

INSTALLMENT II “FAITH”

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Part I. FAITH AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL – FAITH AND “CIRCUMSTANCES”

LESSON I¹

We are taking a close look at “faith”. We have examined from how the Scriptures portray “faith” to determine what true faith is and what it isn’t, as well as looking at distortions, misinformation, and misapplications of faith. We have found from the scripture that “faith” is defined in terms of a living relationship between two dissimilar entities, us as human, physical beings and God who is a spiritual, non physical being.

In order to bond the two together in this mysterious, non-physical link we are given the word “faith” to describe this unity. We have illustrated this “faith” the Bible talks about in three ways:

A. What it is.

1. “True faith” is an alive, intimate personal relationship with God in Christ and based in Him and in truth because He is the “Way the Truth and the Life”.
2. Faith is a spiritual reality not a tangible, mental or physical reality. We used the idea of an umbilical cord to illustrate faith. There is no direct connection between the two entities of mother and child yet there is a two-way flow through the umbilical cord that keeps the child alive and the child’s waste flows away to the mother.
3. Faith is a spiritual, unseen “bond”, a “connection” or “secure hold” between a human being in this physical universe or dimension and a spiritual being in another universe or dimension. The bond is maintained by the spiritual being (God) and not by the human being (man). We used a boat, anchor and rock as an illustration, with the rope between the anchor and the boat as the simile for faith, the boat being our salvation in which we rest secure. It holds us secure, we don’t hold it.

Comment: If the security of my salvation depends on my power then yes, I can lose my salvation. But since it doesn’t depend on my power but God’s, I am thus secure. This leads us to:

B. What faith isn’t

We have also talked at length about what “faith” really isn’t, even though many Christian teachers, churches and religions define it in such inadequate terms.

We have seen that faith isn’t our efforts to secure our own righteousness or salvation; it isn’t wishful thinking; positive affirmations about things that aren’t true; or expectations, hopes and dreams we want by some sort of magic; it isn’t obedience to man-made religious tenants or rules, theology, incantations, mantras, and so on, such as repeating the Lord’s prayer incessantly (I love

¹ Again, this presentation is from a series of weekly lectures.

this because the “Lord’s prayer” follows right after Jesus command not to use “vain repetition” while in prayer), it isn’t any sort of works, religious practices, devotional practices, even keeping the commandments, going to church, righteous moral living, making sacrifices of service or money, praying, fasting, believing in “Jesus”, or “God” or anything else considered spiritual or Christian, or doing, saying, believing anything at all. If you are not sure about this or confused, you will have to refer to the previous installment.

Our purpose in this installment is to see how true faith is able to stand firm against every horror and evil thrust against it and understand why and how. This is neither a simple nor easy subject to deal with, and we will spend some time on this. This is just the beginning.

When I was in seminary, my class in prolegomena was challenged to write a paper on the problem of evil and turn it in. We were given three weeks. I filled a room with wadded up paper and, after two weeks, had nothing. I approached my professor with my dilemma and he told me to write a paper on why I had such a hard time with this topic. I did so and got a fair grade. But the subject plagued my mind. Evil is a formidable opponent and a supreme faith tester. That is why we must come to a perspective that will allow us to stand firm in our faith in the midst of it all.

For a lot of years now I have been caught between understanding evil in an intellectual and theological sense and suffering emotionally when something occurs in the world that crushes the joy and life right out of me. A journalist, after a horrific bomb attack in Iraq in which men, women and children were blown to bits was heard to say, “Where is God in all of this?” A valid question. When one looks at the brutality on people upon each other, especially upon children, the question, “Why does God allow this to happen” is one I have asked. Many who work in professions dealing with human tragedy and evil such as law enforcement officers or trauma room doctors and nurses must have a difficult time having faith in a loving God. I have thought, from time to time, “If I were God, I wouldn’t put up with this any more I would do this and that...”. Then I am caught by the strong hand of truth and Biblical perspective and given grace to endure. Saddened and grieved by whatever happens around me on a daily basis, I am set aright by the reality of what God is actually doing. In other words, I have found out some of the answers.

So my goal is to try to share some of them with you, so you won’t despair or “lose faith”. We will begin with:

- I. The source of evil [As well as, “The cause of Evil”, “Understanding God’s Role in the midst of Evil”, And “How Faith is to Stand in Face of Evil”]

Philosophers, Founders of Religions, and Theologians have puffed, pontificated and postured for years as to the source of evil. It is a huge subject and every religion ever begun has done so with a view to reconciling this issue.

One argument they present that we will deal with is, “If God created all things, then it stands to reason that God must be the ultimate source or creator of evil.”

Yet the Scripture says that, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.” I John 1:5

Psalm 5:4, “For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You.”

James 1:13-17 “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot

be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.”

The Scripture is filled with references to God’s holiness and purity, nearly a thousand references, in case we are not sure.. Jesus was without sin.

So whence cometh evil?

To help answer that question, I’ll share a story I have shared before. The university professor challenged his students with this question.

Did God create everything that exists? A student bravely replied, "Yes, he did!" "So God created everything?" The professor asked. "Yes sir", the student replied.

The professor continued, "If God created everything, then God created evil, since you agree evil exists and God created everything. According to the principal that our works define who we are then God is evil".

The students became quiet before such an answer. The professor was quite pleased with himself and boasted to the students that he had proven once more that the Christian faith was a myth, because it presented God as holy and pure, without evil.

Another student raised his hand and said, "May I ask you a question professor?" "Of course", replied the professor. The student stood up and asked, "Professor does cold exist?"

"What kind of question is this?" the professor retorted. "Of course it exists. Have you never been cold?" The students snickered at the young man's question. The young man replied, "In fact sir, cold does not exist. According to the laws of physics, what we consider cold is in reality the absence of heat. Everybody or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (- 460 degrees F) is the total absence of heat; all matter becomes inert and incapable of reaction at that temperature. Cold does not exist. We have created this word to describe how we feel if we have no heat."

The student continued. "Professor, does darkness exist?" The professor responded, "Of course it does". The student replied, "Once again you are wrong sir, darkness does not exist either. Darkness is in reality the absence of light. Light we can study, but not darkness. In fact we can use Newton's prism to break white light into many colors and study the various wavelengths of each color.

You cannot measure darkness. A simple ray of light can break into a world of darkness and illuminate it. How can you know how dark a certain space is? You measure the amount of light present. Isn't this correct? Darkness is a term used by man to describe what happens when there is no light present." Finally the young man asked the professor. "Sir, does evil exist?"

Now uncertain, the professor responded, "Of course as I have already said. We see it every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil." To this the student replied, "Evil does not exist sir, or at least it does not exist as an entity unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is not like faith, or love that exist just as does light

and heat. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light."

Now as clever as this is, it barely scratches the surface of the issue and has logical flaws. All we can hope to do so far is to remove God as the source of evil in our minds. But there is still more to this.

The Scripture places the source of evil solely at the feet of mankind. No, not at the feet of Satan, even though he is the "Evil one".² Without man's consent, however, he has no power. If the world was totally righteous, Satan would be helpless and without influence. The Bible lays evil at the feet of mankind, and does so over 800 times. How this came about and Satan's role, we will look at in our next closely related section on the cause of evil.

Here is what the Bible, in a few passages, says from beginning to end.

Genesis 6:5, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."

Genesis 8:21, "...for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth;"

Psalm 14:1-3, 1: "The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; There is no one who does good. 2: The LORD has looked down from heaven upon the sons of men To see if there are any who understand, Who seek after God. 3: They have all turned aside, together they have become corrupt; There is no one who does good, not even one".

Psalm 143:1-2, 1: "Hear my prayer, O LORD, Give ear to my supplications! Answer me in Your faithfulness, in Your righteousness! 2: And do not enter into judgment with Your servant, For in Your sight no man living is righteous."

Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"

Matthew 15:18-20, 18: "But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. 19: "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. 20: "These are the things which defile the man."

Romans 3:9-23, 9: "What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; 10: as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; 11: THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; 12: ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE." 13: "THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, WITH THEIR TONGUES THEY KEEP DECEIVING," "THE POISON OF ASPS IS UNDER THEIR LIPS"; 14: "WHOSE MOUTH IS FULL OF CURSING AND BITTERNESS"; 15: "THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, 16: DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, 17: AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN." 18: "THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD

² See this author's work entitled, "Satan, God and the Problem of Evil".

BEFORE THEIR EYES." 19: Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God;

Romans 3:23, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,"

These and other passages are the basis for the doctrine of the "Depravity of Man". Without an understanding and agreement to this doctrine, a message of salvation makes little sense. Today we are taught that people are essentially good. We hear some religions and philosophies teach that man is good and that god is inside of him in some way. All man has to do is to tap into his own divinity to achieve success and health. Scientology, Christian Science, The New Age Movement, are some of the more recent additions to religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, and others who teach doctrines akin to this.

