of purported followers of Christ are formed and the way of truth is further blasphemed. (2 Pet. 2:1-2)

We do the work of the demonic by building large halls to comfortably seat the mixed multitude so we can entertain and amuse them on their way to hell!

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Because many people are seeing the evil and the destructiveness of denominationalism (of which most so-called non-denominational “churches” are still denominational in their practices and outlook), there is now a tendency to form what can only be called tolerance clubs. The people there, because they have come out from various “Christian” “churches” or denominations, still cling to certain religious beliefs (leftover religious baggage). But they know that others around them carry conflicting beliefs left over from their religious background. Rather than risk arguing, fighting and forming yet more denominations, these people take a tolerant approach to the differing beliefs of others. Rather than coming together and relying on the Spirit of truth (whose wisdom is first pure then *peaceable* - Jas. 3:17) to lead them into all truth (Jn. 16:13), they sacrifice the sacred, holy assembly and allow their “fellowship” to be a hiding place for all sorts of heresy and error. (also see Isa. 1:13) The result is groups that talk about “authentic relationships” but which try to build these “relationships” on superficial and deceptive premises using tools like innuendo, religious masks, supposition and false expectations to keep everybody being “nice” to each other. About the only thing the tolerance clubs will not tolerate are those who won’t tolerate the sins and errors of the tolerance club participants!

Paul wrote:

...have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the

bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1,3)

Because of the depth of Paul's thoughts here - and because the demonic will attack us in any possible way to keep us living in anything but the unity of the Spirit - there are few who practice real obedience to this instruction.

Oh, to be sure, the tolerance clubs preach a message of unity. But their underlying definition of this unity is flawed and hazy. Their "unity" is either a "spiritual unity" - that is, "We all possess some spirituality therefore we should practice some form of unity" - or else it is a mere tolerance of one another's personal (especially theological) preferences and personality quirks and a preservation of one another's "personal peace" (that is, the personal "right" to be let alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people, to live one's life with minimal personal disruptions from others, especially from the realities of others' lives and woes - see Francis Schaeffer's *How Should We Then Live?*) This "live and let live" attitude is especially prevalent in self-centered affluent cultures that seek most to preserve only their own comforts.

What is the real unity of the Spirit? Jesus said:

If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (Jn. 14:23)

He also said:

I do not pray for these [Twelve and Seventy] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. (Jn. 17:20-23)

This unity with Father, Son and Spirit by the Spirit is the unity by which we

have all things of God. In this unity, we have the righteousness of Christ (1 Cor. 1:30), we have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and we have the Spirit that searches the deep things of God and makes them known to us. (1 Cor. 2:10-12) Apart from this unity we have and can do nothing. (Jn. 15:5) What foolishness it is to look to any other source for our unity with one another. Yet there are those who unwittingly do so.

Following Christ is most decidedly not a spectator sport though the rulers of darkness would love to have us believe that it is.

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There are people who place great emphasis on “building relationships” with one another, thinking that they must build a bridge between themselves that will sufficiently support whatever loads (discipleship, instructions, corrections, reproofs, rebukes, etc.) that need sent across this bridge. The picture this presents is ludicrous. In the foreground stands this massive structure of a well-designed, well-built, fully-operational bridge (the Holy Spirit) that will support a weight comparable to the heaviest of tanks, armored warfare machines and the heaviest and largest of construction equipment and that can, has and always will withstand all the bombardments of the enemy! This bridge spans all the way across a vast and deep chasm. Yet, in the very shadow of this bridge, men are trying to throw ropes and long boards across this deep chasm which, even when they manage to reach the other side (another believer in Christ) with these things, they will never support the heavy and deep things of God that must go across in order for there to be a real and deep (offensively truthful and painfully self-sacrificing) relationship of love between genuine brothers in Christ. And the massive bridge that will easily sustain such loads remains unused and untouched!

What this also accomplishes is to put these people who attempt to manufacture their own bridges under the power of the ruler of displacing Christ - that Satanic spirit that tricks us into putting anyone or any thing in any rightful place of Christ or His Spirit. In this case, people feel required to “make friends” by putting up with (tolerating) all manner of sin and wickedness so that they might maintain this thing called “relationship” on the off chance that, at some point in the future (maybe even years down the road), some expression of truth might be expressed between them. The fallacy of

this - that man-made bridges could ever support the things of God - ought to be evident to all. But the spirit of antichrist, taking advantage of centuries of religious foolishness, is quite able to deceive many.

Any unity that is not based upon the Person of Christ and union with Him by His Spirit is a false unity. What are some of the characteristics by which we may know what kind of unity we are participating in? That is, are we truly practicing the unity of the Spirit as referred to by Paul or are we involved in a false unity based on flawed ideas of men? In the broadest of terms we can judge the genuineness of our unity by comparing it with the characteristics of the Spirit of God.

The first clue is that He is the *Holy* Spirit. Our unity with one another, if it is truly based in Him, will be characterized and will promote true *holiness* - that is, our being totally and completely set apart for the purposes of God - and not just adhering to someone's legalistic standards of religious behaviors. Compromise with worldliness and sin will be as foreign to us as it was to Christ. Any unity that tolerates worldliness, lawlessness (personal preferences and agendas) or sin is not the unity of the Spirit of holiness.

Closely related to holiness is truth - and this is another name of the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of truth. (Jn. 14:17) Our unity with one another will not be characterized by tolerance of falsehoods - neither in the way we deal with one another nor in the wearing of masks by which we might deceive one another nor especially in the teachings (doctrines) by which we instruct one another. No lie is of the truth (1 Jn. 2:21) and any unity built on any kind of lie is not the unity of the Spirit of truth.

The Holy Spirit is also called the eternal Spirit. (Heb. 9:14) The unity that is truly of the Spirit of God will tend to focus on the things that will have eternal value. The unity that relies on the common interests of the people involved (i.e., sports, hobbies, political interests, common theology and

doctrines, etc.) is merely a work of the flesh. No carnal unity will ever produce a mature body of Christ and any unity that relies on intellectual agreement to similarly held opinions is not the unity of the Spirit of eternity.

About the only thing the tolerance clubs will not tolerate are those who won't tolerate the sins and errors of the tolerance club participants!

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The Spirit of God is also referred to as the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29) The grace of God is the power of God that brings salvation and that teaches us to live self-controlled, righteous, godly lives. (see Tit. 2:11-12) This power (grace) is available only to the humble and not to the proud. (Jas. 4:6) Any unity that does not promote and produce lives that are truly changed into the likeness of Christ's character is not the unity of the Spirit of grace.

Paul wrote that the body of Christ is

...joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, [which] causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. 4:16)

Every member of the body of Christ receives something from the Head Christ Jesus. In the human body, the medium by which information is transmitted from the head to the various body parts is the nervous system. The nervous system has its stem in the head, in the central part of the brain - the chief organ of the head - and it has tendrils that reach through every organ of the body and all the way to every skin cell on the surface of the body. Thus it connects the head to every part of the body and interconnects every part of the body to all the other parts.

This usage of the term *body* for the people of Christ is not a mere

illustration or metaphor. Paul says that the ekklesia, Christ's called-out people, *is* His body. (1 Cor. 12:27) The role of the Holy Spirit as that which connects us to Christ and to one another is not some nice, practically irrelevant, esoteric, theoretical theological point to ponder. It is the only way in which the things of God become reality in our corporate lives.

John wrote:

...if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another... (1 Jn. 1:7)

How do we have unity and fellowship with one another? By keeping our relationship with the Head Christ Jesus pure. But if we walk in darkness (practice deception, sin, selfishness, etc.) we will not have the Spirit of unity operating as the dominant feature of our lives and we will not practice the selflessness and giving, serving attitudes of Christ that make up the real bond of peace. The "believer" who does not desire truth, righteousness, holiness, eternity - in a word, God's will for every believer - above his own personal desires is not walking in the unity of the Spirit but is instead walking according to his own flesh in mere carnal darkness.

We must recognize that

...preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... (Eph. 4:3)

is a *two-way street*. As the world says it, "It takes two to tango." Whereas in the average non-spiritual human relationship it really only takes aggressiveness on one side to start a war, to maintain peaceful relations (a dance more intricate than the tango!) requires full cooperation from both sides of a conflict or even of an unstrained relationship.

This two-way street of interacting with people claiming to be brothers in Christ is made even more complex than normal human relations because it is directly controlled by a vertical element. If our relationship to Christ is skewed, so too will our relationship with our brothers be skewed. If we refuse to walk in all the characteristics of Christ by His Spirit - holiness, truth, righteousness, eternity, grace, to name but a few - then we have no hope of preserving the unity of the Spirit. And even if we do all these things by His

Spirit but our brother can't or won't, we are simply unable to be fully at peace with him because his relationship with Christ, the Prince of peace, is skewed. We simply cannot preserve the unity of the Spirit (of holiness, truth, etc.) because our brother has already broken that unity until he repents and is restored to his full unity with Christ in God.

Any unity that is not based upon the Person of Christ and union with Him by His Spirit is a false unity.

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Those who place greater emphasis on the value of their relationships with others than they do the truth and righteousness of Christ have failed to rightly read the Scriptures. Jesus said:

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take with you one or two more, that "by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established." [Dt. 19:15] And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the ekklesia. But if he refuse even to hear the ekklesia, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector. (Mt. 18:15-17)

In the process of confronting sin in a brother, what is the thing of highest value? Some say it is the brother and they miss the point that, in the end, an unrepentant brother is ostracized as a heathen and a tax collector because he refuses to walk in the light and truth. If the sinning brother fails to return to the way of truth and righteousness in Christ, he ceases to be a brother and he is an outcast! The brother, the person, the individual has no value or place within the body of Christ outside or apart from his place as an obedient son in Christ. In most instances, he may be restored to his place in Christ, but his simple existence as a human being (this inalienable value is never stripped from him!) and his baseless claim to be a believer does not guarantee any place or any rights within the family of Christ and God.

When Jesus started speaking truths that were hard to receive and many of His disciples abandoned Him, He did not water down the truth so as to

keep His closest men. Instead, He asked them if they wanted to leave too! (Jn. 6:60-67) Jesus was not confused as to which - the men who followed Him or the truth He was - was of highest value.

Jesus said:

No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Lk. 9:62)

Remember Lot's wife! Looking back, whether to things or people, diverts us from the things of Christ and makes us unfit for His kingdom.

Jesus also said:

Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to "set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." And "a man's foes will be those of his own household." [Mic. 7:6] 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. (Mt. 10:34-37)

The closest of human relations must take second place to the Person and things of Christ in our life. Anything else is deception and/or idolatry.

Paul, the man who gave us the instruction to endeavor

...to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...
(Eph. 4:3)

is also the same man who publicly confronted Peter, that pillar of the Jerusalem ekklesia, for his hypocrisy in front of the Judaisers. (Gal. 2:11-13) What relationship was Paul trying to preserve? One based in truth, sincerity and genuine obedience to Christ - anything else was not as valuable.

Paul also gave Timothy clear instructions about elders who fail to maintain their high standards of Christlikeness.

Those [elders] who are sinning rebuke in the presence

of all, that the rest also may fear. (1 Tim. 5:20)

What relationship was Timothy supposed to preserve? Again, one based in truth, sincerity and genuine obedience to Christ. Any other kind of relationship was to be sacrificed to attempt to gain the pure one.

When we look to church history, we find numerous people who, like Martin Luther (admittedly an imperfect example because of the incomplete nature of his works) withstood the entrenched hierarchy and led many to a deeper walk with Christ than what was previously available. Those who see his work as merely “dividing the church” (aside from betraying their own misconceptions about the institutional “church” being a valid expression of the body of Christ) have failed to see the divisive nature of genuine purification. Jesus said:

Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth?
I tell you, not at all, but rather division. (Lk. 12:51)

Too many people fail to pay any attention to these words of Christ.

When Moses returned from meeting with God on the mountain, we find this account:

Now when Moses [returned from receiving the Law on the mountain of the LORD and] saw that the people were unrestrained [in their worship of the golden calf] (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, “Whoever is on the LORD’s side, let him come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. And he said to them, “Thus says the LORD God of Israel: ‘Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his

How do we have unity and fellowship with one another? By keeping our relationship with the Head Christ Jesus pure.

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neighbor.””

So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. Then Moses said, “Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother.” (Ex. 32:25-29)

Whatever else we might conclude from this account, we must at least acknowledge that God blessed the Levites for this action, thus showing that He valued spiritual purity over the temporal lives of the Levites’ sons, brothers, companions and neighbors. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) and God’s law regarding those who worshiped and served other gods (Dt. 17:2-5) provide similar insights.

Any relationship in Christ that ignores the superior value of the truth and righteousness of Christ is flawed, corrupted by the deceptive work of the devil. Any brother who refuses to forsake the deception of the demonic and/or corruptions of the flesh or this world makes himself God’s enemy (see Jas. 4:4; Rom. 8:7-8) and forfeits his rights to be received as a brother in Christ. Anyone who maintains relationships that are built upon or that rely upon lies and deceptions is partnered with the devil and that one’s work, in one way or another, will be destroyed in direct proportion to the extent of the lies. (see 1 Jn. 3:8; 1 Cor. 3:11-15)

Those who insist upon walking in the light as He is in the light already have instantaneous, unbroken and (apart from sinfulness) virtually indestructible unity with others who are of this same spirit and mind (1 Jn. 1:7) - even when an area of previously unrecognized darkness is being exposed and confronted. If we are not willing to bring every aspect of every relationship we have with others into Christ’s light, let us not confuse our sinful relations with one another as being the genuine unity of Christ’s Spirit. And let us not suppose that “religious” relations with one another - whereby we place ourselves or others under the authoritarian regime of men who take on the role (if not the titles) of clergy - might somehow cause us to walk in a greater obedience to Christ than we are willing to practice when we stand alone and only God is watching what we do.

If we do not place the highest value on our unbroken fellowship with

Christ, placing a greater emphasis on our relationships with others is not only futile, it is idolatry. And if those who claim to be our brothers do not share this same value for Christ, we have no hope of preserving the unity of the Spirit of God because they have already abandoned Him.

One of the key verses relied upon in these tolerance clubs is Paul's instruction:

Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God. (Rom. 15:7)

Christ has received us *as we are*, they say, and therefore we must not judge or criticize anyone who claims to be our brother in Christ. This misconception unfortunately produces only a haven for self-centered, sinful behaviors (lawlessness - doing what is right in one's own eyes) - and it is done in Christ's name! It is true that Christ received us *as we were* - and then He immediately made us a new creation! (see 2 Cor. 5:17) Therefore it is now *our* responsibility to

...cleanse ourselves from *all* filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 7:1 - emphasis added; also see Eph. 5:3-7; Col. 3:5-10)

Not only has Christ received us as we were (in relation to our sinful state), He has received us as we shall be (eternally glorified). As we live our lives here in the interim stage between what we *were* and what we *will be*, we will produce fruit which clearly demonstrates for all to see what we really *are* - children of light or children of the devil. (see 1 Jn. 3:10) Our lives either produce the righteous fruits of the Spirit or the sinful works of the flesh - producing both righteousness and sinfulness is a spiritual condition that ought

Those who place greater emphasis on the value of their relationships with others than they do the truth and righteousness of Christ have failed to rightly read the Scriptures.

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not be and, in truth, cannot long remain. (see Jas. 3:10-12; Mt. 7:16-20) Bringing forth the fruits of righteousness proves we are appropriately in our place in Christ while performing the works of sinfulness and/or lawlessness may ultimately disqualify us from our inheritance in Christ. (see Gal. 5:19-23)

Jesus said:

...by their fruits you *will know them*. (Mt. 7:20 - emphasis added)

If the fruit produced by one's life is only iniquity and/or lawlessness, we *will know* what that one is. We need not "prophetically look beyond" that one's sin and lawlessness of today, looking forward to some out-of-nowhere miraculous transformation that will occur when that person is "changed in the sweet by and by." No, those who are *departing* from iniquity (2 Tim. 2:19) by *growing* in the grace and knowledge of Christ (2 Pet. 3:17-18) *are being transformed* (present, ongoing action verbs) into His likeness from glory to glory. (2 Cor. 3:18) If there are no glimpses of glorification now (previews of coming attractions, as it were), there will be no glorification then. One who is not in the process of being made Christ-like now (no matter how much knowledge of Christ and the Bible he has) will be rejected on the last day for his lawlessness (doing what was right in his own eyes) because he was *never known* by Christ. (Mt. 7:23) One who was *never known* by Christ then can hardly be said to have been received in any way by Christ now (compare to Rom. 15:7) and he is not to be embraced as if he were a full-fledged brother in Christ.

Let us be neither ignorant nor puffed up, brethren. The spirit of displacing Christ, even when we escape the darkness of denominationalism, has schemes ready to bring us into yet another form of darkness. Those who underestimate the effectiveness of these rulers of darkness will one day regret their ignorance and/or arrogance.

Misusing Wealth

Because of man's fallen nature, he has a virtually unshakable allegiance to social standards that are based, not on a divine perspective nor even on valuing honest work, but on the belief that real achievement consists in imitating and emulating the wealthy leisure class, those individuals who visibly proclaim their "superior" status by ostentatious display and even waste of their resources (money, possessions and time). This fleshly allegiance competes with the way of Christ.

Any relationship in Christ that ignores the superior value of the truth and righteousness of Christ is flawed, corrupted by the deceptive work of the devil.

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With the exception of the instinct of self-preservation, the propensity for [inclination toward] emulation [competitive, rivalrous imitation] is probably the strongest and most alert and persistent of the economic motives...

The accepted standard of expenditure in the community or in the class to which a person belongs largely determines what his standard of living will be... To accept and practice the standard of living which is in vogue is both agreeable and expedient, commonly to the point of being indispensable to personal comfort and to success in life. The standard of living of any class...is commonly as high as the earning capacity of the class will permit - with a constant tendency to go higher. The effect upon the serious activities of men is therefore to direct them with great singleness of purpose to the largest possible acquisition of wealth, and to discountenance [disdain, look down upon with disapproval] work that brings no pecuniary [monetary, financial] gain. (Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, Macmillan, 1899, p. 85,86)

This big-worded insight into economic theory offers a way to

recognize and be set free of the deceptions the ruler of misusing wealth (the spirit of mammon, riches, wealth) has inflicted upon our culture and the world. Again, the method of this spirit is deception, not coercive force whereby the spirit enters our soul and forces us to pursue material comforts and securities. The goal is to cause us to love, pursue or misuse wealth at the expense of our relationship with God.

Let's begin with remembering what the work is which the Lord requires of His true followers. The people Jesus had fed with the five barley loaves and two fishes and who recognized Him as the Mosaic Prophet (see Jn. 6:9,14; compare Dt. 18:15-18) asked Jesus,

“What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?”

Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (Jn. 6:28-29)

His answer exposes the opposing natures of God and mammon. Believing in Christ - an inner, spiritual activity - produces no outward monetary gain and demonstrates no financial superiority. In fact, in many cases it means monetary loss and material deprivation, especially of luxuries and comforts.

Jesus further instructed His followers, in relation to what to eat, drink and wear (the things after which the Gentiles seek) to

...seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Mt. 6:31-33)

Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us,

But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced

themselves through with many sorrows. (1 Tim. 6:6-10)

Though many misguided individuals have taken up well-paid positions of purported “leadership” in “Christian” circles, and the modern notion of doing the work of God is very different from Jesus’ definition, the truth is that the work of God has nothing to do with acquiring wealth or gaining pecuniary advantage. Rather it is more often about giving away wealth and advantage.