So the source of evil in the world is mankind. How did it get like this, and why does God let it go on?

Next lesson.

LESSON II.

The cause of evil - transferring rule or dominion

Last week we established that the source of evil is laid at the feet of mankind by the Scriptures. The question now is, how did, and how does this come about? The answer lies in what I call the transfer of dominion (or rule).

Before there was man, God had full rule, dominion, ownership, authority over everything and responsibility for it. That's essentially what it means to have the title "God". And then when God created man He said,

1:26-38, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule (have dominion) over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." 27: God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. 28: God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

So God gave mankind rule (or dominion) and authority over the planet and responsibility for it. He even gives man a subordinate ownership but retains the ultimate ownership of the universe and sole ownership of the "garden" or "paradise". Nevertheless, man was free to do whatever he desired, even in the garden. In chapter two, God told man to name all the creature of the earth according to his own mind. Everything was wonderful. Then came woman. Just kidding! Man was content to be under God's rule and care. Or was he?

Along came the serpent. We know the story,

Genesis 3:1-5, "Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" 2: The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; 3: but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" 4: The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! 5: "For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6: When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took from its fruit and ate; and she gave also to her husband with her, and he ate."

So what does this amount to? What happened here is that man gave away the authority granted to him from God to the serpent. He made the deliberate choice to remove himself from God's headship and place himself under the serpent's headship. In so doing, all the rule, dominion, authority, ownership, and responsibility he was granted over creation was relinquished to the serpent in an effort to become equal with God. When man submitted himself to the serpent, his relationship with God died, as did the spiritual life and personal fellowship he had with God, and physical death was introduced into creation. Further, the entire planetary environment was now outside the bounds of the garden. Technically, I term this a dimensional exclusion. But man did

come to know, in a very personal way the reality and consequence of being cut off from God; left to his own devices, which we call evil. In other words, man had been given even the power to cut himself off from his own creator. This is called free will. In man's case, he went from implementing God's will to implementing self will.

Paul put it this way,

Romans 1:20-25, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. 21: For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22: Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23: and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. 24: Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. 25: For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen."

I mentioned that man transferred everything he possessed in terms of his dominion over to Satan. In Romans 6:16 Paul notes, "Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone *as* slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?"

To make the case that this world is under the power and control of the evil one, we read that when Jesus was led by the Spirit of God into the desert to be tempted prior to the start of His Ministry, Matthew, in 4:8-10 tells us, 8: "Again, the devil taking Him to a very high mountain and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10: Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'YOU SHALL WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD, AND SERVE HIM ONLY.'"

Note that Satan states his ownership, dominion and rule over all the creation and, Jesus does not correct him. It is true that Satan has had the creation in his grasp from the time man chose to give it to him and relinquish his exalted position in favor of servitude to Satan, a servitude that resulted in the evil the living-dead have created ever since.

1 John 5:19-20 reads, "We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the Evil one. 20: And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so 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."

Jesus said in John 3:19-20, 19: "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. 20: For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

Thus, we have evil, restrained only by law and contrary power otherwise its unrestrained (Romans 13:3). Man still has complete free will or choice, to live anyway or style he desires, with the exception of being able to reverse the consequence of his sin (which is death) and return to paradise in fellowship with his Creator. It is Jesus alone who reverses the choice of man in the garden and did so under the most trying of conditions. Compare the abundant provision in the garden with

Jesus condition at the time of this temptation. Those who now choose to come under the headship of Christ are redeemed from the curse suffered in the beginning. Again, Paul puts it this way,

Romans 5:14-19, “Nevertheless death reigned from Adam until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of the offense of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. 15: But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one the many died, much more did the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abound to the many. ...17: For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. 18: So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19: For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

This is why Christ is called the “Second Adam” (I Corinthians 15:45-49). By the way, the parallel of the temptation account with the garden account is not accidental. It would make a good separate study for you.

A couple of final points:

1. The doctrine of original sin defined by Augustine and debated ever since both within and without the Catholic Church comes to mind. The doctrine generally holds that because of Adam's sin, all people since are born with an inherited condition or a stain of sinfulness or “sin nature” on account of our origin or descent from Adam. The Scripture doesn't quite say that. It speaks more of death being the result of Adam's sin, not sin being the result. Sin becomes the consequence of being born disconnected from God or “spiritually dead”, with the desperate need of being “reborn” or “born again of the Spirit” (John 3) so we may once again enter the kingdom of God (The Garden – Revelation 22).
2. There are many Bible teachers that claim that the entire garden incident with the temptation and all pictures God taking a divine risk and losing. Since then, God has been trying to dig Himself out of the mess He caused. Entire systematic theologies are built on this premise. For example, Hal Lindsay, in his book “Satan Is Alive And Well On Planet Earth” writes, (page 49, p. 4-5), and I quote, “When God created the angelic realm (and apparently Lucifer was the leader of all the angels), He took a calculated risk. He created Lucifer with the greatest intelligence of any created being, endowing him and other angelic beings with self-determination. God did not want robots. God believed it was worth the risk to create these beings with the ability to act independently of His will. ...Lucifer rebelled against God.” He goes on to say that, basically, God had to scramble to try to put things into order in that He had caused a great contest and the outcome was the death of His own Son, a great cosmic tragedy. Then he says, “I realize that to some this account may appear to some as wild conjecture based on only a few verses”... Yeah, I would say so for the following reason;

John 17:4-5, 4: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. 5: "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

John 17:24, "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world".

Ephesians 1:3-4, 3: "Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, 4: just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him."

Hebrews 4:3, "For we who have believed enter that rest, just as He has said, "AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST," although His works were finished from the foundation of the world."

I Peter 1:17-20, 17: "If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; 18: knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19: but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ. 20: For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you. 21: who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Revelation 13:8, "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Then we have the Scripture stating that God has full control over Satan and the demons. In Job, Satan can only do what God directs and nothing more. More on this later. Jesus has full domination or dominion over Satan and the demons as demonstrated time and time again as He cast them out of people. One time, they even asked His permission to enter a herd of pigs, which Jesus granted.

Joseph made it clear that though his brothers selling him into slavery was meant for evil, God intended all it for good. Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive".

So you see, I don't buy that God bumbled it all. God both knew and intended it all to happen from the beginning, from the temptation in the garden and the consequences, to the redemption in Christ. Even evil itself, becomes a key agent in God's plan of redemption for all who would choose life in Christ.

The alternative is that God is in a contest and could lose it. This robs us of hope in Christ and negates the ability of God to fulfill His promises. Satan cannot and will not pull the rug out from under God's plans, will and purpose.

Man still has the freedom and opportunity to choose to pick from the tree of life offered in this sinful world by Christ Jesus who is the Way the Truth and the Life. God even uses man's stubborn self-determination and his tendency to chose what is to his own benefit to bring him to a recognition that in the midst of an evil and wicked world, transferring his dominion back under the sovereign authority of God's saving grace in Christ is the most self benefiting decision he could and should make.

LESSON III.

“Understanding God’s Role in the Midst of Evil”

Summarizing last week’s lesson, there is no place in Scripture stating, “And God said, “Wow, I never saw that coming!”

After what happened in the “Garden” in Genesis chapter three, God’s role in the midst of an evil world is redemption of mankind, and He uses both man’s free will to choose and even man’s intention for evil to accomplish this. We will look at this today, taking free will first.

It should be clear that God granting man free will, though appearing at first to be an error, is really a good thing. Let’s clarify. Few people, including those of us in this room desire to have others make our choices for us. We prefer to make the decisions ourselves. Another’s input we will reject unless it is called a suggestion or recommendation we can consider. If I were to say to you, “You will all wear shorts and tee shirts at all times this winter” or “You will give me all you money”, you would not do so unless you decided on your own to do so, or, were forced to it. Being forced to it against your will is tantamount to slavery.

So, being forced even to obey God against one’s will would also amount to slavery. The alternative for God would have been to be create people without the ability to choose or decide anything. I can’t imagine what these people would be like seeing that even animals and insects appear to have some ability to choose. These people would certainly not be created in God’s image. But, to have free will and then be enslaved, it would not leave much room to understand, let alone appreciate God’s magnificent love for us. Thus, here we are, people with free will, albeit limited when it comes to the ability to regain “Paradise” on one’s own.