The one who is intent on gaining wealth or achieving financial success in the eyes of himself or his neighbors or his peers is not seeking first God’s kingdom or His righteousness. In fact, his desire to enjoy wealth is in direct opposition to Christ’s command to deny one’s self and forsake the world. (Lk. 9:23-25) Whereas Christ expects us to pour out our treasures on Him (Mt. 26:7-10), the ruler of misusing wealth’s strategy revolves around stirring up the love of money that drowns out our love for God - either through waste or misuse of wealth or through excessive pursuit of it. Thus, the world and all its participants look down with disapproval on one who refuses to use all his energies to “get ahead” and the one who desires to give his all to attain to the high call of Christ also gains the direct enmity of the spirit of mammon.

The key words the ruler of misusing wealth uses to manipulate the beliefs of men is “enough” and “more.” Especially in our excessively affluent culture, the definition of the word “enough” has suffered many revisions. One “Christian” employer employs a number of people, paying them well (double or more than the so-called poverty level) - but he calls this “supporting” his employees and their families. Another employer underpays and exploits the staff and dismisses them as lazy and unwilling to work - and then wonders why no one will stay on to work there! Both of these employers are victims of mammon’s deceptions regarding how much is enough.

Our standard as followers in Christ is to be *sufficient for today*. If we have food, clothing and shelter for today, then all that is left for us to do is to

Let us not suppose that “religious” relations with one another might somehow cause us to walk in a greater obedience to Christ than we are willing to practice when we stand alone and only God is watching what we do.

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exercise our godliness and contentment. God is very capable of supplying all of our needs even when we cannot see where that supply will come from. As we actively seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, we will have all the basic necessities of life supplied to us by God (Mt. 6:33) - either through diligent work done in obedience to God's leading (1 Ths. 4:11-12; 2 Ths. 3:6-15), through mutual sharing within the body of Christ (Acts 2:44) or, if necessary, through miraculous provision. (Mk. 6:41)

In our modern affluent culture, however, "enough" now includes that ostentatious display and even waste that keeps us comparable to our neighbors and peers on the endless treadmill of emulation of the wealthy leisure class. We must have our own well-built home decked out with all the modern luxuries (electric lights, running water, two-car garage, etc.) or something is perceived to be "wrong" with our relationship with God. In actuality, the opposite is true. If we believe we have to have all those comforts and luxuries to live, something is truly wrong with our relationship with God because we are not walking in the light of truth and reality. We must learn to be content with God's definition of *enough* or we are a victim of the spirit of mammon's deceptions. (see Phlp. 4:11-12)

"More" is a word that can be like a black hole in space. It is an ambiguous, relative term that can never be achieved. No matter how much you have you can still get more - even though you really cannot get more because what you have and what you are getting right now will not be more - there is still more to get! This is why those who live to get "more" can never be satisfied. As a goal in life it is unattainable and any goal that we substitute for obeying Christ may yet bring us out from under His grace and make us eligible again for destruction. The only *more* we may safely pursue is more of Him - and even that must be attained to on His terms, His timetable and His schedule.

The question of whether one is misusing wealth in God's eyes is not really a question of how much one has. Indeed, some of the worst mis-users of wealth are the poorest of the poor as they sacrifice all their time, energy and even their family to obtain some otherwise useless symbol of status and prestige. The question is not "How much?" or "How little?" but rather "How is it used?" The only time "How much?" becomes a factor in our spiritual lives is when we become victims of mammon's deceptions. When we buy into mammon's re-definitions of "enough" or fall into the trap of pursuing "more"

and fail to recognize what incredible abundance we actually have - a deception very effective against people who look only at their current cash on hand or at the upper layers of the leisure class to measure their wealthiness - the wealth we have been given and misused upon

If the fruit produced by one's life is only iniquity and/or lawlessness, we *will* know what that one is.

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ourselves (precisely because we have failed to see ourselves as wealthy) will be a factor in God's judgments against us. Indeed, one of mammon's most effective deceptions is to cause us to say to ourselves, "I'm not rich. I can barely take care of myself, let alone help anyone else!"

Jesus taught about the foolishness of wasting one's resources on one's self. He said:

"Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses." Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?' So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry."'

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?' So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." (Lk. 12:15-21)

The rich man had numerous options available to him. What wouldn't fit in his old barns could have been shared with the poor who live everywhere and in every time. (Dt. 15:11; Jn. 12:8) He could have even used his new barns to feed others instead of just himself. Either of these would have laid up at least some treasure with God. Instead the rich man considered his *comforts* of more importance than the *needs* of others around him. He

“needed” his new barns more than some around him needed houses and food. This man died in his selfishness and then he had no say whatsoever in who got his goods. He had stored away his fortune but another would benefit by it and he had no reward in heaven either.

This is why Paul also writes,

Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. (1 Cor. 10:24)

and

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phlp. 2:4)

The one who hoards his resources to himself and strives to gain more at the expense of others is a foolish man who has exchanged godliness with contentment for the pursuit of the beggarly elements of this dying world! Let he who has ears hear.

Paul gives us another glimpse of the contentment we should walk in as followers of Christ when he writes:

But as God has distributed to each one, as the Lord has called each one, so let him walk. And so I ordain in all the ekklesias. Let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called. Were you called while a slave? Do not be concerned about it; but if you can be made free, rather use it. For he who is called in the Lord while a slave is the Lord's freedman. Likewise he who is called while free is Christ's slave. You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men. Brethren, let each one remain with God in that calling in which he was called. (1 Cor. 7:17,20-24)

This is directly antithetical to man's fleshly tendency to attain ever higher on the corporate, financial and material scales. And it also brings up a question every believer in Christ should ask of himself: “What calling was I in when the Lord called me? Am I still in that calling? Have I been faithful

to His calling on my life? Or have I left His calling behind so that I could pursue some agenda of my own?" If we find we must honestly answer that last question with a *yes*, we are risking having Jesus say to us on the last day, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness. You followed your own agenda - doing what was right in your own eyes - not Mine. Reap your own rewards for I cannot give you Mine." (see Mt. 7:23)

Whether we have fallen under the control of the ruler of misusing wealth (mammon) because of our greed (pursuit of more for me and mine) or a misplaced desire for security (trusting in our possessions rather than in the provision of God), the way out is the same: we must cease pursuing wealth and, instead, pursue God.

Paul wrote,

But you, O man of God, flee [the destructive consequences of desiring to be rich] and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing... (1 Tim. 6:9-14)

Let us note that this command is to be scrupulously (not sporadically, haphazardly or occasionally) adhered to by all (not some) who would be the mature, spotless bride for whom Christ will return. (see Eph. 5:27)

The method of the ruler of misusing wealth is deception, not coercive force whereby the spirit enters our soul and forces us to pursue material comforts and securities. The goal is to cause us to love, pursue or misuse wealth at the expense of our relationship with God.

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Jesus taught,

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Mt. 6:19-21)

If we would but heed these two passages, the spirit of mammon would have little effect on us. Yet the New Testament has much more to say in this regard. James wrote,

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called? If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors. For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. (Jas. 2:1-10)

Practicing partiality - and emulation and imitation of the wealthy is a form of partiality - can bring us back under the curse that comes from

violating God's laws. This is the paradox that true believers face where law is concerned: If we try to live by obeying law (and not by the Spirit of God), we put ourselves back under the curse of the law. If we break one of God's laws, we also come back under the curse of the law until we openly confess our sins to God and receive His cleansing

from all unrighteousness. (1 Jn. 1:9) Here James tells us that even though we be perfect in every other regard, if we show partiality toward the rich and against the poor, we are back under the curse of the law. And we will be open to more demonic assaults and further deceptions as well.

The work of God has nothing to do with acquiring wealth or gaining pecuniary advantage. Rather it is more often about giving away wealth and advantage.

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Spiritual Fruit

Paul wrote:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. (Gal. 5:22-23)

And Jesus said:

You cannot serve God and mammon [money, riches, wealth]. (Mt. 6:24)

For every fruit of the Spirit of God, there is a counterfeit or alternative fruit of the spirit of mammon. That is, one who lives the life of God bears the fruit of the Spirit whereas the one who is in bondage to the spirit of mammon bears the counterfeit fruit. Let us examine these fruit individually though truly they are deeply interwoven into each other and into the fabric of our lives. The fruit (singular) of the Spirit is all these things woven together to present one composite picture of Christ. The “fruit” of the spirit of mammon may be more individualized because we may practice some of the works of the flesh that are involved here while avoiding others because we see some as sinful or wrong but we see nothing wrong with our favored sins.

Love: The agape love of Christ compels us to care for and serve the others around us. Though this requires that we set aside some or even all of our own plans and agendas, loving others brings great personal satisfaction and fulfillment, meets real needs and prompts people to desire God. This agape love is much more than hugs and kisses and meeting together for “fellowship” - it is the self-sacrificing care and ministering one pours forth from the depths of his being to complete what remains undone in Christ’s sacrifice. (see Jn. 7:38; Col. 1:24)

The alternative for one enslaved to money and wealth is mere tolerance. Family members (whether physically or spiritually), seeking to keep from constantly fighting with each other, can only tolerate one another’s sins and errors and maintain a false facade of unity and togetherness. The reality is that they would rather be apart than together. This lie, perhaps more so than any other, is what makes holiday gatherings of dysfunctional families

such a tortuous event.

Whereas true agape love requires that we reprove or rebuke one another in the hope of bringing about godly repentance, the one in bondage to mammon can only resort to manipulation. Manipulation by guilt and anger are perhaps the most common forms of manipulation as the one seeking to dominate someone else (so as to bring about their own agenda) stirs up their victim's guilty conscience or tries to intimidate the victim with overbearing anger. The former works well against those who are unsure of the fullness of their forgiveness in Christ and the latter against those who are susceptible to fear, particularly if they believe they are vulnerable in some way to the one attempting to dominate them.

Joy: The joy one experiences in the Lord is not a happiness based on fortuitous circumstances in one's life. Rather it is the rapturous union of the human spirit with the Divine Spirit. As such it defies understanding or explanation. This joy is the spontaneous and continuous response of the spirit and soul to the presence of the Spirit of Christ within. It is the joyous liberation of body, soul and spirit from the power of sin and death.

The alternative for the one enslaved to mammon is anger. Unfulfilled expectations for self and others results in frustration at being unable to force oneself or others to do as we want. When left unchecked, this anger will result in a bondage to anger (an "uncontrolled temper") that is a wide open door for further demonic enslavement that wreaks havoc on whomever comes under its fury.

Peace: The peace of Christ is not a mere cessation of hostilities between men or even between men and God (though it is indeed that) but it is the supreme rest in ceasing from one's own labors so as to co-labor with Christ whose burden is easy. (see Heb. 4:10; Mt. 11:28-30)

The alternative for the one enslaved to mammon is fear and strife. The one who accumulates worldly treasures is now afraid that his treasures will be stolen or destroyed. And he strives against those whom he perceives as trying to relieve him of his treasures. When it is one's mistaken ideas of needs that

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is the perceived robber, this strife will take the form of what is commonly called “work-aholism” as the victim is driven to work and produce vast quantities of materials and wealth so as to stave off the perceived impending impoverishment. The atmosphere of fear and strife that surrounds one enslaved to mammon eats away at any love others may have toward that one.

Longsuffering: The one who has the Spirit of Christ living within can endure and persevere in circumstances that others find intolerable and unacceptable. He can forego luxuries and creature comforts so as to attain to the will of God for his life.

The alternative for the one enslaved to money is to be fixated on comforts and luxuries, looking for ways to use his resources to ease his own life. Often this one is quick tempered and lashes out whenever he must endure any embarrassment, discomfort, hardship or loss of material possessions.

Kindness: The one who lives by the Spirit of God within looks for ways to be kind and caring toward others. This is not mere superficial gestures performed during times of special recognition for certain people. No. It is the consistent attitude of watchfulness for opportunities to demonstrate respect and care for any and/or all others.

The alternative for the one enslaved to wealth is self-seeking which results in a negligent failure to attend to the needs and interests of others (see 1 Cor. 10:24; Phlp. 2:4) and which renders that one eligible for God’s indignation, wrath, tribulation and anguish. (see Rom. 2:8) Even when a gift, especially a large one, is given in what they believe to be “generosity,” it is really a manipulation to draw the recipient into bondage to money. For example, a vehicle given to a growing family is not given just to help ease that family’s transportation problems - it is given so that the family can maintain the appearance of family “togetherness” by enabling the family to travel to distant family gatherings or so that the family can drive themselves to “church” without being such a burden on the “transportation ministry.” A gift that covers a deposit and first month’s rent for an apartment, for example, can really be just a way that lures people into greater levels of debt and financial burdens than what they are already in. When such a gift requires one to step into a greater appearance of affluence or contradicts the leading of the Lord in that one’s life, the gift is only a manipulation to get the recipient of the gift to adopt or practice some deceptive philosophy or belief of the giver. Beware of such gifts because the hidden cost may well be bondage to the demonic.

Goodness: The goodness which one who lives the life of Christ exhibits goes beyond kindness. It is a direct expression of the nature of God (see Jas. 1:17) and the very thing which leads people to repent of their sins. (Rom. 2:4) It is the same kind of goodness Christ displayed on the cross, asking the Father to forgive those who were executing Him. (Lk. 23:34) It is the good works, integrity, reverence, incorruptibility and soundness that cannot be condemned and spoken evil of. (Tit. 2:7-8)

One of mammon's most effective deceptions is to cause us to say to ourselves, "I'm not rich. I can barely take care of myself, let alone help anyone else!"

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The alternative for the one devoted to misusing wealth is greed and exploitation. "I need more!" or "I don't have enough!" is their excuse for hoarding and stashing away every penny they can get their hands on without overtly robbing anyone or breaking any laws for which they could be easily caught and convicted. Though these will not straightforwardly rob a gas station or mug a pedestrian, they do not hesitate to pay their employees (or even family members) less than a fair or reasonable value for their services even when this "thrift" is unnecessary for the employer and it lays a heavy burden of want and deprivation on the employee. This is nothing but exploitation of whatever feelings of love, duty and loyalty that one may have for the wealthy slave of mammon.

Faithfulness: The faithfulness that is produced in one living the life of Christ is loyalty and steadfastness to the Person and truth of Christ. It is the refusal to compromise and participate in any form of deception or misrepresentation of the gospel, even if that means great personal loss (even life itself) for Christ's sake.

The alternative for the one ensnared by riches is selfishness - loyalty to only *me* and *mine*. One's attitude is not that the people around them are people to be respected, cared for and watched out for. Rather they are *my* possessions (*my* family, *my* wife, *my* children, etc.) here to satisfy some purpose, need or desire of *mine*. The result is that the one enslaved to wealth is ignorant of or indifferent to the damage his actions do to those around him.

Gentleness: The gentleness of Christ within is not some effeminate, soft-spoken gentility. Rather it is more like the gentling of a horse whereby

the horse, who is far larger, faster and stronger than a man, is brought into submission to a rider. Once a horse is gentled, a light pull on the reins causes the horse to move according to the desires of the rider. So too, a slight word from Christ causes the believer who bears this fruit of the Spirit to do the will of God.

The alternative for the one enslaved to mammon is to be wild or self-willed in the sense of a wild animal who will not be tamed and brought under control. Like a wild horse, this one runs wildly across the land following only his basic instincts. Whereas horses can be mastered to produce even life-saving results, the wild, self-willed horse is only dangerous. It will fight for territory and will steal mares from other horses and even tamed herds. So too, the one who has sold his soul for money will neglect, damage or even destroy the lives of others around him just to gain some luxury or comfort.

Self-control: The self-control of the one living the life of Christ is the ability to do that which is right, good and Christ-honoring. It is not just a matter of biting one's tongue before saying something destructive or of refraining from unleashing one's temper on some poor hapless victim. It is the re-ordering of one's priorities and desires within one's soul and the result is the outward actions that demonstrate that restraint and self-control which brings honor and glory to Christ.

The alternative for the one enslaved to wealth is to be rash or lawless (doing what is right in one's own eyes). That is, rash, not in the sense of being impetuous or flighty, but in the sense of quick to launch into any project or undertaking which will produce some sort of gain for self. Doing any and everything which is right or good for *me* is the essence of the fallen sin nature of man. The damage it does to the others around me - who deserve at least equal respect and care such as we give to ourselves - is virtually incalculable.

These are the two types of characteristics that are produced by submitting either to God or to mammon (riches, money, wealth). From this study, we can see the depth of Jesus' statement:

No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. (Lk. 16:13)

One is either filled to overflowing with the beneficial characteristics of God - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) - or one is possessed by the spirit of money and is consumed by the abundance of the things he possesses. (Lk. 12:15)

The one who hoards his resources to himself and strives to gain more at the expense of others is a foolish man who has exchanged godliness with contentment for the pursuit of the beggarly elements of this dying world!

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The man who has the characteristics of God (in whatever amount or degree he has them), though he have no money to speak of, is far more to be envied and emulated than is the man who, though he have more money than he can ever spend, bears the counterfeit, damaging fruit of his god, wealth (money, riches, mammon). Let he who has ears hear.

Material Wisdom

Paul speaks of those who measure themselves by themselves and who compare themselves among themselves as being *not wise*. (2 Cor. 10:12) James gives a wonderful insight into the two kinds of wisdom - and their sources!

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts... (Jas. 3:13-14)

That's as good a definition of the motives for emulation of the wealthy and greed for more as can be found.

...do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there... (Jas. 3:14-16)

This is one reason why wealth is so dangerous to our spiritual lives. If wealth is accumulated by emulation and greed, confusion regarding the appropriate use of wealth will be one result and an open invitation to further involvement with the demonic is another.

It is interesting to watch how the ruler of misusing wealth's deceptions manifest in those enslaved. It is not just a question of being rich or poor. Rather, it most obviously manifests in how one counts one's pennies. Those who are enslaved to mammon consider their pennies of much more value than does the one who is free of mammon's control. Whether rich or poor, those enslaved have to save or use every penny "wisely." But because it is a demonic enslavement, their "thriftiness" is quite often sporadic and even irrational at times. Rich people under bondage to mammon will "pinch pennies" even when it deprives a poor person of their pennies - and the pennies are of much more use and value to the poor than to the wealthy!

It is extremely difficult to see Jesus "pinching pennies." The One who knows to send Peter fishing to catch their tax money doesn't need to worry over pennies. (see Mt. 17:27) We are to give to *every* man who asks of us -

but Jesus does not say that we have to give him what he asks for. (Lk. 6:30) We are to give him whatever the Lord tells us in our hearts to give him. But we are to give him something.

We must cease pursuing wealth and, instead, pursue God.

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We need wisdom to disperse our resources in a manner that glorifies God - not anxious fretting over petty financial considerations.

It is true that God does not want the resources He's given us just foolishly thrown at every problem we think we see. Money is a defense as is wisdom - but only wisdom gives life. (Eccl. 7:12) Often the resource God most wants us to throw at a problem is ourself - our time, energy and personal service - and not just our money or possessions. When we give of our time, energy and personal service, He works into our life qualities like humility, love (that is, true agape love - not vicarious charity), patience, perseverance and endurance (to name but a few) as well as genuinely meeting the other people's real needs. When we give only of our money or excess possessions, too often we are really no nearer to those we've given to, they are not really helped and we come away feeling smugly superior because we "helped" some poor slob out of a jamb. (See any pride issues in all that?)

Money is a tool and tools are meant to be used, even used up, to get the job done. We must take care to use the right tool to get the right job done. One does not use a drill to cut a straight line nor use a hand saw to make a small round hole. When personal attention is what is required, money makes a poor substitute (and vice versa). There is a time for every purpose under heaven (Eccl. 3:1) and the Holy Spirit is still the only one with an accurate watch!

But money is really *only* a tool. Should the tool become the focus, often the job never even gets done. Rather than focus on money, we must focus on Christ and His agenda for the people we would help. A drug addict/loner is an excellent example. It does *him* no good whatsoever if we feel good about giving him something that meets no need of his or that only meets his culturally-defined "needs" (or, worse yet, feeds his habit!) while we have ignored his true spiritual and/or physical needs that Christ would like to meet at that time. Too often, our "gifts to the poor" have been more for our benefit than theirs.