Now, we should admit that we don’t like people telling us what to do. This becomes very apparent to parents when, telling their children what to do, they encounter rebellion, sometimes such heated rebellion that severe damage occurs. The rebellion may come when the parent is even in a full love and protection mode for the child. “You are not to ride your bike into the street”. The next thing you know,.... This is like the little girl who was told by her dad during an argument, “Sit down”. So she sat down with a look of rebellion on her face. He asked, “Why do you look so hateful?” She answered, “I may be sitting down with my body, but I am standing up in my mind”. We don’t like anyone telling us what to do because we want to decide for ourselves, thank you.

Notice also that people hate to take responsibility for their own motives and choices, and the problems, evil or disasters that result. Best to blame of everyone, everything and even God himself. We have to have courts to determine blame and meet out justice, responsibility and consequence. Most plead, “Not guilty”. When asked. Who is guilty then? The answer? Anyone or anything else. Blame. It is nothing new.

Even in the garden. Remember this?

Genesis 3:8-13, 8: They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9: Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10: He said, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself." 11: And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of

which I commanded you not to eat?" 12: The man said, "The woman whom You gave *to be* with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate." 13: Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

So man blames the woman and God, then woman blames the serpent. The penalty God promised would be invoked was thereby handed down. Nevertheless, two verses later we have God presenting a future redemption in the midst of the penalty.

So man chooses and chooses to transfer dominion to Satan. Now empty, spiritually dead and in darkness, he searches for fulfillment and life, but not on the basis of God's will, but still on the basis of self-determination, what is to his benefit, to compensate for the misery and hopelessness he is in. He still chooses to select Satan as the master and architect. Satan offers his own trees of "life" to people today. Paraphrasing he says, "Look how sweet the tree looks, just eat of it and enjoy the fruit of your very own choice". (Again, Romans 6)

The best looking tree nowadays looks to be a money or possession tree, and "God help" the person who tries to get in our way to get at it. There is also a sex tree, an alcohol and drug tree, a music/media tree, an ambition/power tree among others, I'm sure. But the most deceptive and insidious tree of all, offering sweetness and life, is the "religion" tree.

I mentioned that God even uses man's stubborn self-determination and his bent to choose what he thinks is to his own benefit to bring men and women to Himself. In the midst of his dark, hopeless, sin filled life in this wicked world, many have chosen, to transfer their servitude back to the sovereign authority of God's saving grace in Christ. He finds this the most self-benefiting decision he can make. How is man, lost in darkness able to do this? Because in the midst of darkness, God sent a light:

First, note man's response to the light:

John 1:4-5, "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. 5: The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it."

John 3:19, "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil."

John 8:12-13; Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." 13: So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."

Then, the promise:

John 12:46, "I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness.

John 12:35-36, "So Jesus said to them, 'For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. 36: 'While you have the Light, believe in the Light, so that you may become sons of Light.'"

There is a choice being offered – darkness or light, lostness or redemption.

Remembering that God even uses man's stubborn self-determination and his bent to choose what he thinks is to his own benefit to bring men and women to Himself, God's love declares He will provide a way back to the garden and eternal paradise but it will be man's own choice. "Whosoever will, may come".

Mark 8:34, "And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Luke 6:47, "Whosoever (or all) who come to me, and hears my words, and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like...". (Like the man who builds his house upon the rock)

Matthew 16:25, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it".

Revelation 22:17, "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

So God uses man's free will to bring them back to Himself.

Second, God's role, even from the beginning is to redeem mankind from the consequences of his own stupid, self-willed choices, even when they result in evil. Redemption is the key theme in throughout the Bible, even in the midst of evil. He even uses evil as a means to redeem mankind.

In Genesis 3:15, speaking to the serpent God says, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel."

In Isaiah 45:21-24, God challenges Israel, 21: "Declare and set forth *your case*; Indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me. 22: "Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other. 23: "I have sworn by Myself, The word has gone forth from My mouth in righteousness And will not turn back, That to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear *allegiance*. 24: "They will say of Me, 'Only in the LORD are righteousness and strength.' Men will come to Him, And all who were angry at Him will be put to shame."

Jeremiah wrote in 8:18-22: 18: "My sorrow is beyond healing, My heart is faint *within me!* 19: Behold, listen! The cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land: "Is the LORD not in Zion? Is her King not within her?" "Why have they provoked Me with their graven images, with foreign idols?" 20: "Harvest is past, summer is ended, And we are not saved." 21: For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken; I mourn, dismay has taken hold of me. 22: Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?

Then the Lord through Jeremiah gives the reason why. 9:2-8, 2: "...all of them are adulterers, An assembly of treacherous men. 3: "They bend their tongue *like* their bow; Lies and not truth prevail in the land; For they proceed from evil to evil, And they do not know Me," declares the LORD. 4:

"Let everyone be on guard against his neighbor, And do not trust any brother; Because every brother deals craftily, And every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. 5: "Everyone deceives his neighbor And does not speak the truth, They have taught their tongue to speak lies; They weary themselves committing iniquity. 6: "Your dwelling is in the midst of deceit; Through deceit they refuse to know Me," declares the LORD. 7: Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, "Behold, I will refine them and assay them; For what *else* can I do, because of the daughter of My people?"

So God's role in this world of stubborn, rebellious and evil people is redemption. God even uses what He calls "refining" as well as "evil" itself to accomplish His purpose of redemption.

Redemption is God's primary role in the world, even transforming man's evil into good "for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose" (His purpose being: To be lights in the world, participating in God's work of redemption).

One modern example:

After the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7th 1941, President Roosevelt wanted an immediate retaliation on the Japanese mainland itself and, four months later, in April of 1942, sixteen B-25 bombers took off from the aircraft carrier "Hornet" under the Command of Col. Jimmy Doolittle. They were bound for Tokyo and other major cities to destroy Japan's military production. After the successful raid, the aircraft headed for a prearranged field in unoccupied China – that is unoccupied by the Japanese. It was at night when they approached their destination but the field was not lit as planned and the crews had to bail out of their aircraft due to lack of fuel.

Miraculously, of the 80 men on the mission, all but eleven were ultimately reunited alive with the help of the Chinese, who paid a heavy price for doing so. Three died in the bail out, and eight were captured by the Japanese. They were interrogated unmercifully and tortured continually for four months. The torture included: beatings, sleep deprivation, being left in solitary confinement in 8 foot by 8 foot cells without windows or light, no beds or pillows, not allowed to bathe, and given rice filled with maggots and dirt as food and they suffered water torture while having bamboo splinters jammed up their fingernails,

On August 28th, 1942, they were put on trial and three were sentenced to death by firing squad. Another died of dysentery, leaving four, Chase Nielson, Jacob DeShazer, Bobby Hite and George Barr. These four were moved to Nanking and the brutal treatment continued. Finally, Chase Nielson pleaded for better conditions for the four including the opportunity to physically and mentally exercise, asking for reading material. The Japanese relented and gave them three or four books and one of them was a Bible. The Bible changed Jacob DeShazer's life. He came to faith in Christ and committed himself to serve the Lord wherever He would lead him if he were ever released.

Three years later, in August of 1945, the United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan and two days later the four men were released. After a heartfelt homecoming and recovery, Jacob DeShazer obeyed God's leading and returned to Japan in 1948. He spent the next thirty years evangelizing that country. While there, a Japanese man came to DeShazer and told him he had read his testimony how the Bible brought light to his soul. So he himself got a Bible and after reading it asked God to forgive him, and believed God did. With DeShazer's help, he became a disciple and helped DeShazer evangelize the nation. This man died in 1976. His funeral was attended by Rev.

Jacob DeShazer. The man's name was Mitsuo Fuchida, the leader and commander of the fighter-bomber attack on Pearl Harbor.

There is much more to the story, but this is one example where the sovereignty of our God took what mankind intended for the most horrific evil and from it, ultimately brought forth the salvation of tens of thousands of people.

Did God intend for the war to occur? No! Did He ordain the war? No! Did He cause the war? No! But only God can take a pile of manure and turn it into a bouquet of roses.

As Joseph so magnificently understood when he addressed his brothers, "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

God has determined to redeem as many as possible, as II Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

Our privilege is to be partners with God, lights of hope and redemption in a dark world while there is yet time.

(End of lesson in class)

Summary of lesson: Remember, man had dominion over creation, granted to him by God who has kept His word in this grant, and has not rescinded it. He does not usurp it either. But man chose and chooses to transfer dominion to Satan because: now empty, spiritually dead and in darkness, he searches for fulfillment and life, but not on the basis of God's will, but on the basis of self-determination selecting Satan as the master and architect. Satan still says today, "Look how sweet the tree looks, just eat of it and enjoy the fruit of you very own choice." (Again, Romans 6)

The best looking tree nowadays looks to be a money tree, and "God help" the person who tries to get in our way to it. There is also a sex tree, an alcohol and drug tree, and a music/media tree among others I'm sure, but the most deceptive and insidious tree of all offering sweetness and life is the "religion" tree.