This self-centered attitude carries over into our relationships with those who work for us as well. The demonically enslaved employer or business owner expresses to their employees the attitude:

Your time, energy and resources are of value *to me* (you can do things for me I can't or won't do for myself) therefore you should freely (or at least cheaply) give them to me because I'm not rich. I don't recognize that *you* value your time, energy and resources for different reasons and objectives because *my* goals are more important, more valuable than yours.

Another way this is said or expressed to the employee would be like this:

Your time is only valuable to me when you are pursuing my goals. And then I expect you to give 110% (or more!) while I pay you only half (or less!) of what your activity is worth to me because I don't possess enough resources to share my wealth with you equally or even proportionately. I must gain more than you do in this transaction or I'm losing my secure financial standing. I don't really care what you want to do with your life and I'm certainly not interested in helping you reach your goals - unless I can use your goals to reach mine, of course!

Some consider this to be acceptable, shrewd business practice. In reality it is only self-centered greediness and oppression of the poor.

The most obvious delusion in all this is the "I'm not rich" part - and it is the foundation for the rest of the delusions. The employer or business owner is truly rich - he or she has enough resources to buy everything they need (usually in great quantity!) and just about anything they want! And their perception that any financial position is secure (see Prov. 23:4-5) is as deceptive as the notion that paying decent, honest wages weakens their financial status. (see Prov. 19:17) What is really exposed is that faith in money (mammon) - and not faith in God - really controls their life. These rich people who enslave their employees into poverty by paying low wages most

often deceive themselves into their own self-proclaimed “poverty” by so rigidly structuring their budget that expenditures are limited only to the priorities of the budget. Outside of the budget - which includes highly expensive tools, toys, luxuries, artworks, etc. (none of which are necessary for living life) - they are “broke.” The demonic loves to get someone under this kind of deception - and loves to use these deluded rich people to oppress the poor by luring them into low-paying jobs from which they cannot financially

escape. Mammon’s schemes are particularly vicious and result in unimaginable depths of human misery, bondage and oppression.

Those who are free of mammon count their money only enough to disperse it accurately and give it away as freely as they have received it. It is perhaps those who have the gift of helps (1 Cor. 12:28), who give of their time, energy and resources as freely as God has given to them (see Mt. 10:8), who are most vulnerable to the snare of poverty. These have no desire to charge anything for their time and services and, if they do not heed God’s leadings (in which there are times to freely give and times to freely receive) they are easily manipulated by “thrifty” (greedy, penny-pinching) employers, friends and even family who seek only their own financial gain and have no care for the believer’s well-being.

James wrote:

But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (Jas. 3:17)

The man who has the characteristics of God (in whatever amount or degree he has them), though he have no money to speak of, is far more to be envied and emulated than is the man who, though he have more money than he can ever spend, bears the counterfeit, damaging fruit of his god, wealth (money, riches, mammon).

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The contrast is evident for those whose eyes are accustomed to the light. Those in darkness won't get the point. Let he who has ears hear.

There are some who believe they have conquered the snares of wealth merely by believing that they have no real trust in their resources. Their trust is in God, they say, and, for example, when the mark of the beast (without which none may buy or sell - Rev. 13:17) becomes mandatory, though they acknowledge that it will be "hard" for them, they believe they will be able to forsake all the comforts and luxuries which they have allowed themselves to become accustomed to in this world. Their argument is that because their trust is really in God and not in their possessions, they are at liberty to freely enjoy all the things this world has to offer. There is multi-faceted deception interlaced around elements of truth here so let us step carefully through this minefield. The buzz words used to bring about this deception are 1) trust, 2) liberty and 3) worldliness.

First, their trust may or may not truly be in God where their possessions are concerned. Only God knows the true condition of their hearts - we can only evaluate what fruit their lives produce and this must be done on an individual, case-by-case basis. There is still danger even where they truly are receiving their possessions from God because there still may be deception and disobedience in their disbursements of their wealth. If these people disburse their wealth according to the worldly principle of emulating the wealthy, attaining status symbols, luxuries and comforts, while their brothers and sisters and the orphans and widows around them suffer their torments alone, these are classic victims of mammon's deceptions. To put it in the context of Jesus' parable about the foolish landowner (Lk. 12:13-21), if we need a bigger barn or larger storage unit to store our goods for our own pleasures and conveniences while our brother, sister, neighbor or some orphan or widow suffers need of daily necessities, we are deceived, failing to store up treasures in heaven with God. In our selfish attendance to our own fleshly desires and understandings we are failing to also attend to the interests of others. (1 Cor. 10:24; Phlp. 2:4)

Second, in regards to our liberty in Christ, Paul wrote,

For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Gal. 5:13)

Liberty, especially liberty from dark and evil things, is a prominent part of our upward calling in Christ. But when we use “liberty” as our excuse for pampering and pandering to the desires of our own sinful, selfish flesh nature, we can be certain we are deceived. When we “need” a larger barn, a second home, a second or third car, a video

Too often, our “gifts to the poor” have been more for our benefit than theirs.

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collection, etc. more than a brother or sister needs daily food and shelter, we are deceived. If we even *have* these things and know that there are poor brothers and sisters in need around us, we have already clearly demonstrated that we inwardly hold the attitude that we “need” these luxuries more than our brother or sister needs the necessities of life! When we will give to a “church” or “charity” that builds or maintains homes for poor people in some third world country so that we might gain a tax deduction but we have not attended to the needs of the poor, the orphans and widows in our own neighborhood or sphere of influence, we are doubly deceived - victims of both mammon and the principality who has gained political favor for that particular “charity.” Woe unto those who exercise their liberty at their brother’s expense!

Third, those who believe their Christian liberty is a license to handle and possess everything the world has to offer are operating very close to a dangerous precipice. There is an element of truth that one can have possessions and have God’s grace (power to live in a godly manner) to live above the grasping nature of one’s possessions. But the standard by which we know whether we are truly walking in that grace and liberty is not whether we feel guilty about how we spend our money, time, energy and resources. If our conscience is seared as with a hot iron (1 Tim. 4:2) we will not be able to “feel guilty” about anything! Relying on *feelings* of guilt is doubly flawed anyway: Guilt is always a question of *fact*, not one of feelings; and relying on our own sin-stained conscience rather than the conviction of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 16:8) is to eat yet again of the tree of knowledge that brought about man’s downfall in the first place. (Gen. 2:17) The only standard by which we can know beyond doubt whether we truly walk above the deceitful grasp of wealth is *threefold*:

1) Our resources are not used to emulate the wealthy

in any way but rather used to build up God's kingdom (not our own or some man's personal or "church" empire); *and* (not or!)

2) The needs of the poor, especially the brothers, sisters, orphans and widows, in our sphere of influence are attended to in an adequate (that is, proportionate to our own supply) measure; *and* (not or!)

3) We are prepared and ready to obey Christ's personal, inner command to give any or all of our material possessions to anyone at any time without requiring some form of recompense or proof of God's further provision for ourselves.

Anything else is mere religiosity and "charity" practiced in Christ's name. If we would simply recognize that the word "worldly" simply means "being like the world" we would immediately know that we cannot be like the world and truly follow after Christ. Too often "Christians" who are conformed to this world simply cannot endure that someone might think them to be *the scum of the earth* (see 1 Cor. 4:13) and they must show that one claiming to follow Christ can still be just like anyone else in the world. No! Worldliness and Christlikeness are antithetical to one another. We cannot worship (bow down to, serve) God *and* mammon! (Mt. 6:24)

Those who believe they will be able to forsake the comforts and luxuries of this world when confronted with the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:17) but who have not taken care to forsake the world and its comforts and luxuries now will face nearly insurmountable difficulty when that time comes.

First, they will have to overcome the constant, fleshly tendency to earn more. The flesh dies hard and will not succumb easily to denial of things to which it has had easy access for decades.

Second (in the words of Paul), they will have to contend with *all* the power, signs, lying wonders and

unrighteous deceptions of Satan. (2 Ths. 2:9-10) If they cannot resist Satan's deceptions now while he is still somewhat restrained (see 2 Ths. 2:7), how will they stand in the day of his full fury? (also see Rev. 12:12) Only by God's grace (power) will any of us stand. The wise among us who are even now bringing their souls into subjection in all aspects of dealing with their material and temporal wealth will be far better prepared to make that stand then. Let he who has ears hear.

Mammon's schemes are particularly vicious and result in unimaginable depths of human misery, bondage and oppression.

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Financial Scams

One of mammon's more effective and therefore more dangerous deceptions has been to get people to think vicarious charity is the same thing as Christ's agape love. Vicarious charity generally has three elements:

1) the giving is usually impersonally done through some "charitable organization";

2) the gift given is most often some object that the owner no longer needs, wants or finds useful or else it is leftover money from an excess in cash flow; and

3) the act of "charity" makes the giver feel "good" or superior.

Agape love, on the other hand, is all about personal service that meets the true spiritual *and* (not or!) physical needs of the one given to. (see Jn. 13:12-15) It is about laying down one's life for one's brothers and sisters (1 Jn. 3:16), not merely passing along one's castoffs or giving out of one's leftover excess. And it is done in obedience to Christ, bringing Him, not the giver, glory and honor.

The deception begins very early in a believer's life in Christ. Peter wrote,

Through [God's great and precious promises that, by His power, He has given us everything we need for life and godliness] you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. (2 Pet. 1:3-4 NIV)

Here it is yet again: God has made a way for us to depart from iniquity and live in His light. *Everything* we need for life and godliness is accessible to us by our steadfast faith that overcomes the world and the devil. This thread runs throughout the New Testament precisely because it is the heart's blood of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

Peter continues,

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, [agape] love. (2 Pet. 1:5-7 NIV)

Guilt is always a question of *fact*, not one of feelings; and relying on our own sin-stained conscience rather than the conviction of the Holy Spirit is to eat yet again of the tree of knowledge that brought about man's downfall in the first place.

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These eight instructions are the steps we all must take to reach spiritual maturity. The first instruction here is to *make every effort*. The enemy works hard to get new converts to be lazy or inconsistent in this regard. If this ploy fails, the enemy will work to deceive the new convert into applying his diligence in wrong directions.

The second instruction is to *add to your faith goodness*. Faith is already given to us in the sacrificial death of Christ who was slain before the foundation of the world. (see Rev. 13:8) We apprehend and utilize that faith upon our conversion to Christ (Eph. 2:8) and faith is how we are to proceed to grow into all aspects of Christ. (Col. 2:6) So we are to add goodness to the faith God has already given us. That is, we are to simply do good things for everyone around us immediately after we come to know Christ. For many of us, the abrupt change from being evil, selfish people to being good, others-oriented, caring people is appropriate and alluring testimony to Christ's life-changing power. That many people never express this abrupt change but rather remain evil, selfish people - even after years of "church" - is adequate testimony to just how effective the rulers of darkness really are in deceiving those who lay claim to the name of Christ.

The common deception found in false religion's "church" causes many

converts to add to their faith knowledge, not goodness. That is, new converts are routinely sent directly from their “sinner’s prayer” (which has no place in the New Testament) to a “new believers class” (which has no place in the New Testament either). The damage this does to the new convert is incalculable as it removes the convert from the realms of interacting *first* with the God of goodness who newly lives in their hearts and it begins to train them to listen *first* to men. It also derails their training toward agape love and instead sets them up for a number of misconceptions - one of which is believing that vicarious charity is a godly thing.

Here is how: As each aspect of our life in Christ grows toward spiritual maturity (Peter’s eight characteristics - 2 Pet. 1:5-7), the first characteristics form a support for the later characteristics. If we tried to make a picture of this, it would resemble a pyramid where the lower levels are continually built outwards to make room and support for the upper, newer levels. What the enemy tries to do at every level, but especially at the lower levels where a convert is not as aware of the devil’s devices, is to deceive the believer into building the wrong structures on upper levels when the lower levels have not even been sufficiently developed to support the higher work.

Thus, the last two instructions (to skip ahead to the characteristics most germane to our present discussion) - add to your godliness, brotherly kindness; add to your brotherly kindness agape love - are thus unavailable and completely unattainable to the convert who has been diverted early in his walk with Christ. They may possess a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5) but it is a religious counterfeit based on “church” attendance, Bible knowledge (that puffs up - 1 Cor. 8:1) and “good works” (that is, vicarious charity whereby “tithes” and “offerings” given by the convert to the “church” enable, but do not require, the “church” staff to attend to the orphans, widows and those in need). Meanwhile, the convert’s life is not the simple abiding in Christ as taught and enabled only by the Holy Spirit of God. (1 Jn. 2:27)

Since there is no real godliness, there cannot be *brotherly* kindness. We are brothers only in the light of Christ and we only have fellowship with one another as we walk in the light just as He is in the light. (1 Jn. 1:7) If we walk in the darkness of religious deception, we will not treat each other as brothers, not even in any immature sense of the word. Rather, we will only be associates tasking together in religious activities.

Since there are no brotherly relations (substituted instead and at best

with a flimsy co-worker mentality), there can be no agape love whereby we lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 Jn. 3:16) The end result is the misuse of our resources and wealth as we spend what God intended for others (orphans, widows and our brothers in Christ) for our own comforts, desires and luxuries. This is especially true when we believe that a “tithing” is all that is required of us to keep God happy! Let us completely forsake the notion that the demonic is not effective against the people of Christ!

Agape love is all about personal service that meets the true spiritual and physical needs of the one given to, about laying down one’s life for one’s brothers and sisters (not merely passing along one’s castoffs or giving out of one’s leftover excess) and it is done in obedience to Christ, bringing *Him* (not the giver) glory and honor.

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In deceiving the people of Christ into misusing their wealth, the spirit of mammon has also developed its own “codes of conduct” when it suits its purposes. These codes and laws are unwritten practices begun in wealthy circles that somehow get imported into Christian circles and, when practiced by followers of Christ, have the same effect as any other law. We remove ourselves from grace, estrange ourselves from Christ and return again to our own ability to determine good and evil. In short, we step away from God and into the hands of the demonic.

One such “code” that first developed among the wealthy plantation owners of the American South is “Southern gentility.” In addition to the gentler, nobler aspects of this code of conduct, there are some elements of snobbery against coarse, rude or poor people and some racial bigotry, particularly against blacks and Hispanics. This code with its snobbery and bigotry, when imported into Christian circles, is inappropriate, at best, but even when these two elements have been purged, the code itself is not Christ and obeying the code instead of Christ opens up one’s life to demonic influence.

Another such code is the “gentleman’s club rules.” In decades past in

large cities in America, it was fashionable for the wealthy men to be members of gentlemen's clubs. At these clubs, where it was taboo to bring one's wife or children, one could drink, gamble, flirt with the women present, etc. But one never spoke of what one did or what one saw others doing at these clubs and one always maintained one's self with an air of calmness and civility. This "discretion" and "restraint" has been imported into "Christian" circles as believers, in a mistaken notion of what "the bond of peace" really is, refuse to confront their "brothers" in their sins. (Lk. 17:3; Eph. 4:3) The result is not a holy, sacred assembly nor a spotless bride of Christ but a mixed multitude of believers in Christ worshipping God right alongside sinful rebels against God. (also see Isa. 1:13) The stench this must produce in the nostrils of God is unimagineable!

Another of mammon's financial scams is to get us to live our lives by the dictates of a budget. Some believers who lack discipline and order in their lives are personally directed by Christ to structure their finances with a budget. That is not what we are discussing here. What we are discussing here is the "law" that *everybody* needs to budget their monies and cannot spend a penny outside of the budget's allocations. One sign of the origin of this budgetary law is that the "tithe" is usually the first item on the list! A second indication of the source of budgetary law is found in the lack of freedom to spend pre-allocated funds for some other use. Whereas God may unexpectedly direct us to spend something for someone else, one who is under the deceptive bondage of a budget believes that he or she has no funds available for such a thing and, as a result, disobeys God. If we put ourselves under this budgetary law, we forfeit our ability to walk in the power and liberty of the Spirit of grace and we bring ourselves back under the curse of the law as well as open our lives to further demonic enslavement. Such a deal!

No discussion of mammon's deceptions would be complete without at least mentioning its annual celebration: Christmas. Without doubt, many good deeds are done around the end of December and these are not a completely wasted effort. (see Mk. 9:41) But the customary celebration of Christmas (where each person spends hundreds of dollars just to give gifts to his closest friends and family) has routinely and progressively excluded Christ and, like the "tithe," leaves us believing the deception that the rest of the year we don't have to give anything to any body (except for our token charitable

contributions to keep us thinking that we are “good people,” of course). Our Father of lights gives truly good gifts any day of the year (Jas. 1:17) and He expects us to use all our resources (and not just our excess) to meet the needs of and to further the work of God in the lives of all our brothers and sisters in Christ around us. (Jas. 2:15-16; 1 Jn. 3:16-18) If at Christmas (in truth, all year round), like the world, we expend large sums of money to buy

gadgets, baubles and trinkets for a select few people who neither really want nor need them and even one brother, sister, orphan or widow around us has their needs go unmet, we can be certain we have been deceived by the spirit of mammon. We can also be certain that our self-centered misuse of our God-given resources has not missed God’s attention either. We would be wise to repent now.

Another victim of mammon’s scams is the overweight religious “leader” (absent some valid medical condition that causes uncontrollable weight gain, of course). This person is really controlled by his own belly and is therefore, in reality, an enemy of the cross of Christ. (see Phlp. 3:18-19) Any claims to being a godly example of Spirit-led Christ-likeness are erroneous, exaggerated or simply deceptive. This does not excuse the obsessively skinny (who may be victims of fashion’s expectations or peer pressure) nor necessarily commend those with physical bodies kept healthily fit and trim (these may worship the belly god through obsessive exercise rather than obsessive eating or they may just worship themselves or exalt their own body!). The only sure indicator here is that excessive skinniness or fatness (again excluding those with valid physical/medical imbalances) is a sure sign that the individual is *not* truly led by the Spirit of God but by some other spirit.

God has made a way for us to depart from iniquity and live in His light by way of our steadfast faith that overcomes the world and the devil. This thread runs throughout the New Testament precisely because it is the heart’s blood of the gospel of the glory of Christ.

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Spiritual Deception

Jesus said,

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of
God. (Lk. 6:20)

Though many people refer immediately back to Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount,

Blessed are the poor in spirit... (Mt. 5:3)

the *in spirit* part is left out of Luke's Gospel precisely because of the antithetical nature of God and riches. This raises the question of whether the gospel of the kingdom of God can be truly received by peoples of nations where wealth is the god that is sacrificially served, obeyed and worshiped. It is certain that it cannot be truly presented by rich men who encircle themselves only with other spiritually immature, financially rich men whose wealth is used to support the "ministry." Make no mistake - the kingdom of God is not a "rich man's club" operating on the "gentleman's club" rules of etiquette. It is the living of the life of Christ by the enabling grace of the Spirit of Christ, a life characterized by truth, righteousness and departure from *all* wickedness. (2 Tim. 2:19)

Perhaps the greatest sin of countries like the United States is that of neglecting the poor. This is a shocking statement to make in the face of the armies of volunteers and the multiplied millions of dollars spent in the name of "charity" and "foreign aid." Yet it is nonetheless true. Jesus said, "Whatever you have done - or not done - for the least of My brothers has been done - or not done - unto Me." (Mt. 25:40,45) The personal nature of ministering to Christ is largely lost in American-style, vicarious-giving "charity."

For those with a religious, "church" background, it is difficult to even begin to unravel the layers of deception that surround poverty and wealth as they relate to following Christ. We have been inundated with the heretical "prosperity gospel" for so long in this country that anyone who does not have a heap of toys and luxuries to pamper himself and his family with - or at least an overabundance of resources to "do the work of God" - is, at best, a

second-rate kind of believer in Christ if not an outright apostate rebel. One denominational teacher is famous for the line “Where God guides, God provides.” But what will God provide when His intent is to confront and confound the deceptions of centuries of false notions that have perverted true followers of Christ into the ways and worship of mammon? (see Mt. 6:24)

God spoke through the prophet Isaiah,

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees...to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from *the poor of My people*. (Isa. 10:1-2 - emphasis added)

God not only clearly recognizes the fact that poor people are an integral part of *His* people, He insists upon particularly strict attitudes and treatments toward them. James wrote,

Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (Jas. 2:5)

The snobbish view of seeing financially impoverished believers as being somehow an inferior class of Christians is the first deception that must be abandoned and replaced with the Scriptural view that the poor brother holds an *exalted* place (see Jas. 1:9) - a place not to be sought but honored nonetheless.

The second deception that must be exposed, abandoned and replaced is our understanding of “enough.” Early in His three year ministry, Jesus

...sent [His disciples] to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. And He said to them, “Take nothing for the journey, neither staffs nor bag nor bread nor money; and do not have two tunics apiece.” (Lk. 9:2-3)

**Let us completely forsake
the notion that the demonic
is not effective against the
people of Christ!**

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Life on the road then was a lot more dangerous than we can easily envision in our age of cars, buses, trains and airplanes that make long distance travel fairly safe and routine. Weather, accidents, bandits and wild animals were real and common and often lethal concerns for travelers on the roads. The Bible, as do other histories, records many instances of travelers falling victim to these perils. So here, among other reasons, Jesus is instructing His disciples to travel without appropriate supplies and resources so that they can learn a whole new level of dependance upon God. And the result?

And [Jesus] said to them, “When I sent you without money bag, sack, and sandals, did you lack anything?”
So they said, “Nothing.” (Lk. 22:35)

They learned that the things they truly needed, both for life and service to God, were provided - even though the comforts of a life at home with friends and family were denied to them for that time and season.

The need for moment-by-moment reliance upon God cannot be over emphasized. Jesus instructed His followers to pray,

Give us *day by day* our daily bread. (Lk. 11:3 - emphasis added)

Paul wrote,

And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. (1 Tim. 6:8)

Having only enough *daily* bread for today is diametrically opposed to the stockpile mentality of most Americans who consider it “necessary” to have a well-stocked refrigerator, freezer, pantry and perhaps even root cellar or else poverty and starvation loom eminent on their horizon.

This is really nothing but hard-hearted unbelief in the faithfulness of God to provide for those who seek first His kingdom and His righteousness. (see Mt. 6:33) Or else this unbelief is the subconscious recognition that God’s kingdom and His righteousness are not really our first and highest priority in life and we are, therefore, not eligible to receive of His faithful

provision and we must, therefore, provide for ourselves as if God had truly said, “God helps those who help themselves.” But until we are able to call this self-preserving hoarding and stockpiling by its real name - the sin of unbelief - we are not free to receive the gospel of the kingdom of God.

It is probably the greatest

deception upon the people of Christ right now that wealthy people, either because their cash flow is restricted or because they know of others who possess more than they, do not believe themselves to be wealthy and therefore they do not take the necessary precautions against the dangers of being wealthy.

The deception surrounding “enough” is further compounded by the modern re-definition of what is a *luxury* and what is a *necessity*. In the American scheme, households “require” electricity and running water. This fallacy is contradicted by two incontrovertible facts:

1) Mankind has survived for thousands of years without these two relatively recent inventions and

2) when the electricity and water cease to flow into the house, people do not immediately begin to fall over dead.

Necessities are things like air to breathe, water to drink, light to see, food to eat, clothes to wear, shelter from harsh elements, and other human beings with whom we can interact. Luxuries are everything else that saves time and/or energy or that caters to some aspect of pleasing self. So long as our concept of needs and wants is defined by slick advertising marketeers and not by the Spirit of truth and righteousness, we have no hope of grasping the gospel of the kingdom of God. We may have some intellectual appreciation of what that might mean but until we can correctly label (according to God’s estimations) what in our lives is a need and what is a luxury, we are incapable

A mixed multitude of believers in Christ worshiping God right alongside sinful rebels against God must produce in the nostrils of God a stench that is unimaginable!

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of experientially attaining the fullness of God's kingdom.

Once we can spiritually discern between needs and luxuries, differentiating by the leading of God's Spirit between what is *enough* and what is *excess*, we are then in a position to distribute our resources accordingly. Paul wrote,

For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack - that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack." (2 Cor. 8:13-15)

The reference at the end there is to the gathering of daily manna, the bread from heaven supernaturally provided by God for the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to Canaan. (Ex. 16:18)

God is not calling on wealthy believers to raise poor believers to their level of material goods. He is not calling for a "communistic cell" mentality where all goods are distributed through a specially selected council of "elders" and "apostles." He is not asking anyone to give more than they have to give.

He *is* calling upon believers to allow Him to rewrite our *internal dictionary* (see Heb. 8:10) - especially in regards to words such as *enough*, *needs*, *luxuries* and the like. And He is calling for those who are given more than *enough* to genuinely enter into others' lives and come alongside these others to determine what those others might lack in respect to fulfilling the call of God on their lives. The wealthy believers are to look to the interests of these others as well as to their own interests. (Phlp. 2:4) The wealthy follower of Christ who builds up (or rents) bigger storage barns or builds for himself a second retirement/getaway home while his brother in Christ has need of daily food or shelter is deeply confused as to why God has allowed him to have so much excess. Such a one will find one day that his very soul is required of him and that the judgment he faces is stern indeed. (see Lk. 12:20-21)

It is interesting to note that abundance of resources most often results in an abuse of the necessities of life. Alcoholism, obesity and "high fashion" are all the same sin - overindulgence of the flesh using some excess of a basic

life requirement. Neither the alcoholic, the “clothes horse,” nor the overweight man (absent a genuine physical, medical condition) can be as “led by the Spirit of God” as they claim to be for they are sadly lacking in the fruit of God’s Spirit called *self-control*. (see Gal. 5:22-23) Their appetite is their god, not the one true God (see Phlp. 3:18-19), and they are using their “Christian liberties” as an opportunity to indulge their flesh. (see Gal. 5:13)

The gospel of the kingdom, as was true in the first century, is a message of hope for the poor. Now, as was true then, the vast majority of the wealthy have no real ability to perceive their need for God and they have no intention of sacrificing their wealth by taking up a cross of self-denial and self-sacrificial giving to meet the needs of others. Their desire, security and faith is in their possessions or in their ability to utilize their resources and they have no intention of letting God be their total sufficiency in all things.

Jesus said,

“How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!”

And those who heard [Him say] it said, “Who then can be saved?”

[Jesus] said, “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.” (Lk. 18:24,26-27)

It is *extremely difficult* for a rich man to enter God’s kingdom - and only *possible* through the divine, even special, grace of God. It is a fool who blindly handles his resources to satisfy his own desires - especially his own notions of superficial “charity” and religious duty which most often only

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bolster his own sense of self-worth. Jesus spoke plainly about the seed, the word of life, being choked off by the thorns, the cares, riches and pleasures of life. (Lk. 8:14) There may be no more subtle deception that diverts us from pure obedience to Christ than our self-satisfying, self-edifying “gifts” to the poor that only reinforce our feelings of superiority and power over the poor. Such “charity” only demonstrates that something other than God’s laws have been written into our hearts and minds. (Heb. 8:10)

Failing to heed all the warnings against the dangers of wealth and mammon - and there are a great many warnings throughout the New Testament - renders one ineligible to enter into or remain within the kingdom of God. Once the King of kings has been received as Savior and Lord, serving any other lord is still treason.

All of this about being poor and how we are to view and treat the poor is an important and irrevocable part of the gospel of the kingdom of God. Embracing all of His kingdom or opposing it are the only two options available as God still commands all men everywhere to repent of all their sinful ways. (Acts 17:30) Do not be deceived. God is not now - nor ever going to be - changed by the opinions and practices of men.

Another spiritual deception that has been effective in certain “Christian” circles is to get followers of Christ to label other followers of Christ as being possessed of a “spirit of poverty.” There are several problems with this notion, not the least of which is that there is no basis in the Bible to support even the existence of a “spirit of poverty”! Let us look at this from both sides of this accusation.

The people accused of having this “spirit of poverty” gain this label because they express that they have needs - either through simple honest explanation of, sinful complaints about or apologetic excuses for their financial condition. The simple fact that they don’t have *enough* or that they are *poor* or that they don’t have the *best* in provision and have to *make do* with what they have, is often enough to gain them this label. A careful examination of these things, however, reveals that the reason for this label is only a comparison of these “poor” people to the wealthy, leisure class (those who flagrantly display and even waste their overabundance on themselves) and not a comparison to the sufficient-for-today, contented life in Christ - whereas, if they were compared to this contented standard, it would be readily apparent that these “poor” people suffer no real or substantive lack in

provision.

Simply stating one's relative poverty (in comparison to the wealthy class) while perhaps unwise (2 Cor. 10:12) does not make one demonized. Complaining about one's lack (in comparison to the wealthy) is certainly sinful and wrong (see 1 Cor. 10:10)

but does not, by itself, indicate demonization. The person who feels it necessary to apologize and make excuses for not having wealth is a victim of the deceptions of mammon but that does not necessarily call for casting out a demonic spirit.

On the other hand, those people accusing others of having a "spirit of poverty" are most often the emulators of the wealthy class and those who do the most to perpetuate the deceptions, bondages and oppressions of having to emulate the wealthy. As such, the label (having a "spirit of poverty") comes from their own preconceptions and misconceptions (based on the deceptions of mammon) and not from any Holy Spirit discernment. The label enables these false accusers to look down with smug, self-righteous "superiority" upon those they wrongly believe to be demonized with a "spirit of poverty" while they themselves remain ensnared in their own bondages to the spirit of mammon (having to have only the "best," plenty of stockpiled provisions, plenty of cash in the savings account, etc.) The truth is the label, "spirit of poverty," comes from the *spirit of wealth*, mammon, that evil spirit who looks for any way to get us to misuse wealth.

The deception for the accusers is in the standard by which the label is applied (not having as much as the wealthy) and, for the accused, in stirring up envy and discontent. This is indeed a very clever scheme concocted by the ruler of misusing wealth. Few know how to recognize, let alone escape, this trap.

But perhaps the deepest deception is simply for those who hold to the notions of the "spirit of this" and the "spirit of that." As we have seen in the Bible, the "spirit of something" does not always refer to a demonic spirit nor even to the Spirit of God - it can refer to the human spirit, that is, an attitude, mindset or predisposition of a person or people. (see 1 Cor. 2:12 for example) Thus, one could indeed have a wrong attitude, mindset or predisposition

The need for moment-by-moment reliance upon God cannot be over emphasized.

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about money or wealth, thus defiling their own spirit, and these would be labeled as having this so-called “spirit of poverty.” Unfortunately, because of ignorance, those who believe in the “spirit of this” and the “spirit of that” will now try to “cast out” this “spirit of poverty” as if it were a demonic entity when, in fact, it is a human spiritual condition. What these people need is to be enlightened by God’s revelation in the matter so that their wrong attitude, mindset or predisposition simply disappears in the light of truth - not “delivered,” that is, have a demon cast out.

This is why Paul writes of a *filthiness of the spirit*. (2 Cor. 7:1) The flesh (sinful, fallen) nature of man is capable of causing us to defile our spirits. And this defilement manifests as what some would call the “spirit of this” or the “spirit of that.” But this spiritual ailment is not cured by casting out the offending spirit - that would be removing the human spirit from the person! No, only the truth can set people free from a defiled spirit. (Jn. 8:32) If we could all simply abide in Christ, allowing Him and Him only to lead us into and through *all* aspects of our spiritual life, there would simply be no room for all this confusion.

Fearing Man

This ruler of darkness is (or is at least related to) the one that Paul says is not given to us by God who has instead given us a spirit of adoption (Rom. 8:15) and of power, love and a sound mind. (2 Tim. 1:7) Why is that significant? Because this ruler's work lies in the realm of getting us to fear (respectfully obey) man rather than God, that is, obey any man or follow any tradition, philosophy or teaching of man rather than obey God.

Jesus taught,

And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him! (Lk. 12:4-5)

When we walk in the Spirit of adoption, we know that we are sons of God and we can walk in holy boldness as we walk in Christ's victory over the world. (Jn. 16:33) When we walk in the Spirit of love, power and a sound mind, we can lay down our lives for our brethren and even the world. (Jn. 15:13; 3:16) We don't obey the fear that this ruler of darkness stirs up in our hearts - we can obey God.

A perfect example of this is found in the book of Acts. Luke records:

And when [the captain and officers of the temple] had brought [the apostles], they set them before the [Sanhedrin]. And the high priest asked them, saying, "Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name [the name of Jesus]? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" (Acts 5:27-28)

What a difference six weeks can make! When they were crucifying Christ, the

God is calling upon believers to allow Him to rewrite our *internal dictionary* - especially in regards to words such as *enough, needs, luxuries* and the like.

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people there said to Pilate,

“His blood be on us and on our children.” (Mt. 27:25)

Christ’s blood is already on their hands but now they want it all to be behind them. How quickly the demonic helps its victims to forget the facts!

Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said:
“We ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree. Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”
(Acts 5:29-32)

That’s boldness! They are repeating the same “blasphemy” for which this same council executed Jesus! The story continues as the Spirit of God (that Spirit of wisdom who also bears witness to these things) stirs an eminent Pharisee on the council, Gamaliel, to rise up in their defense. Gamaliel says,

“...keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing; but if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it - lest you even be found to fight against God.”

And [the council] agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:38-42)

We should note that the Holy Spirit overcame all the works which God had allowed the powers behind the Sanhedrin to accomplish in their enmity toward Jesus. Thus we see true wisdom coming from Gamaliel and,

in the apostles, we see the boldness that overcomes the ruler of fearing man. Score one for the home team!

As an aside, we ought to notice that the apostles went to *every house*. (Acts 5:42) Even the house “church” movement has missed this one! Gathering together in Christ’s name is not foremost about getting a

crowd together (see Mt. 18:20) - not even in the neighborhood house “church.” Where ongoing relations are possible and ordained by the Lord, it’s about the older, more mature believers (who have become proficient at abiding in Christ) going to *every house* in ones and twos to see what is occurring in each house, seeing how they might further the work of Christ in that home. It’s about older believers providing younger believers with personal services and selfless examples the younger ones will need to see to truly express the life of Christ toward others in their turn. This is completely antithetical to the ruler of false religion’s “church” though some “churches” give token acknowledgment to this concept in their “home visitation” programs.

Choosing whether we will obey man or God is not always so clear cut a choice as the apostles faced. The ruler of fearing man has corrupted many a follower of Christ away from simple obedience to Christ by dangling in front of them more subtle opportunities to obey man rather than God. In the letter to the ekklesia of Ephesus, Jesus rebuked them saying,

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent. (Rev. 2:2-5)

**Once the King of kings
has been received as
Savior and Lord, serving
any other lord is still
treason.**

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Removing one of the lampstands is a serious punishment. It means taking that ekklesia out of the presence of Christ. (see Rev. 1:13,20) Leaving one's first love must also be a serious offense - and it is. Leaving one's first love is to forget Christ Himself and get caught up in works done in His name. It is to cease to abide in Him and take up works, a form of legalism.

This is precisely what happened to many second century followers of Christ. Greek forms of thought intermingled with Christ's teachings. Rather than being intimate with Christ and obeying the leadings of Christ's Spirit, many became philosophical about following Christ's teachings, seeing them as another system of thought rather than a whole new way of living life.

The roots of this thinking are seen in the New Testament itself. Paul wrote,

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.
(Col. 2:8)

Many second century followers of Christ failed to heed this warning, having fallen victim to the deceits of the ruler of fearing man, and fell from the heights of simply abiding in Christ. The traditions of men - philosophy, morality, education, knowledge, etc. - when pursued apart from Christ only serve to stir up one's independent knowledge of good and evil, the very thing for which Adam and Eve were ejected from God's first garden. (Gen. 2:17)

Paul wrote,

We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything... (1 Cor. 8:1-2)

That is, in the place where one holds on to knowledge apart from Christ.

...he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. (1 Cor. 8:2-3)

Knowledge, when gained or held apart from our love relationship with Christ,

is a return to our flesh nature. It is unwisely looking to a wrong source. Christ Jesus is our source of knowledge and wisdom - and that wisdom is spiritually gained from God through His Spirit. (see 1 Cor. 1:30) Paul wrote,

If we could all simply abide in Christ, allowing Him and Him only to lead us into and through *all* aspects of our spiritual life, there would simply be no room for all this confusion.

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However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. (1 Cor. 2:6)

Don't miss that - the rulers of darkness will not ultimately prevail. Don't be caught up in their schemes and suffer their fate with them.

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor. 2:7-9; Isa. 64:4)

We must not forget that those who truly love God obey Him. (Jn. 14:15; 1 Jn. 5:3) As we obey, we abide. As we abide, we receive His illumination and revelation. Those who disobey and fail to abide remain mired in their own thoughts or, worse, the darkness of this age.

Paul continues:

But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of

God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world... (1 Cor. 2:10-12)

This latter is not a reference to a demonic entity but to the attitude, mindset and predisposition toward disobedience that makes us subject to the prince of the power of the air. (see Eph. 2:2)

Now we have received...the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one. For "Who has known the mind of the LORD that he may instruct Him?" [Isa. 40:13] But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:12-16)

Only those who receive of the Spirit of God have the mind of Christ. All others are under the sway of the rulers of this dark world. (see 1 Jn. 5:19; Jn. 3:19-21) If we allow cultural expectations and mandates to govern the way we follow Christ we have no basis to believe that Jesus is our Lord and instead must reasonably conclude that we are simply under the sway - the control and direction - of the evil one.

Paul goes on to say,

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness" [Job 5:13]; and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." [Psa. 94:11] Therefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come - all are yours. And

you are Christ's, and
Christ is God's. (1
Cor. 3:18-23)

Man can never truly add
anything to God's way of salvation -
he can only participate in it or else
his actions remove himself from it.
Rejecting the world's wisdom to
embrace God's wisdom is not
foolishness - it is the only way to
eternal life.

**The ruler of fearing man's
work lies in the realm of
getting us to fear
(respectfully obey) man
rather than God, that is,
obey any man or follow any
tradition, philosophy or
teaching of men rather
than obey God.**

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Intimidation

In addition to deceiving us into relying on our own knowledge of good and evil, this ruler of fearing man is not above using intimidation to scare us into disobeying God. He does this most often in conjunction with the works of the other Satanic beings:

He can attempt to make us afraid of a government's rulers or police, thus adding to the work of a principality.

He can attempt to make us fear losing a promotion in our particular field or of creating enmity in a certain arena of endeavor, thus building on the work of a power.

He can attempt to make us fear what our neighbors, family or peers will think if we slip into "poverty" or into perceived need or hardship, thus capitalizing on the work of mammon. The ruler of fearing man is especially capable of inserting this fear when our perceived needs are not actual needs but rather our own list based on cultural standards. It should also be noted that the ruler of fearing man will also try to get us to fear that God will not provide for us as we step out in faith in Him - he will try to get us to provide for ourselves in obedience to that fear, thus building on the work of mammon in yet another way.

The ruler of fearing man is especially supportive of the spirit of antichrist's clergy, making us believe it to be a "mortal sin" if we actually stand up for the truth and challenge the Nicolaitan overlords and heretics.

He also tries to get us to remain silent any time the Lord gives us something to say that would rattle the cage built by the ruler of false religion ("church") or that would expose the lies of the last ruler of darkness that we will soon examine, the spirit of error.