The whole thing is much like what happens when you kids decide to leave home and go out on their own. They cut the ties and choose for themselves the path they will take. It is up to them to decide whether they will choose to follow you teaching and instruction or not. Remember Joshua's words to Israel,

Joshua 24:14, "Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the LORD. 15: And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that *were* on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

So here we are in the midst of a horrific world of evil, a decaying, corrupt, environment witnessing the very thing God said would happen and then wondering where God is in all of it. Because of His

decree giving man dominion, He is not in it at all except to offer redemption, life, and restoration to paradise if men so choose it. He is granting ample time for this because He wishes as many as possible to be saved. He is not the cause of the floods, hurricanes, traffic accidents, wars, tornados, volcanic eruptions, crime and havoc and all the rest of the evil and awful things that go on. He is not judging NYC in 9/11 or anyone else anywhere. His judgment on mankind was fully taken out on His own son whom He gave up for us because He loves us. What goes on in this world is the direct result of us deciding to cut ourselves off from God's Lordship and wing it ourselves - period. The chaos in creation is also the result of this. We live in a dangerous place, a place we created for ourselves when given dominion over it and then cutting ourselves off from the protector and lover of our souls.

So we need to be clear. This is man's world that he has given over to the control of Satan who is, in turn, trying to amplify man's evil to his own ends. But Satan can only go so far. He is limited. If not, he would simply possess or kill everyone if he could, bringing total destruction upon both God's creation and God's redemptive work in Christ. But God's plan of redemption will not be thwarted or derailed. Rather, God will use man's evil itself to bring him to redemption if necessary. This is His own statement. As you know, the pain of evil and the impending reality of death are often the only elements that will prompt some people out of their self will and cast them upon God's mercy.

Paul says,

I Thessalonians 5:1-11, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2: For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3: While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. 4: But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; 5: for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; 6: so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. 7: For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. 8: But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. 9: For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10: who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. 11: Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

And so we wait. We suffer with the world but not without purpose, for we are given the privilege of being the light of the world.

LESSON IV

Our faith in the midst of evil, how does it survive, how does it manage?

In the first part of this series on faith, we took a very close look at the subject of “faith”, what it is and what it isn’t, from the texts and teachings of the Scripture. Remember we discovered that faith is actually an unseen, non-physical, non-corporeal, bond between a physical human being and The Spiritual Being, our Creator and Savior. It is not something we sustain by our own efforts but something that sustains us from God Himself through our communion in Christ.

In this second part, we are looking at faith as it stands in the face of evil. In this section we have looked at the source of evil, the cause of evil and God’s role in the midst of an evil and wicked world. Here we discovered that the Bible throughout its pages lays the source of evil at the feet of man, due to mankind transferring the dominion granted to Him by God to Satan. God not only knew this would happen when He created man in His own image, but intended it to happen having already set in play the redemptive plan to bring man back to Himself. (Studies Available)³

The quintessential book on suffering and faith in the Bible is the Book of Job. Many books have been written on the book of Job and nearly all of them carry the theme, “Why The Righteous Suffer”, and then the authors use the Book of Job to illustrate this theme.⁴ Although this question is broached in the Psalms, The question and theme of the Book of Job is of a different nature. The point and intent of the Book of Job is found in the prologue in a dialogue between God and Satan, a dialogue of which the characters in the book have no knowledge. However, the reader is both privy to and becomes involved in this profound question challenge forced upon him. It is found in chapter 1, verse 9 which says, “Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

Satan is stating that Job’s faith in God is commensurate with the wealth and prosperity Job has enjoyed. “Take that away and Job’s faith will collapse”, he says. He could be saying, “He is just another fair weather believer”. The reason the book is in the Bible is because God wants to pull the reader in and have the reader ask himself the same question. In other words, is the quality of our relationship with God defined by our circumstances? Many, as we have already studied, teach this.

In the soliloquies following Job’s loss of everything he owns, including the tragic loss of his children and the infliction of incredibly debilitating, painful, sores over his whole body, four “friends” try to convince him that he must find the sin in his life that brought this all on, repent of it, and get right with God. (Perhaps at least, he could send in an offering to the T.V. preacher to gain God’s favor again). No apologies for the cynicism.

Anyway, over the next 37 chapters the debate rages. Job stands by his understanding that his faith in God is neither motivated by his wealth or threatened by his tragic losses, nor is his tragedy a sign that there is something wrong with him or his relationship with God; a point of view that his friends can’t accept.

Ultimately Satan is proved wrong, as are his friends. His friends represent a very common understanding of faith, the “religious” point of view, prevalent even in this day. Faith, as Job knew,

³ For one, see this author’s work, “Knowing the Evil that would transpire, God Created Anyway. Why?”

⁴ See this author’s work on, “The Book of Job”

was a relationship with God that transcended anything and everything that this world gives or inflicts upon God's people. The two are not connected.

Job's only error was to assume he was righteous by his own works and challenges the Almighty to answer him regarding this. God does, humbling Job, who repents and acknowledges God as the source of true righteousness. God ultimately grants him a greater prosperity of family and wealth than he ever enjoyed.

Nevertheless, the lesson is critical. Faith is a relationship that transcends, or stands separately above whatever happens to us here. The two do not connect. Let's explore a little more.

It is easy to be drawn into agreeing to the argument of the four friends. Often our faith gets shaken under trying circumstances or tragedy. This shaking may be caused by four things reflected in Job's experience:

First is relationships. People let us down. Often it was or is our parents. We may have not gotten off to a good start, been in a tragic or abusive situation and have little reason to believe there is a good God. Then, it is hard to find anyone to trust. Most everyone is out to scam us out of our livelihood it seems. Sometimes it is those whom we called "friends". Sometimes it may come from people in the church.

The news we read is awful because humanity is vicious and cruel and we don't know when we will be next. Our goals are often simply survival and self-protection. We buy locks and fund military and law enforcement agencies to protect us, often to no avail. A huge percentage of our income goes to restrain evil in so many forms. In fact, our national budget approaches 90% to restrain or corral evil. We even have to put seals on food products to help assure us someone hasn't pumped poison into them.

Have you even been ripped off by an auto mechanic? Many have. So when people are asked to place their faith in someone, they are often hesitant, and understandably so. Unfortunately these feelings may be transferred to God. One may interpret harsh experiences as God being unfair, unjust or vindictive. But then there are honest, reliable, trustworthy auto mechanics. When we find one, we return there and our fears are diminished each time and we finally come to a place of faith where we are able to rest in our discovery. We even recommend them to others and praise his work.

So it is with our faith in God. We find after a time, that He is always faithful and, after all is said and done, we worry less and rest and trust more. This may take years, but that is okay, God has all the time in the world. So we have the capacity for "faith". The challenge is the object or person into which we should place it so we know we are okay. It is the direction or focus of our faith that is key, as well as understanding what the truth is regarding its place in a very evil world. This will be discussed more thoroughly later on.

But, if our faith or the perception of our relationship with God rests upon what we see in this world, then we are in stress indeed. But it doesn't and must not. So difficult and damaging human relationships attempt to challenge our faith in God.

The second is the temporal nature of the created universe. Stuff wears out, goes to pieces, deteriorates or simply breaks down. Things rot and decay. We try to keep up with it but it always

seems to win. We buy a new car, a new house, a new anything and the thrill lasts until about the time, usually in days, that it begins to disintegrate at a very costly and time consuming rate.

People get old and die, friends and loved ones are critically injured, crippled, or are killed. Our beloved pets die. The world is in chaos from natural disasters let alone human ones. We are constantly dismayed, hurt and disappointed if not angered by all this. We wonder where God is in all this pain and hurt and evil, and last week submitted an answer to this dilemma. The temporal nature of the creation itself tries to challenge our trust in God.

The third we have alluded to. The incredible evil mankind pours out upon his fellow man and upon the creation itself. We have as a nation seldom had to suffer as these people or as the starving, persecuted, tortured, disease ravaged, people of the world. So it is hard for most of us to feel what they feel and possess their wonder about where God is in all of it. Those of you who have loved ones in war zones now fear for their lives and pray for their safety just as we do every week here. But some are killed, captured and tortured, and we see heads of our fellow Americans, our neighbors, viciously chopped off and so on.

Even here at home, the insidious evil that occurs to people and children here is appalling. We read or hear about it every day. Even church clergy are involved with unspeakable acts against children. Gang violence, crime of every kind is rampant. Mothers stuff their newborns into waste cans, or drown them. Fathers murder their children's mothers and senseless crimes, immorality, and acts of indecency by the millions occur every year right here in the good old USA and make the world wonder what we are really all about.