Touch not God's anointed! (Psa. 105:15) is a favorite line jerked out of context to protect the Nicolaitan clergy and any other "man of God" who exalts himself over the people of Christ. Let us examine that in a little better light. First, *God's anointed* in that verse refers to *all* of God's people, the Israelites, in their dispersions. (see Psa. 105:13-14) This is consistent with the New Testament that says we *all* have an anointing from the Holy One. (1 Jn. 2:20) Those who use David's refusal to harm King Saul, *the LORD'S anointed* (1 Sam. 24:6), fail to recognize that no "pastor" (or whatever titled person or position) is to be a lord or master over other believers as Saul was over David. There simply *is no basis* in the Old or New Testaments for supposing the clergy or anyone else to be "more anointed," "more holy," more anything from God than anybody else. The only *more* someone might be is more older or more mature - and that is a factor of time and personal application, not a special gifting from God. In fact, other than to be denounced, the notion of clergy over the people of Christ is simply not found in the New Testament. There just is no basis for being afraid of challenging the Nicolaitan overlords' and heretics' sins, lies, deceptions and errors. Even genuine elders are supposed to be *publicly* rebuked! (1 Tim. 5:20)

Second, if the clergy does not belong to God and they are speaking lies in the name of Christ, they are not entitled to protections from God but will rather receive punishment from Him. (see 2 Pet. 2:3) *Touch* carries with it some idea of *harm* or *destroy*. When it comes to these Nicolaitan overlords, indeed, as is true of every other false teacher and cultist, *we* ought not seek to harm or destroy them. (see Lk. 9:54-56) Indeed, they might yet repent and be restored to us as true brothers in Christ. Speaking the truth about their destructive "ministries," however, when done out of concern for their soul and the souls of those whom they deceive, is neither harmful nor destructive - except to their fleshly egos, false reputations and lucrative careers, the very things diverting them from the path to eternal life. Rebuking them in the Spirit of the Lord may be the most beneficial thing one could do for them!

To overcome this ruler's intimidation factor, we must heed the

The rulers of darkness will not ultimately prevail. Don't be caught up in their schemes and suffer their fate with them.

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instruction given by the writer of Hebrews:

For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. (Heb. 12:3-4)

It is good to note here that the sinners who directed their hostility against Christ Jesus were the religious leaders of the day. It is no different now when genuine followers of Christ are opposed, ridiculed, persecuted or even executed by religious “Christian” leaders of today. We must also recognize that, in our fight to liberate ourselves and others from the prison gates of the demonic, we have not yet suffered as He suffered. As we consider Him in this light, it will help us to abide in Him and we will be encouraged to endure whatever suffering God has placed before us.

A few verses later, the writer continues:

If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (Heb. 12:7-8)

Not only should we not obey the intimidation the ruler of fearing man would attempt to put on us, we should receive whatever consequences might come from our obeying God, not as the destructive work of the devil, but as the corrective, constructive discipline of God our Father.

A few verses later, the writer goes on:

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous... (Heb. 12:11)

Okay. Suffering hurts. As someone once wisely said, dying (to self) still feels like dying. It will not be a joy ride or pleasure cruise - but the joy and rejoicing do come later. (see Psa. 30:5)

...nevertheless, afterward [the chastening] yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

Pursue peace with all men, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled; lest there be any fornicator or profane person like Esau, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright. For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Heb. 12:11-17)

The writer here is saying that if we endure God's chastening we will be more like Him - so be encouraged and strengthened to endure. Remain diligent, however, as there are some serious consequences to negligence in these matters:

1) We might fall short of the grace of God by falling back under law or some other deception that prevents us from finishing our race. (also see Gal. 5:4)

If we allow cultural expectations and mandates to govern the way we follow Christ we have no basis to believe that Jesus is our Lord and instead must reasonably conclude that we are simply under the sway - the control and direction - of the evil one.

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2) If we fail to forgive the human agents who cause or add to our sufferings, a root of bitterness could spring up in our souls and this would cause us to stumble and defile others because of our own unforgiveness. (see Lk. 23:33-34; Acts 7:59-60; Mt. 18:21-35) And,

3) We might become like Esau who, though he believed himself entitled to an inheritance, in fact, to his sorrow, he was not. (also see Mt. 7:21-23)

Let he who has ears hear.

Error

The last ruler of darkness we will study (if there be more lords of darkness, this author is not aware of them at this time) is the spirit of error. In truth, this may be just another name for the spirit of antichrist - its goals and tactics are extremely similar. But since the Scriptures may be interpreted as giving it a separate name, we will study it as a separate entity. John wrote,

Other than to be denounced, the notion of clergy over the people of Christ is simply not found in the New Testament.

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You are of God, little children, and have overcome [the deceiving spirits and the spirit of antichrist], because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. [The deceiving spirits] are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn. 4:4-6)

This ruler of darkness preys against our ability to hear God for ourselves by getting us to listen to and obey demonic voices and lies rather than listening only to God's Spirit of truth. Those who don't believe we are supposed to hear God for ourselves should remember Jesus' words:

My sheep hear My voice... (Jn. 10:27)

Only those who are not really His sheep fail to hear His voice. Let he who has ears hear.

The spirit of error's first aim is to keep us so busy, so distracted or so noisy in our souls that we are unable to clearly hear the voice of God.

Let us recall what Jesus said about prayer.

But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the

secret place... (Mt. 6:6)

The *secret place* Jesus refers to is that place where no other human may go. It is that innermost place in our beings where our spirit co-mingles with the Spirit of God. It is our heart of hearts. Since God only speaks there in a peaceful, small voice (see 1 Ki. 19:12), a busy, distracted or noisy soul will easily drown out God's voice.

If this ploy is successful, the ruler of error will then attempt to give his own messages to the person. These "revelations" or "words of knowledge" will be very subtly embedded with deception, though, as time goes by, if this one does not forsake this demonic relationship, the deceptions will become more pronounced and ungodly. (see 2 Tim. 3:13)

John wrote,

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. (1 Jn. 4:1-3)

Whatever else might be gleaned from this passage, we at least find one question to ask that spirit that speaks to us in our inner being: "Has Jesus Christ come in the flesh?" A noisy, overly busy soul will mask the answer and cause confusion, but a quiet, patient, contrite soul will know the voice of God.

The spirit of error's work then becomes an imitation and usurping of the rightful place of the Spirit of truth within our hearts. If we would be wary and vigilant against this spirit's deceptions, we must recognize the specific role the Spirit of truth has in our lives. Jesus taught:

...the Father...will give you another Helper...even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (Jn. 14:16-17)

First, the Spirit of truth, our Helper, helps us to persevere in our race

to attain to the upward call of Christ Jesus in our lives. Second, He is not related to this world in any way and His instructions will always cause us to forsake the world and embrace the cross. And third, He is within us, as Jesus said elsewhere, *in the secret place*.

(Mt. 6:6) Often times, if we are truly quiet and still, we can sense or discern whether the spiritual voice speaking to us comes from without or from within our innermost being. When dealing with spiritual voices speaking to our inner man, a voice speaking from outside our spirit will not be the Spirit of truth who dwells within.

Jesus also taught:

But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (Jn. 15:26)

First, He proceeds from the Father - everything He is, God is also. Everything God is, so He is too. Second, the Spirit of truth will testify of Jesus. An angel says this again to John in the book of Revelation:

...the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. (Rev. 19:10)

Any prophetic word given by spiritual means, especially one that has nothing to say about Christ but rather focuses on some group or individual is suspect as not coming from the Spirit of truth. If the word contains demeaning or condemning elements (against the people - not their sins!) or simply gossips about or speaks evil of that group or individual, we can know with certainty the word has not come from the Spirit of God.

Jesus also said,

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take

**Dying (to self) still
feels like dying.**

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of what is Mine and declare it to you. (Jn. 16:13-14)

First, He will guide us into all truth - to do that He must progressively lead us out from under every lie we have believed in (1 Jn. 2:21) and we must actively depart from every iniquity. (2 Tim. 2:19) If we can detect even the tiniest deception, we can know immediately that the spirit speaking to our inner being or speaking through someone else is not the Spirit of truth. Second, He only speaks what He hears from God or Christ - if God or Christ would not say something, neither will the Spirit of truth. And third, He will bring glory, not dishonor, shame and disgrace, to the name of Christ. The strange goings on in hyper-charismatic circles do little to glorify Christ and instead point to severe demonization. This casts suspicion on every spiritual, prophetic word given in those circles as not really being from the Spirit of truth though it is still true that God, not desiring that any should perish, could speak within those circles.

The attitude we must cultivate to overcome this ruler of error is first of all a quiet, peaceful interior. That is, we must abide quietly in Christ. (also see Isa. 26:3) Only when we sit quietly at the Master's feet will we hear His words. Second, we must love the truth more than our own life. Paul warns,

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan... (2 Ths. 2:9)

That would be the working of all of his assistants too.

...with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish... (2 Ths. 2:9-10)

At least one (if not more) of Satan's deceptive tricks - personally altered to fit the individual if necessary - will be effective against those whom he holds in his prison of darkness. Why?

...because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they

all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Ths. 2:10-12; also see Rev. 21:7-8; 22:14-15)

If we are negligent, we can become like Esau who, though he believed himself entitled to an inheritance, in fact, to his sorrow, he was not.

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The pleasure we take in any unrighteousness is the very door by which the demonic will come into our lives. If we are walking in the love of truth, we will forsake all unrighteousness and the demonic will gain no control over us. If we are content in our sin, the demonic will gain great advantage over us and will lead us into further unrighteousness and darkness until even God will give us over to the strong delusion and permit us to believe any lie the demonic spins past us. The choice is ours.

Tag Team

If the Satanic entities we have studied worked alone they would be formidable enough. But as we have already seen in several instances, the demonic excels at what it does, in part, precisely because they do work together in their vast scams against humanity.

We have seen how the ruler of fearing man works closely with the other rulers of darkness, invoking reverential obedience to the spirit of antichrist's Nicolaitan clergy, invoking fear of a principality's evil governmental police and/or policies, invoking fear of one's superiors or colleagues in one's field of work, invoking fear of what other people will think if we aren't awash in every gadget, toy and luxury the spirit of mammon would have us believe we need.

We have also seen how the tithe brings together the rulers of false religion, displacing Christ and mammon. The ruler of false religion deceives us back under law and we, with a set percentage of our wealth, support the "church" and its Nicolaitan clergy in what we mistakenly believe to be some "work of God" where our wealth is wasted on a "house" that God neither wants nor needs. And we have seen how mammon's scams to get us to misuse our wealth rely on false religion's "church" "discipleship" methods that derail us from attaining to true spiritual maturity. Mammon interacts also with principalities and the spirit of false religion causing governments to make certain charities (especially the "churches" that bow down to the government) tax deductible, thus giving mammon a level of control over both the givers in their vicarious charity and over the organization to which the charity is given.

The powers behind the educational system manipulate that system to produce quiet, dependent (enslaved) automatons (employees, servants) for mammon's career-to-get-luxuries system. In this case, the educational system trains young people to absorb vast quantities of knowledge they will never use (even making them take work home!) and teaches them little or nothing that would make independent thinkers and doers, world movers and shakers. Then, the "church" imitates the worldly education system by making the "pastor" more like a university professor than a true shepherd! So much for being salt and light in a dying world. (see Mt. 5:13-14)

The most interactive system these lords of darkness have created is, far and away, the "church." Begun as the synagogue (the Jewish "public school" system) during Israel's Babylonian captivity and wedded to the pagan

temples of Rome in the third century, false religion's "church" is a haven for the spirit of antichrist's Nicolaitan clergy, for mammon's plots to get us to misuse our resources, for the ruler of fearing man's schemes to cause us to follow man's teachings and traditions (in many cases, using the very words of the Bible to do so!) and for the spirit of error to pass along its deceptive whisperings to the hearts of believers, non-believers and pseudo-believers alike. As James said,

The ruler of error preys against our ability to hear God for ourselves by getting us to listen to and obey demonic lies rather than listening only to God's Spirit of truth.

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For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there. (Jas. 3:16)

This is the modern "church." Those who deny this are the captives of one or more of the rulers of darkness.

The scope of the religious scam the demonic has worked against the people of Christ is seen most clearly when we compile a list of the main items and concepts which are heavily relied upon in "churchianity" - items and concepts not even found in the Scriptures!

Peter wrote:

[God has] given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these [promises] you may be partakers of the divine nature... (2 Pet. 1:4)

If these items and concepts we are about to examine cannot even be found anywhere within God's great and precious promises - the Scriptures - how can they have anything to do with partaking of the divine nature, that is, living the life of Christ? The simple answer is: they can't. When we can recognize the extent of the deception, we will then be free to become more the spotless, blameless bride of Christ ready for Christ's return. Until then, our garments will remain stained with darkness.

Take this list to your own exhaustive concordance or Bible computer program:

“Pastor”
Pulpit
Pew
Clergy
“Church” buildings
Denominations
Tithe (in the New Testament)

Every one of these items are conspicuously absent from the Scriptures yet they are hinge pins or even centerpieces of the “church.” Let us examine each one in more detail.

“*Pastor*”: If we look in the King James or New King James version (and a few other English versions as well), we do find the English word “pastors” (plural) used once in the New Testament. (Eph. 4:11) The word is used along with four other categories of leaders that the Lord gives to His people to equip His people for the work of attending to the interests and responsibilities of His kingdom of light. (Eph. 4:12) This one usage, especially tucked in as it is with a list of other equally important leadership giftings, does not justify the prominent, exalted and, in many cases, even worshiped position of “pastor” that is practiced in virtually every institutionalized “church.”

This should be even more apparent when we recognize that Paul gives his two assistant apostles Timothy and Titus (not bishops as the KJV inaccurately claims - ever wonder why so many “Christian” groups, organizations and individuals insist on “King James only,” even to the point of dividing over it? Because the demonic managed to insert some key concepts into the printing of the Scriptural texts!) the qualifications of overseers (bishops) - Greek episkopas - and elders - Greek presbuteros - (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9) but he gives no similar qualifications for “pastors” nor any of the other four leaders of Eph. 4:11.

But the deception does not end there. The English word “pastor” is inserted for the Greek word “poimenas” which every other time it is used in the New Testament is translated “shepherd.” If we trace the origins of the

English word back through its Latin origins, we find that “pastor” is derived from roots that go to the Greek god Pan, the half-goat, half-human god of herdsman and pastures! “Pastor” is from a *Latin* word! There is no way “pastors” were included in the original Greek. Think about it.

While one can perhaps dismiss the linguistic differences as the mere transition of languages over time, one cannot dismiss the stark contrast between true spiritual shepherds and “church” “pastors.” The KJV translators of 1611 apparently felt compelled to insert the English word “pastor” in the Scriptures somewhere (Eph. 4:11; Jer. 2:8; 3:15; 10:21; 12:10; 17:16; 22:22; 23:1-2) because the Anglican “church,” like the Catholic “church” before it, had titled positions called “pastors.” The irony of this is that the Catholic and Anglican “pastors” may have been more like genuine spiritual shepherds than were the Anglican and Catholic clergy! Today, however, the modern “pastor” is little more than a Nicolaitan overlord (Rev. 2:6,15) who, even in normal, routine “church” business, lords over those who have foolishly placed themselves under his hand. And the “pastor” is anything but a shepherd who knows every sheep by name and who lays his life down for the sheep - even though he is most often paid a handsome, even exorbitant, salary to do so! Most often, the “pastor” wears the “wool” of his congregation (Mt. 7:15) and butchers, abandons or even drives off the hundredth sheep (Mt. 18:12-13; Lk. 15:4-7) so he can keep the ninety-nine (the largest and best tithers) comfortable and faithful to himself and/or his sect.

A “pastor” is set in office either by himself or by other men - not God. Often this involves politics that rival the world’s machinations and the “pastor” applicant must be a confirmed sycophant of at least one of those who get to choose the new clergyman. God’s callings and giftings within the man (assuming there are any) - and especially if the man is supposed to be one of the five giftings (Eph. 4:11) - are distorted, squelched or completely overridden as the man tries to give himself completely over to his new position of power and responsibility - the “pastor.” In order for a man to become a

The demonic excels at what it does, in part, precisely because they do work together in their vast scams against humanity.

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“pastor,” he must buy into a number of lies - the perfect breeding ground for demonic influence and control. Any saving grace a “pastor” might accrue (during the time the wheat and the tares are permitted to remain together) is in how much of his real gifting from God (apostle, prophet, herald, shepherd, instructor, whatever) he manages to grow into *in spite of* his efforts to be the “church” “pastor.”

Pulpit: The closest one can come to find a pulpit in the Scriptures is the reading table from the synagogue. (Lk. 4:17) This vague reference alone (especially since the reading table does differ from the modern pulpit) does not justify the pulpit’s central, elevated place in nearly every “church,” a place that separates and divides the clergy from the laity - especially since clergy is a distortion of Christlike leadership. This reference (Lk. 4:17) is even less of a Scriptural basis since the synagogue was clearly rejected in the New Testament as the pattern of assembly. James, most likely the first book written in the New Testament, is the only book that speaks of followers of Christ meeting in a synagogue - and that only in a passing remark! (Jas. 2:2) The later books show a different pattern of assembly. In addition to being rejected in the New Testament, the synagogue simply and absolutely has no place in the Old Testament whatsoever. In fact, the synagogue is the direct result of disobedience to God’s laws while the Jews were held captive in Babylon. The synagogue was, in effect, the “public school” with its professional teachers (the rabbis who produced little but divisiveness and traditionalism, both of which war against God’s will for His people) whereas God had told His people to *homeschool*. (Dt. 11:29)

The pulpit is simply not to be found in the Scriptures!!!

But it is found in the pagan, Roman temples around the time of Constantine - it was called an *amba*. So is the platform from which the “pontiffs” (recognize the Catholic sect’s title for clergy? - literally, the “bridge” between the god and the people) declared the words of the god to the people.

Pew: The closest one can come to a pew is where James speaks of having the rich man sit in a good place but having the poor man stand or sit by one’s footstool. (Jas. 2:3) This, like the reading table above, is found only in the context of the synagogue and is therefore excluded from being useful as a pattern for assembly.

Clergy: This has been discussed previously (p. 96) so let us just

summarize here. The word “clergy” derives from the Greek word “kleros,” the heritage or portion of God, His people. (1 Pet. 2:3) In the time of the so-called “church” “fathers,” the clergy came to be a superior, more-valued portion of God’s flock. Nowadays, most clergy, especially “pastors,” often act as if the rules for being a member in God’s flock don’t even apply to them in any way!

The most interactive system these lords of darkness have created is, far and away, the “church.”

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“Church” buildings: This too has been discussed previously (p. 80) so again let us simply summarize here. God does not live in buildings made by human hands (Acts 7:48) but rather lives in His people who are said to be living stones. (1 Pet. 2:5) There simply is no New Testament temple or house to build for God! This is why the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom when Jesus died (Mt. 27:51) and why God caused the old temple in Jerusalem to be destroyed in 70 A.D.!

Denominations: Actually, denominations are easily found in the Scriptures! We need only re-examine the list of the works of the flesh that keep us from inheriting the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21) to find the concept of denominations. The word in particular that strikes at denominationalism is “dissensions” or “divisions” (Greek “dichostasia”). The word picture here is larger than that of the English words. It is of “twice” or “again” (“dicho” as in dichotomy) and “standing” (“stasia” as in stasis).

We are called to be the one body of Christ. The thousands of denominations that exist were almost all formed as a result of one sect of Christ’s proclaimed followers dissenting and dividing from one another. It is impossible for those who thus form to be a valid and complete expression of the kingdom of God. This doesn’t mean that God did not use these denominations to some extent as He uses all things for His own (even the sinking of the Titanic, for example) but the denominations were not fully of Him either. As the people of Christ mature to being the spotless, blameless bride ready for His return, all things that are not of Him must vanish from our midst.

The body of Christ (like the human body) is filled with living, breathing, moving, pumping (all ongoing action words) body parts. Stasia is

static. It's like taking a photograph or drawing (and thus killing) a blood sample of what we think God was saying or doing at a particular time or in a particular man. Thus there is the Catholic stasia, the Lutheran stasia, the Calvin stasia, the Protestant stasia, the Evangelical stasia, etc., etc., etc., ad nauseum. The dichos part of the word kicks in when we divide ourselves away from those who won't adhere to our own man-made stasia. It is the "double standard" - believe as I do or leave - a distinctive part of nearly every "church" "pastor's" strategy! Denominational headquarters is also the most likely place to find "brothers" to lord over you in direct disobedience to Christ's commands otherwise. (Mt. 20:25-26; Mk. 10:42-43; Lk. 22:25-26; Rev. 2:6,15) God will allow many denominations (even "non-denominational" denominations! - see any contradiction in terms here?) to build its world-wide headquarters and establish its "pastors" and clergy as some mega-CEO to push the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1-3; Mt. 24:10-12) across the globe!

Some have tried to defend denominations on the basis of the works they have produced over the years. Denominations have indeed built hospitals, universities and schools, etc. But how much more could the people of Christ done if they hadn't built God all those houses He doesn't live in anyway (Acts 7:48) and had instead worked together at the community level to establish a purer expression of the kingdom of God and the body of Christ? It is also to be noted that the world has also built many fine schools, universities and hospitals too. What makes the people of Christ different here?

The New Testament tithe: This also has been discussed previously (p. 76) so yet again let us summarize. The closest one can come to the idea of tithing is Paul's instruction to the Corinthians (regarding their collection for the impoverished Jerusalem saints) to lay something aside on the first day of the week. (1 Cor. 16:1-3) As this is a collection for poor and troubled saints in a particular city at a particular time, it is very difficult to say this is the set percentage tithe that is almost universally in almost all instances of income and increase virtually demanded by the clergy so that they can maintain their own exorbitant and extravagant lifestyles at their congregation's expense - especially since the Corinthians' gifts were to be what each one had purposed in his own heart to give (2 Cor. 9:7) and not any set percentage!

Note this carefully!!! *Not one* of these things can be found in the

Scriptures as a way to honor, obey and worship God and *each one* of these things have a detrimental effect, to one extent or another, on our spiritual life in Christ.

Some people believe that the bride's necessary purification will occur within the context of the "church." This is simply not possible. "Church" leadership

today regularly reject and decry the truth about "church" as heretical and ungodly just as the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day rejected and decried His teachings as demonic blasphemy. Reform is not an option for the institutional "church" anymore than it was an option for Judaism under the Pharisees and Sadducees. A new wineskin was - and is - required for the new wine. (Lk. 5:36-39) Modern "pastors" - by virtue of their stranglehold on their congregation's minds through their careful control over who gets into their pulpits - will not permit the truths to be told in their "church" any more than the Jewish leaders made a place for Jesus' teachings in their synagogues. And traditional Judaism could only bring spiritual death once the Law and the Prophets were fulfilled. So too can the traditional, institutional "church" - in all its forms and spinoffs, including the mega-"church" and the home "church" that inadvertently incorporates "church" principles - only bring spiritual death as the bride (the body, the real people of Christ, the ekklesia) readies herself for her Husband's return. (see Rev. 19:7)

Why has this deception grown so large? Because, in addition to God allowing it to be so while the wheat and the tares mature together, most people who attend "church" have no real desire (either because of demonic deceptions or simple self-centeredness) to know or do God's will. Most want only a cultural feel-good religious experience that makes them somewhat "better" people who feel "better" about themselves (though quite often "church" attendees suffer under more guilt than anyone else!). As a result of

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this lack of a genuine desire to know and do God's will, they have rejected the only spiritual protection against deception (Jn. 7:17), they have rejected sound doctrine (Tit. 2:1-15) and have instead heaped up teachers - "pastor"-teachers! - who will tell them stories that scratch their ears and that keep them "faithful" (at least to the "church" or the "pastor" - 2 Tim. 4:3-4) - even while they fall away from the true faith that was delivered once for all. (Jude 3)

Until we love truth more than our own opinions (2 Ths. 2:10) and desire God's will more than our own (Jn. 7:17), the modern "church" paradigm will continue to seem like a good thing.

There are some - most often some "church" attendee or leader - who respond to the criticisms against the "church" by saying, "Well, God must have allowed it for some purpose." The blindness concealed behind this objection is staggering. Yes, God has allowed the "church" to exist because the tares needed a hiding place! God has also allowed serial killers and child molesters to go uncaught and unpunished in this life! (There is indeed too much similarity between the "pastors" and "church" leaders who do their mutilations to the spirits and souls of their victims and these serial killers and child molesters who do their damage on the physical plane!) God also allowed the Jews to be so blinded by their traditions that they murdered their Messiah. Do we really want to belong in the same category as these? Jesus said it clearly:

It is impossible that no offenses should come, but woe to him through whom they do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. (Lk. 17:1-2)

Those who deny that the "church" system thwarts the will of God have forgotten that

...[God is] not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet. 3:9)

and that

...it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance... (Heb. 6:4-6)

Any saving grace a “pastor” might accrue (during the time the wheat and the tares are permitted to remain together) is in how much of his real gifting from God (apostle, prophet, herald, shepherd, instructor, whatever) he manages to grow into *in spite of* his efforts to be the “church” “pastor.”

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When one of His little ones is so offended that he or she succumbs to the spirit-numbing darkness of the “church” and fails to depart from all iniquity but instead perishes behind the veils of the gods of this age, God’s will for that one *is* thwarted. We have played the games of false religion for so long that following Christ is no longer a dangerous, lethal struggle!

There is a physical picture occurring in the world at the time of this writing of what the “church” is doing on spiritual levels. In Uganda, it is reported that a charismatic leader heads up a “Christian” cult that challenges the legitimate government for power. According to these reports:

Children are kidnaped and forced to serve as soldiers for and servants to the cult leaders.

These children are mutilated and tortured for disobedience and even killed if caught attempting to escape. Often other children are forced to torture or murder these

“wayward” children. Some children have been forced to murder their own parents.

The bloody clashes between the cult and the government disrupts the life of everyone living in the country.

The “Christian” cult was originally funded and supported by Islamic elements of another country who wanted to destabilize Uganda.

News coverage of the atrocities done in Uganda is virtually non-existent for the Western media.

How is this like the “church”?

New believers are diverted from attaining to genuine spiritual maturity (2 Pet. 1:5-7) in a number of ways, chief of which is believing that listening to a sermon and being a somewhat “better” person is all that Christ intends for us. These believers are expected and trained to take up quiet, passive subservient and supportive roles underneath the “pastor” and the “church” staff.

Believers are bludgeoned with fearful threats to keep them from leaving the “church” and, when they come into contact with deeper truths of God, are forced to choose between the “church” and those truths. Often this is a bloody, tumultuous encounter that drives many people away from all contact with the Bible, God and Christ.

Because the “church” is really a perverse counterfeit of God’s authority, the real body of Christ, the ekklesia, that is still in bondage to some darkness within the system is kept from realizing its full potential.

The “church” - especially with its modern buildings,

luxuries and amenities - is a product of the work of the demonic, especially false religion, antichrist and mammon (riches, wealth) and is not a work of God.

Reform is not an option for the institutional “church” anymore than it was an option for Judaism under the Pharisees and Sadducees.

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Even when the truth is told (as has been done in this work) it will be down-played or completely dismissed in the pulpits and by those under the control of the demonic.

Let he who has ears hear.

Perhaps the saddest example of how these rulers will gang up on someone is how they take down men, especially preachers who come from a religious background, who begin to see the truth about some of these deceptions but who fail to understand and guard against the rest of Satan’s pride, his lions and lionesses, whose schemes are equally dangerous and lethal.

One preacher was freed from false religion’s “church,” began to call for more interactive community among believers and even spoke against the Nicolaitan overlords. But his understanding of all that it means to be clergy was limited. While he worked to see people leave the “church” and come out from under the “pastors,” he failed to see the danger in having an “upper class.” He simply transferred clergy status and privileges to his idea of “elders,” expecting them, in effect, to be another version of heaped up teachers who dispense the Bible “line upon line, precept upon precept.” (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4; Isa. 28:13) Fortunately, very few unwary souls have been drawn into his snare.

Another preacher saw the fallacies and deceptions of “church” and even identified the spirit of false religion as the demonic spirit behind the scenes. He began to speak clearly and boldly against the false practices. He received clear revelation from the Spirit of truth and began to preach clearly and convincingly about Christ and our responsibilities to Him and to one

another. He received clear instruction from the Lord (both personally and through other prophetically gifted believers) that he should cut back on the number of his speaking engagements and to instead focus on ministering to his family. But he neglected to slow down his “road show,” succumbing instead to flattery that convinced him that “the body of Christ” needed the messages he was speaking, and he became busier than ever. Then the spirit of error whispered in his ear and he was diverted to preaching about end-time events. He came up with interpretations of prophecies that were new but not beyond the realm of Scriptural possibility that would have immediately exposed the deceit of the spirit of error. The fruit of error began to show over time in that people were being diverted away from the teachings of abiding in Christ and of maintaining their responsibilities to Him and to one another. Having come from a “church” background, he was freed from the “church” paradigm but he still clung to doctrines that held vestiges of Nicolaitan clergyism, a resurrected version of the “personal pastor” system. It was not long before this preacher began making Draconian speeches about bowing down to these men and supporting them with the “tithe.” Though this man still preaches, he does nothing of real value for the kingdom of God and instead, draws men after himself - and to the demonic who pull his strings - not much different from any other “church” “pastor” that one can submit one’s self to.

In yet another sorrowful instance, a professional man, skilled in his ability to maintain a professional facade and demeanor, was able to conceal, to a large degree, his personal arrogance. Through his studies and experiences, he was freed, in large degree, from the “church” paradigm, clergyism, fear of man, and even the misuse of wealth. As a result, he apparently came to believe that he was not deceived about anything. The spirit of error came to him, led him to extreme busy-ness, noise and distraction and then began speaking to him when he attempted to pray to the Father in his secret place. (Mt. 6:6) He began to traffic in false words of knowledge and then to receive overt cultists as “brothers in the Lord.” The Spirit of truth began to warn other believers that this man had become tangled in the brambles and was dangerous to be around but the man himself would not hear the rebuke.

Section III:

Walking in the Light

As was said at the very beginning, this work should not make you fear the devil and his assistants. Rather, it should stir you to vigilance, wariness and wiser resistance to his schemes. That we can overcome the devil - if we will but abide in Christ - is clearly portrayed in the New Testament. Indeed, even in our study of these Satanic entities, we have repeatedly seen that careful

adherence to Christ is the way of victory over the demonic. But let us make no mistake here - our abiding in Christ Jesus is the *only* assurance and hope for our victory over the world and the demonic.

There are some who object to this intensive study of the dark forces arrayed against us because they say the gospel *is* light. Many times this objection is only a cover for darkness and stems solely from having one's religious toes stomped on. Those who object to the truths contained in this work simply because their own idolatry has been exposed are those who prefer the veils of the demonic. Let he who has ears hear.

But there is a small portion of people who have grown weary of seeing only the sin around them. They truly hunger for real fellowship and genuine righteousness in their lives and in the lives of their brothers and sisters around them but they really have no idea how or even see any way by which to attain to the glorious light they see and adore. Because they yearn for His light, they object to this intense study of the darkness that many people practice in the name of Christ. Unfortunately, we cannot simply focus on the good side of things, refusing to look at all the religious practices which enslave us to the demonic and which prevent the life of Christ from coming forth in us and in those around us. We cannot simply hunker down and await some new practice that *will* produce the life of Christ in and around us. There are two reasons this is so:

First, those who would like to simply focus on Christ, the cross, the blood, the transcendence of God, etc., have the right idea but they have gotten the idea too late in their Christian lives. If, from day one of their salvation

We have played the games of false religion for so long that following Christ is no longer a dangerous, lethal struggle!

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experience, they had persistently abided in Christ, this would be the correct course to take. If these had *never* been deceived into partaking of the cup and table of the demonic, these might be (aside from their remaining wary and resistant to the devil's devices) right in their opposition to a lengthy detailed study of the darkness practiced in Christ's name. But because we are all religiously leavened (see Mt. 13:33; 1 Cor. 5:8; Lk. 5:39), we must learn just how we have been deceived into serving the demonic and we must learn to recognize, forsake and overcome all the counterfeits we have routinely practiced thinking we were truly serving God. If we intend to be without spot or blemish when Christ returns to claim His bride, we must *purify ourselves* in preparation for that day. To do so, we must be able to correctly discern between pure substance and contaminant.

There are some who will object to the notion that we can and must purify ourselves, believing holiness and sanctification to be solely the work of God. John wrote,

And *everyone* who has this hope in Him [of being made like Christ when He is revealed as King and Lord] *purifies himself*, just as He is pure. (1 Jn. 3:2-3 - emphasis added)

Everyone, not just a select chosen few, *must* purify themselves (in Paul's vernacular, we must depart from iniquity - 2 Tim. 2:19). This purification is the fruit that follows those who hope for eternal life in Christ. If there is no self-purification, either one is deceived and diverted from the path to eternal life or there is no real hope in their hearts for eternal life in Christ. Either way, it is a serious and dangerous condition to be in.

And Paul wrote,

Therefore, having these promises [that upon our separation from idolaters and the things of idolatry, the LORD Almighty will be our God and Father], beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1 - emphasis added)

Cleansing ourselves from contact with all persons who practice idolatry and from all the paraphernalia, forms and practices of idolatry (among those who name the name of Christ and not those of the world - see 1 Cor. 5:10) *is* the perfecting of holiness! And it is not God's responsibility or place to do it! Waiting on God to do the things He has commanded us to do is either sheer ignorance or

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a blind denial of our responsibilities before God. If we fail to purify and cleanse ourselves in this way, it is only one more way in which we have failed, neglected or refused to depart from iniquity. (2 Tim. 2:19)

The second reason we cannot simply focus only on the good or light side of the gospel is that we are commanded to be wary and vigilant against the tactics of the devil, steadfastly resisting against his schemes to deceive and defraud us. (1 Pet. 5:8; Eph. 6:11) Paul felt it necessary to overtly express his forgiveness of the sinning brother at Corinth

...lest Satan should take advantage of [Paul and the Corinthians] for [Paul was] not ignorant of [Satan's] devices. (2 Cor. 2:10-11)

Today's Christians are exceedingly ignorant of Satan's devices and are generally lax in their attitudes about the devil and the demonic and, as a result, the demonic holds great advantage over them. Such negligent attitudes, though easily propelled too far in other directions (into fear, sensationalism, etc.) are in themselves unsafe and unwise. If we are to gain our complete liberty from all darkness, we at least need to be able to recognize the darkness when we see it.

We must remember John's warning:

This is the message which we have heard from Him

and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. (1 Jn. 1:5-6)

Jesus said,

But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. (Jn. 4:23-24)

Walking in the light is not optional for the real follower of Christ - it is mandatory. Walking in the light is the only way to be Christ's ekklesia, His *called-out people*. We have been called while imprisoned in darkness to come out of the dark world, to be separated from all darkness, to cling to Him who is light so that we might be good soldiers and citizens in His kingdom of light. There simply is no other way to attain to the eternal life He has so generously bestowed upon us - just as there is no way we can leave behind all the subtle imprisonments of darkness if the enemy has fooled us into thinking that the prison gates of the demonic are instruments of light and righteousness.

The Narrow Road

John wrote:

In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love [agape] his brother.

For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. (1 Jn. 3:10-14)

If we would remain on the narrow road that leads to life (see Mt. 7:13-14), we must love our brothers in Christ. That is, we must set aside our self-centered agendas and lay down our lives so that not just we ourselves but also our brothers attain to Christ's agenda for all our lives. (1 Jn. 3:16; Jn. 13:34) By this agape love we may know that we have passed from death to life because if we don't love our brother we abide in death as did Cain who, under an evil influence, murdered his brother and we do not abide in Christ who came to bring abundant life. (Jn. 10:10) Let he who has ears hear.

How do we attain to Christ's *agape* love? Peter wrote:

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly

This work should not make you fear the devil and his assistants. Rather, it should stir you to vigilance, wariness and wiser resistance to his schemes.

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kindness; and to brotherly kindness, [agape] love. (2 Pet. 1:5-7 NIV)

We have seen these steps to spiritual maturity before. But let us look at them now for their original and ultimate purpose - to show us how to attain to Christ's agape love.

1) First and throughout, we must be diligent to build on what God has already given us - our faith. (Eph. 2:8-9; Col. 2:6) It is inappropriate and even foolish for us to do nothing after we have been exposed to a greater light and truth of Christ. We must diligently receive, apply and obey His truth every time He brings us a new or expanded insight.

2) Then we must add to our faith goodness. In addition to our trust in God to bring us from darkness into His light, we must begin to do good. We do not leave our previous circle of influence (except under rare or perhaps dangerous circumstances) - rather we now bring the goodness of God to those who have always been around us so they might see the life-changing power of Christ.

3) Then we must add to our goodness knowledge. As we participate in the goodness of God (Jas. 1:17), as we pray to (talking and listening to) the Father in the secret place (Mt. 6:6) and as we read the Scriptures that equip us for godly living (2 Tim. 3:16-17), we will feed on what God is saying to us and we will spiritually live (Mt. 4:4) and we will accomplish the will and purpose of God. (Isa. 55:11)

4) Then we must add to our knowledge self-control. As we learn what God expects of us, we must obey that. This is not an embracing of God's laws but a following after the leading of the Spirit of Christ. (Jn. 3:8) Our participation in God's goodness and our growing knowledge of His revelations is the base upon which we build up our obedience

to His commands.

5) Then we must add to our self-control perseverance. As we learn to live the life of the new man (see Eph. 4:20-24), we will find it impossible to get it right on our first try. We will fail in trying to control ourselves. But as we persevere - keep on trying to live by God's Spirit - we will be more self-controlled.

**We cannot simply
hunker down and
await some new
practice that *will*
produce the life of
Christ in and
around us.**

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6) Then we must add to our perseverance godliness. As we persevere in our self-control, we will live lives that bear ever greater resemblance to the life of Christ. This is no mere form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5) but is the actual life and power of God coming forth from our earthen vessel. (2 Cor. 4:7)

7) Then we must add to our godliness brotherly kindness. As we become more like God we must begin to reach out to our family in Christ. Just as we give preference to our natural family members, we must recognize and care for all our brothers and sisters in Christ. (1 Cor. 10:24; Phlp. 2:4)

8) Then we must add to our brotherly kindness agape love. As we give preference to our brothers, we must begin to sacrifice more of our own lives on their behalf and even on behalf of the people of the world around us. This is not a blind self-sacrifice, but rather done in obedience to the leading of Christ's Spirit within our hearts. Without this laying down of our lives at Christ's command, there is no evidence that we have passed from darkness into light. (1 Jn. 3:14)

Many have been deceived into departing from this process of attaining to true Christlikeness. Few indeed have truly attained to anything resembling self-sacrificing agape love - but many of these consider themselves “elders” and “leaders” of the people of Christ! The few who have attained to this spiritual maturity will most likely recognize how they took these steps in hindsight, having been drawn by the Lord in spite of their religious background and handicaps. Most people exposed to the “Christian” religion are quick to say to one another, “We love you,” but these do not follow up their words with self-sacrificing demonstrations of Christ’s agape love. These people, wrapped up as they are in false religious notions of following Christ, are more inclined to faithfully and self-sacrificially practice some hobby or sport or to simply disappear out of one’s life than they are to take time to attend to the needs and trials of the orphans, widows and the least of Christ’s brothers! Christ’s agape love is much, much more than words (1 Jn. 3:18) and failure to act on one’s declarations is only deception, the native language of the devil and the demonic. Let he who has ears hear.