So we find that faith is forced to stand up against the three things that give us the most trouble, 1. Relationships that have been or are painful; 2. A decaying world and, worst of all, 3. Man's horrible evil. All try to challenge our faith in God.

For some, unfortunately, faith is little more than a shallow, unsubstantial hope or wishful thinking easily crushed under the weight of these negative circumstances. For others, it is a relationship that transcends all the ills the world inflicts on itself.

But the biggest challenge (number four) may be when we look at ourselves. On the one hand we believe that we are saved due to the grace and love of God who has forgiven us and redeemed us by the blood of His own dear Son. We state our theology of God's grace and love for us easily. On the other, we find that we constantly produce awful stuff from within ourselves whether in thought, deed, or spoken word and we wonder, "How can God, continue to love us?"

In us we find these two forces battling. Paul in the classic and familiar passage of Romans 7 gives us the answer based in his own experience. Please note the contrasts:

14-25, 14: "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. 15: For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. 16: But if I do the very thing I do not want *to do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good. 17: So now, no longer am I the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 18: For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. 19: For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20: But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21: I find then the

principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good. 22: For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man, 23: but I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin which is in my members. 24: Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25: Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

So, even in the middle of our own worst moments, is it possible that God really does love us and will not rescind His promise to us in Christ? Absolutely. And may I say, that until a person comes to the very end of himself, seeing what a miserable wretch he or she is, will that person actually know, like Paul, what the full magnificence and wonder of God’s grace really is. In other words, it is in our brokenness and pain that God reveals His true love and care, not His rejection and judgment.

So the circumstances we endure in this world seek to undermine our faith in God. But one thing has nothing to do with the other. On the one hand, we observe man’s inhumanity to man. On the other, we observe God’s work of redemption in the midst of it all. The scripture intimates that though we are in the world we are not part of the world.

I John 4:4-6, 4: “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; (*spirits and teachers not from God*) because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5: They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. 6: We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.” (Italics mine)

Ephesians 2:4-10, 4: “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5: even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6: and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, 7: so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8: For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; 9: not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.”

A young lady once asked me, “How is it that when I was lost without Christ God loved me, but now that I am a Christian He seems to hate me?” She was a victim of the very bad theology we looked at in this study early on. Paul nearly shouts it out, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.” Romans 8:1-2

Now let’s talk about the conflict of the inner man in closing. It is not an isolated phenomenon. A missionary to the people of the Arctic listened to an Inuit man, a new believer, try to describe the conflict between the spirit of evil and the Spirit of God within him. The man said in his own language, “I have two dogs that fight within me... A black dog that represents all the bad things in my life, and a white dog that represents my new relationship with Jesus Christ. And they fight and they fight and they fight”. And the missionary asked him, “Which one will win?” And the man answered, “The one I feed the most”.

But he is incorrect. We must never confuse the solid relationship we have with God in Christ with the circumstances of our existence or the unrighteousness of our lives. We have the gracious gift of

salvation not because we live so righteously, but in spite of it. We still fight the black dog. We will never live perfectly, consistently righteous, or godly. But the Lord has assured us we share His victory.

It is in our brokenness that Jesus offers us rescue, not because we have such great faith. Regardless of the good and godly things we do or don't do, difficult things we face or do not face, these things are not a gauge of our salvation. They are more likely a gauge of which dog we are feeding. Evil, whether in the world or in ourselves is the consequence of man's free choice. We can choose to get help or not, believe the truth or not, understand God's plan or not, grow in the grace and truth of our Lord Jesus Christ or not. Do good works or not. Our choice. But none of this changes or manipulates God to any different view of us than He already has or knows about. It only changes us.

We need to take heart when life slams us good. Paul, who suffered greatly in his service to Christ wrote these words for our encouragement,

“What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:31-39

LESSON V.

“QUANTITY” REGARDING FAITH, THE “GREAT AND SMALL FAITH” DEBATE

Last week we saw that our relationship with God in Christ, defined by the word “faith” is neither understood by nor affected by what happens in this world. We have seen that God in Christ, in the midst of evil, provides for and desires the redemption of all who would seek Him. He is patient, not wanting any to perish. Those whom He redeems, that is, brings back to Him through faith in His Son, are not removed from this world, but become partners with Him in this redemptive work. Man’s evil acts we experience we also see God use, not to show His abandonment of man or even His judgment, but as one means to bring man back to himself. Our relationship with God through faith in Christ is not qualified or quantified by the evil, pain, hurt or suffering we endure. It is separate and untouched by it. Our relationship with God is one thing, the mess of the world, and even our own lives is another altogether. We do not interpret or understand the one by the other. We interpret and understand our relationship with God by His own unshakable Word.

“And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN." This *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. **Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;**” (Hebrews 12:26-28)

Let’s not confuse the shakiness of this existence with our place in Christ in the unshakable kingdom of God.

John Peterson, a fine Christian musician and composer faced a tragic moment along with his wife. His family lived near 64th St. and Shea Blvd. in Phoenix. One night his teen-age daughter was riding home from church with friends and they made a left turn from Shea onto 64th Street. As they did so, a car coming from the opposite direction hurtled through the red light tee-boning the car with the young people in it. The Peterson’s daughter was among two or three killed in the horrific collision caused by a drunk driver.

Friends of ours told us this story and how they visited the Petersons that night to comfort them and weep for them. What John Peterson said under this most trying moment I’ll share with you in a moment.

When a drunk goes through an intersection and kills someone, people ask, “Why did God let this happen or How come God didn’t stop this?” This is, of course, a subtle way of blaming God. My answer is God was not behind the wheel. It happened because the drunk got behind the wheel and drove his car through a red light and killed someone. God did not rescind His word when he gave man dominion over the planet and the free will to choose his life style. This is the way it is without God. This is the world of rebellious man really is. It is a dangerous place. We must be careful. Paul made this clear when he said, “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:16-17)

The world would come to the defense of this man and say, “Of course he isn’t responsible, it was the fault of the bar or the bartender, or the light system at this signaled crossing, or perhaps the

people who died were just in the wrong place at the wrong time, or maybe he was improperly potty trained as a child...”.

It is interesting that as much as the world wants to place blame on God, Satan, or anything and everything else, we read clearly that is **people** who will be judged by God for the failure to respond to what God has done in Christ.

For us who have responded, that judgment is eliminated. In receiving Christ, we admitted responsibility for our sin and corruption. We sought His grace and mercy and flinging our wretched selves at His feet. So we won't face the judgment of the wicked. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life." John 5:24

In receiving Christ, we begin a relationship with God called “faith”. Today’s lesson is on whether there is need to consider for us, a “quantity” of faith that makes our Christian lives more fruitful, complete, satisfying or successful. This is a confusing issue for many, and I receive questions about this.

By the way, when our friends Gene and Sharon asked the Petersons if there was anything they could do to help in the midst of their pain and sorrow, here is what John Peterson said, “Gene, we either believe in what God has said and Jesus has done or we do not. For us, we believe.” Did the tragic death of this young girl who had her whole life ahead of her cause the Petersons to feel like God no longer loved them or cared for them, or that their faith was too small? Was their response a demonstration of “great faith”? Let’s find out.

We read stories in the Bible like the following: (Matthew 8:5-13)

Matthew 8:5-10, “And when Jesus entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, imploring Him, 6: and saying, "Lord, my servant is lying paralyzed at home, fearfully tormented." 7: Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him." 8: But the centurion said, "Lord, I am not worthy for You to come under my roof, but just say the word, and my servant will be healed. 9: "For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to this one, 'Go!' and he goes, and to another, 'Come!' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this!' and he does *it*." 10: Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled and said to those who were following, "Truly I say to you, I have not found such ***great faith*** with anyone in Israel”. (Bold italics mine)

Was it the “quantity” of faith the centurion possessed that brought about this healing? I am going to try to establish that “quantity” of faith is not really the point when statements like this are made. I will try to establish that the statement, “If we just had more faith”, is a useless exercise in grunting.

A hint comes in Jesus’ commentary about the centurion’s faith. "I say to you that many will come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed that *very* moment.”

Now, was it that the centurion believed that the servant would be healed? Was it that he had such a great faith? Or something else?....What was it about the centurion’s faith that was different than those of the house of Israel He came into contact with? Please think about this.

Here are some more, looking at the “littleness” of faith:

Mat 6:30 "But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, *will He* not much more *clothe* you? You of little faith!

Mat. 8:26 He said to them, "Why are you afraid, you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm.

Luke 17:4-6 "And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' forgive him." 5: The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" 6: And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a mustard seed, you would say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and be planted in the sea'; and it would obey you."

Is Jesus really saying something about the “quantity” of their faith? Hmm. Here are a couple more:

Mat 9:22: “But Jesus turning and seeing her said, ‘Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.’ At once the woman was made well.” (This applies to the woman suffering with 12 years of bleeding.

This next verse gives the answer.

Mat 9:28-29, “When He entered the house, the blind men came up to Him, and Jesus *said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 29: Then He touched their eyes, saying, "It shall be done to you according to your faith."

When Jesus talks about faith in terms of great or little or effective, is He really talking about “quantity”?

When we think about faith, we often are confronted with the challenge that our success as people will depend on the quantity of our faith. I am postulating that this is not true. So often preachers or others will look down upon our difficult circumstance or failure to be rich or healthy and say something like Job’s friends argued, “Well you just don’t have enough faith”, or “You are out of fellowship with God”, or “It is the sin in your life”, or something like this. If we are genuine Christian believers, none of these things are true.

This “not enough faith” argument falls right into a previous installments’ point. It places the responsibility for procuring God’s blessings on us. However, people are not saved just because they have “faith”, even if they are seen to have a “great faith”. Of the 5 or 6 billion people on this earth, maybe 4 to 5 billion of them would say they have “faith”. Are they thus saved? They think they are. But their “faith” is usually found to be in their own works, religious devotion, piety or faithfulness. What is the difference between that faith and saving faith? Paul writes,

“...nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” Galatians 2:16

Paul also hopes to:

“...be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith,”
Philippians 3:9

Remember Jesus’ answer when asked by those gathered around Him as to what they could do, “to the works of God”? “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent”, He said.

So is “great faith” defined by quantity or direction and focus? I could have a “great faith” in Islam, but is it focused on that which will really save me? That is why, in lesson I, I insisted that faith must be grounded in truth and that the truth is not a product of human thinking but of divine provision buttressed with evidence.

Let me tell you a story or two about all this. I’ve shared this one before. Ian Thomas, an English missionary, was away on a mission trip for several months when a colleague said to him, “You must have a great faith in your wife to be gone from her for so long a time”. Thomas was angered at this but held it in check and replied, “I don’t need to have a great faith in my wife because I have a great and faithful wife”.

You see, he really did have a great faith in his wife but not because he willed it or built it up or worked on it, but because she was faithful. So he was able to rest without worry about any of the things the other fellow had on his mind. Isn’t this great! Faith is rest without worry in God not because our faith is so great, but because we have such a great God! That recognition is faith sufficient don’t you agree? And exactly how do you quantify it? You don’t. How do you measure “how much faith” a person has anyway? The world looks on the outside, God on the heart. The world sees and judges. God sees and loves. Faith is not “expectation” but the recognition of the sovereignty of God.

So it isn’t that we have such great power of faith within ourselves but are considered, even by Jesus, to have a great faith because it is directed properly and solely toward God through Him. Not only that, but God acts on our behalf even when we, who are in Christ, neither believe it nor expect it. In other words, it is our faith in Him, not in the way we believe circumstances should or should not work out. Sometimes God answers prayers not even asked and does things for people who are not noted for exercising any faith at all.

One of many illustrations of this and a humorous one at that is found in Acts 12 where Herod Agrippa II had arrested Peter and thrown him into a maximum security Roman prison to await execution. The church in Jerusalem was in fervent prayer for Peter but in truth had no expectation of his release, in essence, no faith that it would or even could happen. And rightly so. There was simply no one who had ever escaped or even broken into this prison. Multiple gates and walls, guards and watchmen made the prison impregnable. But they prayed anyway, faithfully in prayer but with no expectation their prayers would be answered. How do we know they were like this? Because the passage tells us so. After his deliverance by an angel we read in verse 11,

Act 12:11: “When Peter came to himself (On the street outside the prison), he said, “Now I know for sure that the Lord has sent forth His angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” 12: And when he realized *this*, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark, where many were gathered

together and were praying. 13: When he knocked at the door of the gate, a servant-girl named Rhoda came to answer. 14: When she recognized Peter's voice, because of her joy she did not open the gate, but ran in and announced that Peter was standing in front of the gate. 15: They said to her, "You are out of your mind!" But she kept insisting that it was so. They kept saying, "It is his angel." 16: But Peter continued knocking; and when they had opened *the door*, they saw him and were amazed."

This is very human and the saints of the early church were no different than us. The point is, if God is waiting for us to exercise some great faith before He acts, then we are in deep trouble. God doesn't fulfill his purposes for us based on anything we do or think we do. It is because we are His children by faith in Christ, period.

Sometimes God answers prayers we don't even ask. I have had this experience where something occurred that, had I prayed for it, I might have taken some credit for the answer. In the same token some of my prayers have not been answered at all, and I felt that maybe it was because God did not want to hear from this old sinner and was ignoring me. Also a mis-hit.

One Biblical example of God healing without even one mention of someone asking for it is found in Luke 22:51. Remember when at Jesus' arrest in the Garden Peter drew his sword and cut off the ear of the servant of the High Priest? Luke writes, "But Jesus answered and said, 'Stop! No more of this.' And He touched his ear and healed him."

Our efforts to put God in some controlled environment (a "box") where we both expect and assume that God only acts when we do this or that or exercise faith this way or that is not only foolish, but arrogant and borders on demonic paganism. To assume that God will answer prayer because we put it in the form of "ACTS" (Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication) is pure nonsense. Not that there is anything wrong with any of these things. But they assume that God responds to some religious system or liturgy. Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, some Lutherans, some Methodists and others make this assumption. But this is not the case at all. In Isaiah 1:11-15; I Samuel 15:22; Micah 6:7-8 and so on make it clear that God is not pleased with ritual or sacrifice unless humility, faith and concern for others, especially the poor preface such rituals.

Faith was called "little" not because Jesus is quantifying it but because it was incorrectly directed to the wrong place. Faith is not called "great" as a quantifying adjective, but because it is directed to the One who is recognized as God and as truth.

A familiar story to illustrate and close with:

You remember when Peter wanted to join Jesus in walking on the water. And Jesus said, "Come!" And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

The illustration is so simple and clear, we teach it to children. In the midst of the storms of life, we stand firmly, even on water in which we would normally sink, because our eyes are fixed upon Jesus. This is what constitutes "great faith" not the quantity of it but the focus of it because only He can sustain us in the storms, only He can guide us across the waters in which we would normally sink. To place our focus on anything or anyone else is what constitutes "little faith" and causes our

hearts to sink. But even then, Jesus stretches out His loving hand to us and brings us safely into His ship.

OTHER EXAMPLES:

Mark 6:1-6, 1: "Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. 2: When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? 3: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. 4: Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his *own* relatives and in his *own* household." 5: And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6: And He wondered at their unbelief.

Their unbelief is defined by their not believing in Him.

Matthew 15:21-28, 21: "Jesus went away from there, and withdrew into the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22: And a Canaanite woman from that region came out and *began* to cry out, saying, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is cruelly demon-possessed." 23: But He did not answer her a word. And His disciples came and implored Him, saying, "Send her away, because she keeps shouting at us." 24: But He answered and said, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." 25: But she came and *began* to bow down before Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" 26: And He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." 27: But she said, "Yes, Lord; but even the dogs feed on the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." 28: Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your faith is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

Her faith was great because she recognized Jesus was indeed "the master".

LESSON VI

FAITH, GOD'S WILL, SERVICE AND PERSEVERANCE – OUR ROLE IN AN EVIL WORLD.

“Albert Camus, a prominent existential thinker, struggled with religious issues like the meaning of life, the foundation of morality, the problem of suffering and evil, and the desire for eternal life. His major novels – “The Stranger” (1942), “The Plague” (1947), and “The Fall” (1956) – exhibited his conviction that God does not exist and that the world is without meaning. Camus’ main frustrations came from the issues of suffering and evil. Seeing pain and suffering all around him, he could not believe that a God who was good and all-powerful would watch such events and do nothing to alleviate them. Such a God, he felt, was not worth believing.”⁵

Camus sought answers and often attended church where the pastors were unable to counter his arguments until he met a Methodist Minister, Howard Mumma, in Paris in the late 1950's. Sworn to secrecy by Camus regarding their infrequent and irregular meetings, Mumma was able to persuade Camus to read the New Testament. Camus was caught up in Christ and inquired about being born again and being baptized. Mumma explained to Camus how to come to God confessing his sins and his need of forgiveness and place his faith in Christ. Camus came to a place of developing faith and wanted to be baptized, but before that could happen he was killed in a car accident on January 4, 1960.