Loving Truth

When the disciples asked Jesus what the sign of the end of the age and of His return would be, He replied:

Take heed
that no one deceives
you. (Mt. 24:4)

If we intend to be without spot or blemish when Christ returns to claim His bride, we must *purify ourselves* in preparation for that day.

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There may be no more important attitude than the love of truth for those who will be alive at the end of the age when Christ returns (also see 2 Ths. 2:10). Centuries of false religion have deceived us as to the role of truth in leading a person to Christ's salvation. Though obedience to truth is only one aspect of the standard by which God will judge every man (see Rom. 2:6-11), it is the one area where most people fail to press on to attain to all that Christ has for them. These people are basically good people who take care of at least some others and who refrain from practicing grossly wicked acts. But they don't draw near to God. They allow the "pastor" to "feed" them or, after rejecting the lies of "church," they neglect to press into the deep, personal relationship whereby the Spirit of Christ leads the genuine believer into all truth. (Jn. 16:13)

False religion has taught us to look for one key event ("sinner's prayer," taking communion, baptism, etc.) to mark the an individual's entry into a life with Christ. And these are potentially signs that one has embarked on a life of faith in God. But where there is genuine conversion to Christ, the reality of that individual's life before this event is that of already having been in the process of coming to the truth every time he or she chose to reject falsehood and deception and instead chose honesty and reality. This is the training God puts everyone through whom He knows will ultimately receive Christ as their Savior and Lord so that, when they are presented with the facts of the gospel (which require faith to apprehend and embrace), they will be able to step out and receive the things of God which the Spirit is revealing to them. False religion - by substituting the voice and teachings of the "pastor" for the voice of God - trains us away from our initial pursuits and embracings of truth and slowly, numbingly trains us instead to embrace entertainments,

knowledge, morality and/or false religion. In short, anything but Christ Himself.

Jesus taught as one who had authority precisely because He was and still is the way, the truth and the life that is the only way to the Father! (Mt. 7:29; Jn. 14:6) When some Jews began to question Jesus' authority to teach what He was teaching, He answered,

My doctrine [teaching] is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine [teaching], whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him. (Jn. 7:16-18)

One of the ruler of fearing man's deceptions, as we have seen, is to invoke fear of questioning the words and teachings that come from the Nicolaitan clergy. But here Jesus invites *everyone* to question and challenge the source of *His* words and teachings. If anyone's words and teachings ought to be above question, it should be Christ's. Since His words are not above challenge (though indeed they will stand up to any and all challenges), let us be free, once and for all time, from the monstrous, demonic lie that teachings from the clergy are above question. (also see 1 Ths. 5:21-22) Let us also clearly recognize that one who will not stand to have his teachings or practices questioned or examined - especially by the light of the Scriptures - *is* clergy.

In this passage, Jesus gives the secret to always clinging to the truth and to always being preserved in the truth:

If anyone wants to do [God's] will, *he shall know...*whether [the doctrine] is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. (Jn. 7:17 - emphasis added)

If we persistently pursue God's will rather than our own - as Jesus said in another place, if we deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him, losing our life for His sake (Lk. 9:23-24) - then we will know, in the depths of our

innermost being where our spirit co-mingles with God's Spirit, whether the words and teachings we are hearing are truly from God or just some man's spin. Because so few who name the name of Christ really want to do God's will but rather pursue their own agendas (the lawlessness that abounds - Mt. 24:12), many will not be able to differentiate between true and false teachings and will

Cleansing ourselves from contact with all persons who practice idolatry and from all the paraphernalia, forms and practices of idolatry (among those who name the name of Christ and not the idolaters of this world) is the perfecting of holiness!

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...depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines [teachings] of demons... (1 Tim. 4:1)

There have been some who, when confronted about having listened to the demonic, have responded, "We all listen to the demonic," as if that excused their obedience to some demonic deception. It is true that we have to hear everything spoken in our ear. But it is not the hearing that will cause us to depart from the faith - it is the failure to discern and rightly divide what we have heard combined with our giving heed and obeying what we have heard from some demonic source that will cause us to abandon our pure trust in the leading of the Holy Spirit. Giving heed to (hearing then obeying) the words of the demonic is a clear step toward departing from the faith.

When Jesus gave us the secret to always clinging to the truth and so being preserved in it, He also gives a description of one who speaks on his own authority.

He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory... (Jn. 7:18)

These are those who

...rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the

disciples after themselves. (Acts 20:30)

This prophecy from Paul about the coming clergy -

“From among yourselves...” (From the elders - see Acts 20:17)

“...men...” (“bishops”)

“...will rise up...” (into the exalted place of clergy)

“...to draw away the disciples...” (the “laity”)

“...after themselves.” (not after Christ.)

- is the epitome of “church.” The better a man can “preach” or “teach,” the more “congregants” his “church” will attract and the more loot (“tithes” and “offerings”) he will rake in.

While, of course, most “pastors” of a “church” will outwardly deny that he seeks his own glory (some don’t even try to deny it!), his regular spot in the elevated place of attention and authority confirms otherwise. Inwardly, he basks in the attention he gets when he steps into that place which is truly reserved for Christ. He doubles the judgment against him when, in the place of Christ, he speaks deceptions he has learned from other men. His judgment grows exponentially when he speaks deceptions gleaned from the demonic.

Peter wrote,

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed... For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness... (2 Pet. 2:1-2,18)

The word *heresies* here is most often assumed to mean “false teachings” - and that sense is certainly in view here. But one of the more interesting renderings of that word is *divisions*. In modern language, we call them *denominations*. And the sermon, though it has been used by God in times past to stir men to

godly repentance, has become something other than what it once was. Now it is often structured (three points and a joke or a poem, etc. and, of course, followed up with an emotional musical plea for

Many have been deceived into departing from the process of attaining to true Christlikeness.

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converts to come forward to the “altar”) - and it is all lifeless. It is not what the Spirit of God wants to say to His people at that time but it is

...precept upon precept, line upon line... (Isa. 28:13a)

as these people teach “through the Bible” obeying, not the Spirit of God, but the calendar and their own agenda. This method, according to Isaiah’s prophecy, is for those who are to

...go... (see 1 Jn. 2:19)

...fall backward... (see Gal. 5:4)

...be broken... (see Lk. 20:18)

...snared and caught. (see 2 Tim. 2:25-26 and Isa. 28:13b)

It is not the proper method for transferring the characteristics of God to younger believers. (see Dt. 11:19; 2 Tim. 2:2) Pragmatism (practicing what is convenient or expediently practical) has brought the people of Christ under the reign of false religion precisely because it was (and always will be!) easier to preach sermons to people instead of personally making true followers and disciples of Christ. (see Mt. 28:19)

Peter continues:

...they allure through the lusts of the flesh... (2 Pet. 2:18)

“I like the teaching,” “I like the singing,” “We like the children’s ministry.” These are the desires these false teachers use to draw men after themselves and their “church.” Any time we insist upon a “Jesus” as we want “Him” to be we can be certain that we have a counterfeit, a fraud, a deception

that, in the end will be unable to deliver us from God's judgements on the last day. Using the name of Christ to subtly train people in self-indulgence will never be the real way of Christ. It is a deception of the lords of darkness. Let he who has ears hear.

...they allure...through licentiousness [a hunger for evil or lawlessness], the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. (2 Pet. 2:18)

This mixed multitude, the mixture of those who have escaped alongside those who live in error, the mixture of the wheat and the tares in the same place at the same time, has been necessary so that the wheat would also grow to maturity. (see Mt. 13:29-30) But as we get ever closer to the day of the harvest, the time when the angels remove from Christ's kingdom

...all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness [pursue their own agendas]... (Mt. 13:39,41),

the necessity for the mixed multitude will cease and the difference between the wheat and the tare will be more readily apparent. The wheat will become heavy with the head of grain it has produced and the stalk will bow down before its King in humility. The tare, with its light and fluffy counterfeit "grain," will stand proudly and arrogantly, waving in the breeze, an easy target for removal by an angelic harvester - and the wheat will be of sufficient maturity that it will not be uprooted when all the lies that enabled the tares to also grow to maturity are exposed and removed.

Peter continues,

While [the false teachers] promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption... (2 Pet. 2:19)

This is the hypocrisy that is characteristic of all victims of the rulers of darkness. Beware of it and do not listen to or imitate in any way any man whose life is not open to direct observation. (see Lk. 12:1)

...for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is

brought into bondage. (2 Pet. 2:19)

The enemy who takes you captive also makes you his slave. It is interesting to note that those who place themselves under a teacher or “pastor” do not absorb a great deal of the knowledge that is given forth through the pulpit but they manage somehow to absorb and imitate the private sins of the speaker (arrogance, pride, greed, lust, whatever). And then these “leaders” are offended that someone in “their congregation” would do such a thing or, God forbid, actually address *them* with their own air or attitude!

The human pawns of the evil spirits should also remember John’s warning:

He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity...
(Rev. 13:10)

Though this is by no means the only application that could be made from this statement, those members of the clergy whose “church” has been used to bring others into demonic bondage will, one day, be forced into captivity in more visible ways. Let he who has ears hear.

Peter goes on to say,

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. (2 Pet. 2:20-21; also see Heb. 6:4-6)

Once one escapes the darkness behind the gates of the demonic but

Let us be free, once and for all time, from the monstrous, demonic lie that teachings from the clergy are above question.

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refuses to depart from some iniquity and becomes trapped again in the prisons of the rulers of the darkness, that one is worse off than in the beginning. If one starts off life as a sinner destined for judgment, what could be worse than that? Being a sinner bound for hell who has known *and rejected* the only escape from judgment! So much for that “once saved, always saved” theory!

We have seen repeatedly that truth is our ultimate liberator. Jesus said,

If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.
And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you
free. (Jn. 8:31-32)

With an attitude of sincere seeking, let us also ask Pilate’s question:

What is truth? (Jn. 18:38)

Jesus said to His disciples,

I am...the truth... (Jn. 14:6)

He also said,

[God’s] word is truth. (Jn. 17:17)

And John later wrote,

...the Spirit is truth. (1 Jn. 5:6)

The Spirit of Christ (the Person of truth, the Word of God) *is* the Spirit of truth. He alone - not His teachings, not His miracles, not His people and certainly not religious deceptions practiced in His name - is our Liberator. Only as we abide in Him are we invulnerable to the deceptive schemes of the devil and his assistants.

Those who are unwilling or unable to embrace this truth that the Holy Spirit - and not our doctrines and creeds - is to be the standard of our faith and knowledge are only manifesting their own sin of unbelief. One who is

seeking to obey the Spirit of truth will not reject the truth when he hears it. One who has a preset creed or belief, on the other hand, has great difficulty letting go of that creed or belief when the Spirit of truth reveals something that contradicts that creed or belief.

Giving heed to (hearing then obeying) the words of the demonic is a clear step toward departing from the faith.

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This truth wrests control from the “church” institutions and the “pastor/priests” in their nice wool suits (false prophets wearing sheeps’ clothing - Mt. 7:15) - and it restores the personal responsibility to obey God back to every believer who stands before God on an equal footing alongside all of his brothers in Christ. “Pastors,” because they open their “church’s” doors (and offering plates!) to the mixed multitudes, simply cannot trust that God will control the people (for good reason - they aren’t all His!) - something they could reasonably expect from God if they were dealing with true, mature believers - and they will not trust God any way because then they lose their ability to fleece the flock and maintain their own extravagant lifestyles or their extravagant “church” buildings and “ministries.”

Jesus, in speaking about His own teachings, said:

If anyone wants to do [God’s] will, *he shall know* concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority. (Jn. 7:17 - emphasis added)

This is Jesus’ promise that we will not be deceived by false prophets and false teachers. But *we* must fulfill the condition in order to receive the promised reward. *If* we want to do God’s will - whatever that might be and no matter how costly it may be to our selves - then we will know the truth about what we hear. We must trust that God’s Spirit of truth - by convicting us of sin, righteousness and judgment (Jn. 16:8), by leading us into all truth (Jn. 16:13) and by reminding us of what Christ has said (Jn. 14:26) - will keep us from being deceived. The one who wants to do God’s will above all else simply *will not* reject the truth when he hears it. He will be led by the Spirit of God to receive it, apply it and obey it. The religious man, filled with his own

understandings and religiously-derived agendas, is far more likely to reject the truth precisely because it is in stark contrast to the things in which he has so heavily invested himself for so many years. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

John wrote,

Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you... (1 Jn. 2:24)

If we receive only the tiniest spark of the gospel of Christ and we keep that, even if we were in some remote, dark heathen land where we could find no more of the gospel, if what we first heard and received by the Spirit of Christ remains in us, then:

...you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. (1 Jn. 2:24)

We need to think about this for a minute. If what we heard from the beginning abides in us - no matter how much or how little of Christ's gospel it was - we will abide in Christ. But if we follow after darkness and deception, what we heard in the beginning no longer has a place in us and, if we allow that fallen condition to remain and continue, we will ultimately have no place in Christ. (also see 1 Jn. 1:6) Let he who has ears hear.

And this is the promise that He has promised us - eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. (1 Jn. 2:25-26)

That would be both human and demonic deceivers. Too many people fail to see the demonic agenda behind the actions of men. Only as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, can we finish our race without being tripped up by the snares and deceits of both men and demons.

But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but

as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. (1 Jn. 2:27)

Do not listen to or imitate in any way any man whose life is not open to your direct observation.

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The Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of truth, gives us an anointing by which we are taught to abide in Christ, by which we learn to rightly divide *all* things, and by which we do not require anyone to teach us. Oh, how the heaped up teachers try to explain this one away! (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4) This *is* the secret place of the Most High under the shadow of the Almighty God, the only safe haven for our souls and spirits as we make our way out of a dark, deceived and depraved world held captive by the lords of darkness. (see Psa. 91:1; compare Mt. 6:6) We must abide only in Christ or we are lost - both now and, if we die like that, crossing the great divide between time and eternity in that condition, we will be lost for all eternity.

Sound Doctrine

Paul wrote:

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

Before we examine what exactly sound doctrine is (and Scripture does tell us *exactly* what it is), let us review these characteristics of the apostasy, the great falling away from the faith. (see also Mt. 24:4-5,9-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-3) Those who have fallen from the faith:

reject sound doctrine. (We will delve into this in a moment.)

practice religion according to their own desires (lawlessness, doing what is right in their own eyes). “I like this” and “I prefer that” is their method of choosing what “church” they will attend. The question of how Christ wants them to live their life never even arises for the vast majority of these “Christians.”

have itching ears. They love to hear the truth (or at least some reasonable facsimile thereof) but they don’t live by the leading of the Spirit of truth. They hear but do not do. This produces three results:

1) heaped up teachers (sermonizing “pastors,” “teachers,” televangelists, TV “preachers,” etc.);

2) rejection of truth (the Person, Spirit and facts of truth) and

3) receiving of fables (stories that have only minimal relevance and application to every day life and godliness).

In a word, “churchianity.”

To see exactly what sound doctrine is, let us turn to Paul’s letter to Titus, and see Paul’s instructions there. As we read Paul’s instructions, let us note that these instructions apply to six kinds of people -

Those members of the clergy whose “church” has been used to bring others into demonic bondage will, one day, be forced into captivity in more visible ways.

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- 1) older men,
- 2) older women,
- 3) young women,
- 4) young men,
- 5) servants and
- 6) all men.

Every person who follows Christ will belong to two or perhaps even three of these categories. So let us not miss the relevance of this passage to *all* people who name the name of Christ.

Paul wrote:

But as for you, speak the things *which are proper for sound doctrine*: (Tit. 2:1 - emphasis added)

What follows are Paul’s clearly laid out instructions as to what constitutes sound teachings in the way of Christ. Paul goes on:

...that the older men be sober, reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience... (Tit. 2:2)

This is Paul's instruction for the older men: In a word, they are to be self-controlled (a fruit of the Spirit that comes with at least some spiritual maturity - Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:5-6) and well-formed into the likeness of Christ Jesus. (see Rom. 12:1-2) Paul continues:

...[that] the older women likewise...be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things - that they admonish the young women... (Tit. 2:3-4)

Again we see the fruit of self-control and goodness. As we go on to see what the older women should admonish (teach) the young women, let us remember that the older women cannot teach what they themselves do not know. Thus the requirements for the younger women also apply to the older women. Paul continues:

...[that] the young women...love their husbands, ...love their children, ...be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. (Tit. 2:4-5)

Yet again we see self-control, goodness, submissiveness to authority - and this is so the truth of God remains of good reputation. This aspect of sound doctrine - that women should be homemakers and obedient to their husbands - is one that is rejected by women for a number of reasons. The women's lib movement of the 1960s and 70s was, generally speaking, a virulent reaction to an abnormal oppressive situation - the suburban home of the 1950s. Created by the unprecedented wealth after World War II (a sign of America's having been given over to mammon), Americans flocked to the suburbs. The man went away to work 40 to 60 hours per week and magazine and then television editors and ad men used women's lack of understanding of their godly role to foist upon them the role of the "housewife" who cooks, cleans and sends the kids off to school. This was so that all the new kitchen gadgets - refrigerators, can openers, dishwashers, etc. - could be sold to every house and the editors and ad men could rake in their own fortunes. Many believed (some still do!) that the superficial American "housewife" role is a

valid expression of godly womanhood - but the resultant oppressive captivity proves otherwise.

The women's lib movement rightly revolted against this oppressiveness but, rather than point women to God where they can attain to true fulfillment in Christ, it pointed women toward lawlessness - doing what was right in their own eyes. As a result, women rebelled against their husbands and, in some cases, virtually abandoned their families to pursue their own careers - with no thought as to what God might want of them. Women often came to think of themselves not as equal in merit to the man (as Scriptures teach - see 1 Cor. 11:11-12) but as superior. This has infiltrated into Christian circles as too many "Christian" women refuse to submit (or they "submit" with gossip, resentment and backstabbing!) to their husbands because they see their husband as something less than what they see themselves as - either spiritually, intellectually or emotionally. And too many Christian men tolerate this false relationship, finding it more "peaceful" to "lead" whenever the wife allows him to. The truth is that the man is called by God to be the head of his wife (see 1 Cor. 11:3) - not some absentee "provider," pseudo-"husband" and pseudo-"father" - while the woman is still called by God to be a wife whom the man *husbands* (manages, stewards). Let he - or she - who has ears hear.

Paul continues his instructions:

Likewise exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself [Titus, as a young man,] to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you. (Tit. 2:6-8)

Again we see self-control, reverence, godliness - and this is so that those who oppose Christ gain no advantage through the sinfulness of those who claim His name. Paul continues:

The one who wants to do God's will above all else simply *will not* reject the truth when he hears it.

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Exhort servants to be obedient to their own masters, to be well pleasing in all things, not answering back, not pilfering, but showing all good fidelity, that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. (Tit. 2:9-10)

Still yet again we see self-control, honesty, integrity - and this is so that the teachings about God are pleasing to behold. Paul continues:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Tit. 2:11-14)

Self-control, right living, godliness, redeemed from lawless deeds (acts performed according to self's agenda), a people purified from all darkness and zealous to do good. This is what the normal, usual Christian life is supposed to look like. Paul continues:

Speak these things [which are proper for sound doctrine], exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you. (Tit. 2:15)

These things which are proper for sound doctrine are the very things which those who rely on teachers to scratch their itching ears will reject. Let he who has ears hear.