Camus' struggle to believe in a good God while watching pain and suffering all around him is the primary cause of disbelief in the world, and the primary motive for man trying to make sense out of life. So philosophies and religions have sprung up since time began to try and deal with this in some way that will keep people with the realm of sanity or keep them from destroying themselves and everything around them. The world offers a smorgasbord of thought and tempts one to select an acceptable means of making it through without a life of depression and hopelessness.

In our study, we have examined all of this and tried to offer answers that underscore the truth of our Christian faith and understanding of these things. (Available) The goal of these studies is to move each Christian from a place of confusion, doubt and insecurity to a place of confidence, assurance, understanding and peace. The hoped for result is that this will affect our lives and allow us to be more compassionate, understanding and helpful to each other and we serve Christ by serving each other in the midst of an evil world that, ultimately, really can't touch us. In short, I hope us to become not a force of fear, but a force of faith.

In these last two sessions, we will look today more closely at our role in this world of confusion and struggle, and next week, answer questions that have been submitted for consideration.

I have mentioned that our role involves the privilege of participating in the redemptive work of God in this world. What does this mean? Well, it is simply that we are Christ's body in this world, and as such, we serve mankind as He served mankind with the goal of seeing as many as possible have the opportunity to hear and believe the good news. Last week I quoted Hebrews 12:28 which states,

Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;” (Hebrews 12:28)

⁵ “The One year Book of Christian History”, M. and S. Rusten, Tyndale House, 2003, pg. 8

Remember, the “work” of God is to believe in Him whom God has sent. When we believe, our works are done. But not the purpose for our lives. So what this really amounts to is determining God’s Will for our lives. We can only summarize because we would have to read most of the Bible here, wouldn’t we? One passage helps sum it up, and it is from the Old Testament:

“With what shall I come to the LORD *And* bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the LORD take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn *for* my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:6-8

Employing sarcasm, may I suggest that to understand God’s Will for our lives, we need to look beyond what our career should be, what car we should buy, how much money we should give to His work, where we should go to church etc. I weary of people who tell me, “God spoke to me and said, “I should sell my house and move””. I know I am going to encounter resistance from some who rely on revelation to figure out what toilet paper to buy as they justify this by saying, “Doesn’t God care about everything we do? Doesn’t He even know how many hairs there are on our head?” Etc. Etc. Ad Infinitum, Ad Nauseum. I mean this is the same mentality of those who claim that God told them to get a gun and go kill the abortion clinic doctor and his staff.

A lot of Christians think God is more interested in one’s vocational success than in one’s family, wife, husband or children. Men think they are doing God’s will when they work 24/7, and are shocked when served with the divorce papers. Women think they are following the Lord until their gossiping disguised as “concerns” comes back to wreck their relationships. Moms and Dads can’t understand why their kids are a wreck, and are angry that the schools don’t include prayer, and spiritual teaching in their curriculum. Of course it isn’t done at home, but, we are too busy, not to mention ignorant, afraid and perhaps even lazy. So let’s blame the public school system! It’s the government! Why not? After all, it isn’t God’s will that we raise our children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, is it dad?

Many wonder, “What is God’s will for my life?” Well let’s make it utterly so simple that even a three year old can get it.

Mostly, it involves how you treat other people. It involves service to others in the manner of Christ and in His name. But the first step is to develop a godly quality to our Christian lives so we will not present a hypocritical service and have our witness disqualified because of the mess we are in by our own doing.

1. Godly lives

There are so many scriptures to choose from and I steered on just a few to illustrate the point. For example, Paul wrote in Titus 2:11-14 a great summary of it all:

11: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12: instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,

13: looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14: who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.”

II Timothy 2:19-22, “Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, ‘The Lord knows those who are His,’ and, ‘Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness.’ 20: Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21: Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 22: Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”

Ephesians 4:17-24, 17: “So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18: being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19: and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20: But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21: if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22: that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23: and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24: and put on the new self, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”

Paul looked at his ministry and personal life and said,

I Corinthians 9:27, “but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

Philippians 2:14-16, 14: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15: so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16: holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain.”

An illustration: You are a guide in one of the great underground caverns like Carlsbad, Meramec, Mammoth, Fisher, Karchner and so on. You have brought your tour group to the deepest part of the cavern through many twists, turns, and a maze of tunnels. Now you ask them to turn their flashlights off. It is so dark that nothing can be seen, even with night vision equipment. Without lights, and a guide, it would be impossible to find ones way out of the cavern. All the flashlights now go dead except yours. Yours is the only light that will save them. But the strength of your light is commensurate with the godliness of your life, and the godliness of your life is measured by how you live in your secret life and how you have served and loved others, (beginning with your spouse). Is there enough light for you to get your group to safety? Or will they deride you, the guide, for being so unprepared that you cannot even see clearly yourself?

Jesus said,

Matthew 7:3-5, 3: "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4, Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck

out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5, You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”

This brings us to the next part of God’s will, Service

Matthew 20:25-28, “But Jesus called them to Himself and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and *their* great men exercise authority over them. 26: It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27: and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28: just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.’”

Matthew 25:34-40, 34: "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35: 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; 36: naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' 37: "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? 38: 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 39: 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' 40: "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.’”

John 13:12-15, 12: “So when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined *at the table* again, He said to them, ‘Do you know what I have done to you? 13: You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for *so* I am. 14: If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15: For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.’”

Galatians 5:13-14, 13: “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only *do not turn* your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14: For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the *statement*, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."

Philippians 2:1-4, 1: “Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2: make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3: Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4: do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

God’s will for your life, wherever you find yourself, is service to others with love and compassion, understanding and patience, even to the sacrifice of yourself, if necessary for, “greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend.”

Perseverance in the above, no matter what.

In the midst of the evil of this age, but with what we have learned over these past several weeks, the Lord asks us to persevere in our faith and His work with patience and understanding, so we will not be discouraged.

I Timothy 4:16, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

I Corinthians 15:58, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.”

I Corinthians 16:13-14, “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14: Let all that you do be done in love.”

Galatians 6:9, “Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. 10: So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.”

Ephesians 4:14-16, 14: “As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15: but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, 16: from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Ephesians 6:13, “Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

These are samples to help us see God’s perspective when we are concerned about whether or not we are in His will. I hear Christians nearly every day wonder about God’s will in whether the house should be sold or not, or about where one should live or work or what kind of car one should buy or what kind of toothpaste one should use, or what doctor to go to or a million other things they are concerned about. The reason they struggle with these things is that there is no concern about them in the scripture. Others want to understand books like Revelation or Daniel, or issues about the end times, or prophecy, and so on. My answer to most of these is this: “Instead of trying to figure out what you don’t understand in the Bible, why don’t you apply what you do understand in the Bible, like being the kind of husband, wife or parent - neighbor, friend or employee – citizen, employer, or the godly Christian God clearly instructs you to be? Work on those things for the next forty years and leave the rest until that is done. That is God’s will for your life. In other words, rather than spend energy and frustration over the things you don’t know, why not apply the things you do know?

Amazing how we will find almost anyway possible to do everything except what is clearly stated in God’s word. Perhaps that is why our light is so dim.

LESSON VII

Questions recently submitted.

- 1a. "If the world in which we live is so full of evil and hate, how do we explain all the good that still happens despite Satan being in control if it weren't for permissive providence?"

The idea of, "God's permissive will" or of His "permissive providence" is not a scriptural term. This is just a way of expressing our lack of understanding about the problem of circumstances, evil, God's will and so on. Often it can be another subtle way of blaming God for the disaster. As far as good being done, remember, man is free to choose to do whatever he wishes regardless of the motive. Plus, there are a multitude of believers who simply do good things because of their love for God and others. To God, the motive is the key to why anything is done. The "heart" is the center of man and that is where God's attention is focused.

- 1b. Is part of the goodness, love, kindness which is still in this world because of God's presence in His people left here on earth? Example: Hospitals, Salvation Army, etc. Or does it have nothing to do with why His people still remain here?

Yes, it absolutely does and is. It is the people of faith and desire to make a positive difference that is a major cause of the good in the world. But even those of little or no faith, who have chosen to live a moral and responsible life can do good. That is the power of man's choice. While speaking at a men's seminar I made the statement that the most powerful tool a person possesses is his or her decision-making ability (his choice). This is the basis upon which he acts or reacts. Some Christians are disreputable, dishonest, corrupt people who are little better than the worst unbeliever in the world. Some without faith outshine Christians in charitable acts and good deeds. This is because these people have chosen this path. Their reasons vary, but the most common is that they find some personal benefit or satisfaction in making the choices they make, even if it is simply a tax write-off. Even some tribal peoples have established a society that seeks the benefit of all within it. As far as the Salvation Army, hospitals and so on go, most of these, including schools, (all the way from grammar school to graduate schools) were started by the church. The Ivy League Schools like Harvard, Princeton, and so on, as well as others like Notre Dame and even USC were at one time Christian schools with faith in Jesus Christ at the heart of their charters. But, bottom line, without the Biblical moral influence brought to the world by Christianity and even Judaism, life and government would be quite different, and people would be lost in darkness, left to their own devices.