Choose Wisely

In many of the passages we've already seen (Jas. 1:27; 3:16-17, for example) there is purity and then there is worldliness. Worldliness is the state of existing under at least some level of control of the rulers

of the darkness of this age. (1 Jn. 5:19; Eph. 2:2) Purity is living only by the power and direction of the Spirit of God. Worldliness is simply being like the world. Some see the word "worldly" and miss this, mistakenly thinking themselves as not really being *worldly* even though their lifestyles and practices are exactly the same as the world. This is effective deception! One might have only one small part of himself attached to the world but this makes him worldly and opens his life up to the control of the lords of darkness. (also see 1 Jn. 2:15-16)

Paul wrote,

Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He? (1 Cor. 10:14,20-22)

Some have tried to say that this is a passage that proves that a Christian cannot be demon possessed but that is a complete misunderstanding of what Paul is saying. Jesus said, in a similar way,

You cannot serve God and mammon. (Mt. 6:24)

We, as people claiming to follow Christ, can indeed serve mammon and we can indeed drink the cup of demons and we can indeed partake of the table of demons. But if we do so, the service of God and the cup and table of the Lord are not available to us - even if we practice things that appear godly and

The question of how Christ wants them to live their life never even arises for the vast majority of "Christians."

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take “communion” or the “Eucharist” at the best “church.” The things of God are simply unavailable to us and we are failing, neglecting or refusing to depart from iniquity as well. (2 Tim. 2:19) On the other hand, if we abide in Christ, being led by His Spirit, when the opportunity to serve mammon (which most often comes upon us quite stealthily), or a time to drink the cup or partake of the table of demons subtly presents itself to us, we will not be deceived and we will neither sin nor do the works of the devil.

Some people think that drinking the cup of demons and partaking of the table of demons refers only to overt acts of idolatry such as going to a pagan god’s temple and offering sacrifices to the false god. This is indeed one aspect of it - and this is precisely why the rulers of darkness have gone to such lengths to conceal themselves so well in the “church.” The “church” building, in spite of the customary label, is not *God’s* house (He does not live in temples made by human hands - Acts 7:48) - then whose house is it?

It is a house of a lord, the ruler of false religion, but it is not the house of God.

The clergy are not the men of God but rather the priests of a false religion because, at the least, they lord over their congregation (assuming there are no other false practices - which often there are).

The pulpit and pews come, not from the pages of the New Testament, but from the pagan temples of Rome and are instruments of subjugating the people of Christ to bondages of darkness.

The token elements of “communion” routinely served at many “churches” (a thimble of grape juice and a button-sized piece of unleavened cracker) are often served up with a sermon filled with that sect’s common religious preconceptions and misconceptions about the taking of the bread and wine in the name of Christ.

Thus the average “church” goer *has been* deceived

into practicing overt idolatry - going to a false god's temple and offering sacrifices there! We are mistakenly but overtly partaking of the demonic's cup and table whenever we sacrifice our time and resources to build the ruler of false religion's temple (the "church") and to attend its rituals.

But drinking the cup of demons and partaking of the table of demons can be done on even more subtle levels. For example, when someone claiming to be a brother in Christ is really trafficking in the realms of the demonic, if we receive gifts or instruction from that person, we are partaking of the demonic's cup and table. We have fellowship - unity, commonality - with the demonic wherever and whenever we participate, either willfully or ignorantly, in any deception. May the Lord be gracious and merciful and reveal to us any and every other way in which we have and might partake of the demonic's cup and table.

Jesus taught:

And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine will burst the wineskins and be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins, and both are preserved. And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, "The old is better." (Lk. 5:37-39)

Too many "Christian" women refuse to submit (or they "submit" with gossip, resentment and backstabbing!) to their husbands because they see their husband as something less than what they see themselves as - either spiritually, intellectually or emotionally. And too many "Christian" men tolerate this false relationship, finding it more "peaceful" to "lead" whenever the wife allows him to.

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The new wine is the Holy Spirit. (see Eph. 5:18; Acts 2:13-15) Any time a purer, clearer understanding and expression of the way and nature of Christ among men is brought forth, those who have partaken of the old wine - whether that be the old wine of Catholicism in Luther's day or the old and demonically-tainted wine of churchianity in this day - these will resist being brought forth into the new light. They will say, "The old is better." Let he who has ears hear.

John wrote,

We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. (1 Jn. 5:18-21)

There is sin and then there is God, John is saying. There is the world and then there is God. There is the wicked one and then there is God. The Son of God is the truth and we are safe only in Him. Choose God and keep away from all the substitutes and distractions.

Idolatry, like the cup and table of the demonic, is not something that must be practiced overtly - it can be very subtle. Idolatry is to worship a false god - any false god. Idolatry is putting anything or any person or any practice before (in front of or more important than) our obedience to God. This is why modern "Christianity" ("churchianity") is such a clever deception. The demonic has deceived many into practicing idolatry in the name of God and Christ! The lips and mouths speak the things of God but the heart is filled with deceptive religious darkness, the work of the lords of darkness.

We are commanded to remove from ourselves any idolater who claims to belong to Christ (1 Cor. 5:10-11) and to cleanse ourselves from all hints of idolatry. (2 Cor. 6:17-18) Let he who has ears hear.

Done in Christ

Paul wrote:

I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body which is the ekklesia [His called out people], of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. (Col. 1:24-26)

From the cross, Jesus said,

“It is finished,” and then bowing His head, He gave up His spirit. (Jn. 19:30)

Some have taken Jesus’ last words to mean, among other things that Christ’s sacrifice was completely and ultimately finished - that there was and is absolutely nothing any human could do to add to the finished work of the cross. From this notion - which indeed has many solid, foundational elements of Scriptural truth within it as we shall see - has evolved the “once saved, always saved” theory and many other confusing notions about “predestination.”

The misunderstanding lies in the failure to differentiate between the temporal realm (where time is measured in increments and divided into past, present and future) and the eternal realm (where time is largely just an abstract concept). This is not an easy concept to grasp - I am not sure I fully understand it but I have grasped (at least apprehended if not comprehended)

These things which are proper for sound doctrine are the very things which those who rely on teachers to scratch their itching ears will reject.

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what I have perceived from the Scriptures as the Spirit has opened them up to me. To describe the “temporal” aspect of the eternal (in itself this is a contradiction in terms), we might say that it is *always now* (another contradiction in terms). That is, there is no past and future but an ongoing, eternal, unchanging existence. What keeps this from being a hellish proposition (like growing old and living forever while still in these decaying bodies would be an unthinkable nightmare) is that everyone in the eternal realm is already perfected in that unchanging state. None can even imagine just how glorious that will be. (see 1 Cor. 2:9)

If the two realms remained separated, it would be difficult enough to grasp these concepts. When the eternal enters or intersects time, it is mind boggling to say the least.

Consider Christ’s sacrifice. When did it occur? Historically (in time) it was around 33 A.D. But the Scriptures tell us that the Lamb had been slain from the foundation of the world. (Rev. 13:8) Similarly, in the beginning, the Word was both with God while simultaneously being God but, around 3-4 B.C., the Word became flesh and dwelt among men. (Jn. 1:1,14) Consider also that on the first day of creation, God created light but darkness was already on the face of the deep and then God divided the light from the darkness. (Gen. 1:1-3) I personally believe (you may choose otherwise) this is a veiled reference to Satan’s prideful rebellion, God’s foreknowledge of man’s coming fall and the sacrifice of the Lamb. (Consider, in contrast, that on the fourth day God created lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth - Gen. 1:14-15.) And, on the seventh day, God rested from all of His work because

...the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them,
were finished. (Gen. 2:1-2)

So, when was *it* finished? On the first day of creation (before the foundation of the world) when God divided the light from the darkness? On the seventh day when God rested? In 33 A.D. when Christ was crucified? Or in the future when Satan and all his followers have been eternally consigned to the lake of fire and the saints are finally gathered around the river of life? In the realm of the eternal, the answer to this question is: yes! All four answers are equally true. Anyone who thinks they can fully explain how this

can be is welcome to try. I am not equal to the task. I merely relay what I see to be true in the Scriptures.

But in the realm of time - which has been subjected to rules even Satan is apparently unable to violate (see Dan. 7:25) - we must recognize that *it* (my life, my interaction with the eternal) is not finished until I have either been consigned to the eternal lake of fire or I am chosen to reign with Christ

forever. This is the difference between our being seated (past tense) in the heavenlies in Christ (Eph. 2:6) and the need for us to work out (future, ongoing action) our salvation with fear and trembling (Phlp. 2:12) lest, having neglected so great a salvation (Heb. 2:1-3), how shall we be brought again to repentance (Heb. 6:4-7) and obtain our inheritance. (Heb. 12:14-17) In the realm of time, Today is the day of salvation. (Heb. 3:13) There is no promise of reaching tomorrow and yesterday can only be vaguely remembered. These are simply the limitations of time.

Let us now return to Christ's sacrifice and the question of whether it is finished or not. In the eternal, the answer is unequivocally: yes! But we are in the realm of time and the answer to whether Christ's sacrifice is finished or not - as is indicated by Paul's declaration that he was filling up in his flesh what was lacking in Christ's afflictions (Col. 1:24) - is: no. Let us be careful to understand exactly what that means for, if we are not careful, we will take a difficult truth to grasp and propel ourselves right into heresy and error!

Let us first differentiate between sufficiency and completeness. Paul wrote:

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God... (2 Cor. 3:5 - emphasis added)

Because Christ's sacrificial work is finished in the eternal, our sufficiency for all of life and godliness is found in Christ. (see 2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Cor. 9:8) There

We have fellowship - unity, commonality - with the demonic wherever and whenever we participate, either willfully or ignorantly, in any deception.

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is needed no other resource for the believer than the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. Period.

But the completeness of the sacrifice of Christ is another matter. In the eternal, where everything is finished, perfected and completed, nothing can be added to Christ's sacrifice. It is done and it is sufficient. Let us be very clear on this for this is a foundation stone within our faith that Christ's work (that is, those things which only Jesus could and did do) on the cross is finished and complete.

But Paul also wrote:

...I die daily. (1 Cor. 15:31)

Everyday we must participate in Christ's sacrifice. It must be His resurrected life we live every day if we are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phlp. 2:12) and not neglect so great a salvation. (Heb. 2:1-3)

If we examine the context around Paul's declaration that he provided what was lacking in Christ's afflictions (Col. 1:24), we find that he did this for the sake of Christ's body which is His called out people and that the stewardship Paul had received from God was for *the people* so as to fulfill the word of God as it is now revealed to His saints (set apart ones). (see Col. 1:25-26) Paul did not supply what was lacking in Christ's afflictions for his own sake but for the sake of Christ's people, those others who are also called out and set apart to attend to Christ and His kingdom.

Christ's death on the cross in the temporal realm does nothing - in itself - to minister to the needs of the orphans, widows and least of Christ's brothers. (see Jas. 1:27; Mt. 25:40,45) That is, Jesus does not personally descend from the cross, travel through time and personally minister to those in need. Rather, by His Spirit, which is available to us because the Christ, the Messiah, the Lamb was sacrificed on the cross, we are sufficiently supplied to fill up in our flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His people around us in our time.

Because Christ's sacrifice is complete in the eternal is precisely why we must take care that all our good works (which will be many - see Eph. 2:10; Tit. 2:14) be done in Christ and not done in the flesh. Any "good" work we do outside of Christ is simply not present in the completed sacrifice of Christ in the eternal. At best it will be considered by Christ to be nothing (see

Jn. 15:5) or it will be wood, hay or stubble to be consumed away by His fiery presence (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15) or, worst, it will be deemed lawlessness - the pursuit of our agendas - that disqualifies us from our inheritance. (see Mt. 7:21-23)

We are commanded to remove from ourselves any idolater who claims to belong to Christ and to cleanse ourselves from all hints of idolatry.

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If all things were finished in time - as they are in the eternal - there would be no need for us to make every effort to abide in what Christ has supplied for us. We would simply be done. Every day, we clearly demonstrate that we are not done - that is, we are not perfected, completed, glorified (the end result of Christ's redemptive work in our lives). It is precisely the negligence and laziness regarding our salvation which the "once saved, always saved" theory produces that betrays its deceptive source.

Paul wrote:

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not us. We are...*always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus*, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Cor. 4:7-8,10-12 - emphasis added)

And Peter wrote:

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you: but *rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings*, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (1 Pet. 4:12-13 - emphasis added)

Because the eternal I AM - that Being Who Exists in Every Moment and Beyond - was sacrificed in time, we have the breathtaking opportunity and the

mind-boggling responsibility to be delivered into and partake of His ongoing sufferings and death so that His life may be manifested in our lives to the people around us. This *is* true Christianity. We have both the privilege and responsibility to partake daily of His ongoing sacrificial death and display His divine treasure - *His* life - from within our earthen vessels. Anything else done in His name is apostasy and false religion.

Overcoming Through Perseverance

John wrote,

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 Jn. 5:4-5)

We have both the privilege and responsibility to partake daily of His ongoing sacrificial death and display His divine treasure - *His* life - from within our earthen vessels. Anything else done in His name is apostasy and false religion.

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Let us note the tenses used here. One born of God overcomes - ongoing action - the world. The victory that has overcome - past tense - the world is our faith. Our faith is an ongoing action as well - he who believes and keeps on believing has overcome and keeps on overcoming the world. As Jesus said,

In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (Jn. 16:33)

We fight - that is wrestle and stand (Eph. 6:12-14) - against our spiritual adversaries from a position of victory and strength, not a guerilla warfare of subterfuge, stealth and desperation. We possess the land but a few well-concealed rebels remain under the law of sin and death (see Rom. 7:21-24; 8:2) and these rebels, if left uncontrolled, will allure invasion from the demonic. But, so long as we remain wary and vigilant, when a stronghold is identified, we can, by God's Spirit, isolate it, lay siege to it, sack it, clean it out and make it a habitable place for the Spirit of truth. That is true deliverance from the power of the evil one.

But we must persevere, especially in the last days. Jesus said,

...because lawlessness [the pursuit of one's own agendas] will abound, the love [the life blood of living by the Spirit] of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. (Mt. 24:12-13)

Make no mistake, the life of following Christ is a struggle. (see 1 Pet. 4:12-19; 2 Tim. 3:12) but our victory is assured while we believe and abide.

We must not allow ourselves to be deceived. Just because God meets us where we're at does not mean that we've arrived. There is a tendency within the human soul to shy away from looking at one's own failings, weaknesses and sins. If this were not so, we would not need the Holy Spirit to convict us of our sins and our personal history would not be one of fighting against the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is another tendency that is equally hindering to our spiritual walk with Christ - the tendency to rest upon our current attainments. Since we don't like to look at our sins and failures, we tend to fool ourselves into thinking that where we are at any given moment is exactly where God wants us to be and there is no need to go on any further to please God. Though we still hold to false opinions, beliefs and practices, we somehow feel no need to press on to become more like Christ. We are content to remain just as we are as if we were already Christlike.

Paul wrote,

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Phlp. 3:12-14)

Paul also wrote:

But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection,

lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified. (1 Cor. 9:27)

Paul's attitude and mindset to lay hold of all of God's grace (His life-changing power) allowed him to overcome the inertia that has come into our souls as a result of Adam's fall. Those who fail to adopt this same attitude are not putting off the old man, not being renewed in spirit and not putting on the new man which is Christ and will yet subject themselves to the consequences of being disqualified for eternal life. (also see Rom. 2:7-8)

Paul wrote,

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardening of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to licentiousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness. (Eph. 4:17-24)

By what irrational logic might one who refuses to be made more like Christ consider himself "saved?" What is that one saved from? Let he who has ears hear.

**We fight - that is
wrestle and stand -
against our spiritual
adversaries from a
position of victory
and strength, not a
guerilla warfare of
subterfuge, stealth
and desperation.**

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Afterword

To my beloved brethren in Christ Jesus:

This work has been written with full knowledge that it may spark either a disagreement or a strong emotional reaction in some readers' hearts. I must first beg of you that you submit yourself to the Most High God and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ - and to Him alone - before you simply reject what has been said. The fact that you, as such a reader, are having a strong reaction is an indication that what has been said may indeed be true. If you simply reject, out of hand, what is said in this work, you may someday find out that you have rejected truth from God Himself.

But if you truly find some error in my work, please contact me and enlighten me. If anyone can show me, from the Scriptures, where I have erred, you will not need either coercion or force to compel me to obey Christ Jesus, the sole Commander and Teacher in the New Testament. Simply show me the plain meaning from God's Word and the question is settled.

On the other hand, if you find yourself in disagreement, not only with me but also with the plain meaning of the Scriptural text at hand, please open your heart and mind to the possibility that you could be wrong. And the stronger your anger or other negative emotional reaction, the greater the likelihood that you have received demonic assistance in being wrong. If you cannot even consider the possibility that you could be wrong, I must tell you straight out that you are under the sway of the evil one, that your mind is veiled to the glory of the gospel of Christ, and that, if you refuse to repent, you will perish in your sins.

The material covered in this work is lethal in scope. It is life and death - choose life. It is eternity in heaven with God or eternity in the lake of fire separated from God. Choose life with God.

Eternal life has been given to us but we must lay hold of it (1 Tim. 6:12), always pressing

...toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of
God in Christ Jesus. (Phlp. 3:14)

Satan is seeking whom he may *devour*. (1 Pet. 5:8) This *is* a life and death struggle we are engaged in. If we allow his deceptions to hypnotize us and lull us to sleep or into lowering our guard in any way, we can be certain he

will try to kill us.

If you suspect the enemy has deceived and/or imprisoned you, seek the Lord as to how He would set you free. Please contact me if I can be of any help or service to your walk in Christ. Or seek out a brother or sister who walks in (or at least desires) true liberty from these things written of in this work and seek the Lord together. Please reread any section with which you disagree, especially any portion with which you angrily or violently disagree, asking the Lord to show you the truth of the matter. Ask yourself and God,

“Where did I learn this thing I believe to be true? Was it from the Lord, the Spirit of truth? From some man? From some spiritual, even demonic, voice?” The answer to that question alone - especially when attained with the help of the Holy Spirit of God - often brings great liberty from the deceptions of the demonic.

James wrote,

Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (Jas. 4:7)

Deception and darkness simply have no power under the light of truth. Light and truth are more than available to us. We need only take up and refuse to relinquish the weapons of Christ and our victory is assured because Christ has already soundly defeated and overcome the enemy.

Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (Jas. 4:8-10)

The tendency within the human soul to shy away from looking at one's own failings, weaknesses and sins and the tendency to rest upon our current attainments are equally hindering to our spiritual walk with Christ.

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If we would but obey this instruction, we would find that the chains of darkness that have held us captive for so long are completely incapable of keeping us from being effective soldiers of light in the army of Christ.

Let he who has ears hear.

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The Rulers of the Darkness of This Age:	Strategy - Use deception to get us to:
False Religion	do anything but abide in Christ without our realizing how greatly we are being robbed.
Displacing Christ	place any man or any thing in any rightful place of Christ and/or His Spirit without our noticing the switch in any way.
Misusing Wealth	love, pursue or misuse wealth at the expense of our relationship with God.
Fearing Man	obey any man or follow any tradition of men rather than God.
Error	listen to and obey demonic lies rather than listening only to God's Spirit of truth.

This book is for:

* those who have left the “church” behind but still find that the abundant life of Christ still eludes them, especially in their corporate fellowships.

* those who feel trapped in the “church” but have no idea why they feel this way and see no way out.



This book is:

* a warning that time is short for the tares because the wheat is nearly ready for harvest. Anyone who intends to be a wheat when the angels come to harvest the tares must purify himself *now!*

* a weapon for the tearing down of the high places that have been built up in our lives. Handle with care, prayer and wisdom!

Neil and his wife would like to hear from:

* anyone who is blessed by this work

* those who have sincere questions about anything written here.

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