2. "When upsetting, difficult or terrible things happen I have heard people say, "I wonder what God wants me to learn from this". This relates to the idea that God gives us lab sessions in the issues we pray for. For example, someone prays for patience and is given a problem that requires patience. Your thoughts?"

My thoughts are that this is not the way God normally works. By this way of thinking, if a person suffers a broken arm and asks God for help, should we then expect God to break the other arm? Or if we lose one child in a tragic way, do we fear because God will surely see to it the other one is killed? Someone has bought into Murphy's Law here. But none of this squares with how Jesus approached tragedy, death and pain. Sometimes He wept. Sometimes He was moved with compassion. To wonder what God wants one to learn from this is another subtle way of blaming God for the event, (God must have done this to teach me something). I'm not even sure God wants us to "learn" something from the suffering. I think He is happy when we bring our pain and hurt to

Him, even when we understand none of it. I Peter 5:6-7, 6: “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, 7: casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

On the other hand, when Israel was complaining in the wilderness about having to eat manna all the time and crying out for some meat, God said, essentially, “You want meat? I’ll give you meat!” So he sent a giant flock of quail to them. After they killed and ate so much quail that they were vomiting their guts out to the point that some even died. They were forced to eat nothing but quail for a month. They shut up for a while and were happy with manna again. So maybe we can learn something from this? Like being content with what we have?

In addition, we must ask, “Does ‘patience’ grow under the trials that test it?” “Does God test people so they will become stronger?” The answer to the first is that “patience”, as we think of it, reflects the emotional aspect especially as it relates to people and things. We use it to describe “impatience” with someone or something, which is really frustration manifested in sarcasm, anger or whatever.

This is not the Biblical use of the term. The Biblical use, as applied to Christians in the New Testament, is seen in passages like James 1:2-3, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.” The Greek word for “testing” is “δοκιμιον” (doe-kee-mee-on) and means “proof” or “result” of being tried or tested. This is like the smelter that purifies the ore. The tests are not from God but the Spirit uses these times to force us to a choice...and that choice is to persevere in the faith, endure and continue, which is the meaning of “patience”. The actual word for “patience” means to “stand under”, “bear-up”, “endure”. It has little relationship to the idea of avoiding frustration, anger or being “impatient” with others. Rather it has to do with the steadfastness of our walk with God.

Peter uses the same phrase and word in I Peter 1:6-7, and one can see the point clearly. “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”. Paul uses it in Romans 5:3-5, “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” In no place do we find that it is God who is doing the testing. In fact the opposite is true. This word is used many times where men are “testing” God or “testing” Jesus or even testing other men. Sometimes it is used to challenge men to test themselves (II Corinthians 13:5) but never of God doing the testing.⁶

In James 1:13-14 we also read these words, “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.” Sometimes this is translated “tested”. The root word for “tempted” here is pi-rahd-zoh, and its intent can range from “scrutinize and examine” to “solicited to participate in evil”. This is different than the other word for “testing”. The word James uses here is the same word used for Jesus being “tempted” by the Devil. So regardless of what “testing” is mentioned, in the New Testament as it relates to Christians, it is not from God.

⁶ For more on this, see this author’s work on “Testing” found in the studies in Galatians.

The typical “testing” of our “patience” is not really what the Bible is talking about. All that kind of testing does is prove how immature we are and impatient we are. This will never produce the patience we think of when we use that word. That kind of patience is found in Galatians 5:22 and is not a result of testing, but is a fruit of the Spirit, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*,

This word is unique. It is “makro-thu-mia” and does indeed reflect how we respond to others. It does not come as a result of testing, but of the Spirit. The same word is used in II Corinthians 6:6 in the midst of a context describing demeanor and human relationships, and this word is also found in I Corinthians 13:4; James 5:7; Matthew 18:26 and so on, reflecting the same idea. Again, it is not produced by God bringing some test into our lives, or giving us “lab-sessions”.

But someone will say, “God tested Abraham”! The references are: Genesis 22:1 and Hebrews 11:17. And yes, here, God “tested” Abraham. He told him to make his son into a human sacrifice, not unlike the human sacrifices of the heathens around Abraham in the land of Canaan.

But we will note here that this word for “tested” is not used in the sense of “makrothumia” above, (or “patience” in relationship with people or things), but in a unique way and for a unique purpose. The Hebrew word for “tested” is “nah-sah”. It is comparable with “pi-rad-zo” above, and God’s purpose is reflected by the result and the comments about the event. Here, what God did was to gripingly teach Abraham that He is the only one who fulfill promises (reflecting back on Abraham’s mess with Hagar and Ishmael), and only He can provide the proper sacrifice. So Abraham’s faith must be in God alone and not in himself, his works, the circumstances of his life or his surroundings. Abraham had indeed learned to obey God implicitly. The redemption of the entire world depended upon it. God knew he would do so and the account is there from which all can learn.

Further, the emphasis, three times, from God about Isaac being Abraham’s “only son” (verses 2, 12, and 16) is poignant and touching. It prefigures God’s sacrifice of his “only son” for us. The pain of a loss of an “only son” is reflected by other passages: “O daughter of my people, put on sackcloth And roll in ashes; Mourn as for an only son, A lamentation most bitter.” - Jeremiah 6:26. “Then I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs into lamentation; And I will bring sackcloth on everyone’s loins And baldness on every head. And I will make it like *a time of mourning for an only son*, And the end of it will be like a bitter day.” - Amos 8:10 . “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” - Zechariah 12:10

Finally, this query calls into question the character of God. It is so for some to believe He really loves us and cares for us and has compassion for us when we hurt. There are so many places where this is truly taught, but the best illustration may be in Luke 7:11-16,

“Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd. Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a sizeable crowd from the city was with her. When the Lord saw her, He felt compassion for her, and said to her, “Do not weep.” And He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said,

"Young man, I say to you, arise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak. And *Jesus* gave him back to his mother. Fear gripped them all, and they *began* glorifying God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and, "God has visited His people!"

Perhaps the most touching verse in all the Bible is verse 15. This is a true and consistent portrait of our Lord and Savior.

3. When challenges come, in the faith and responsibility God grants us, where does God leave off and we pick up or when do we leave off and God picks up?

There are some things that are simply impossible for us to do. Like change a person's character or heart. For example, once we speak the truth in love, we are only responsible for that which we say, not for the other person's response or lack thereof.

It is pretty clear what our responsibilities are from the scripture and what His priorities are for us and in what order. But when it gets confusing, here are a few rules of thumb that might help. We must leave off when and leave it to God when: 1. There is nothing more we can do without causing damage somewhere. 2. When our spiritual and emotional lives become so tormented or damaged we become captives of the situation to the detriment of ourselves, others or other responsibilities we must carry out. 3. When our relationship with others we have been charged with becomes neglected or damaged. 4. When we take on a responsibility that is not ours (like meddling in another's life or family) or try to force a situation and the results are painful or frustrating (such as straightening out someone else or trying to get someone to come to faith). 5. When frustration occurs as we perceive that there is an impediment to achieving or accomplishing a goal or task we desire to complete. Sometimes it is simply the clock. Sometimes it is other people or circumstances.

Faith rests in the fact that God doesn't necessarily work on our time-table. Sometimes leaving it alone or to God may mean leaving it to others who are gifted or better able to handle it. Our primary responsibility is to be available and serve the best way we can when called upon.

4. Ephesians 6:12 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. What does this passage mean? Who are the aforementioned entities?"

Let's break it down. "Struggling" or "wrestling" means indeed we are in a match until one hurls the other one down and holds him down. But the wrestling match is not a face-to-face, physical match although physical beings may be the apparent enemy at the time. In assuming the battle is here, and that it can be fought using human resources is a deception. We need to look deeper so that we recognize that people are not to be hurled down, but loved. It is the power behind this evil that must be recognized and dealt with. This power is described as, "rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*", essentially several terms to describe the same entities – demonic and satanic beings who seek to use people to deceive, scare, and lie so that death and destruction of what God loves may occur. Paul refers to these powers twice more in Ephesians. Jesus notes that Satan is the "ruler of this world" (or cosmos in the Greek), and Paul notes in I Corinthians that Satan is the God of this age. So with an enlightened battlefield, we go into it wisely, not with human resources but with God's. Note that the armor described in Ephesians 6 is not our armor, that is not of human resources we somehow

generate, but God's Armor. As we learn and apply truth, we are shielded with His breastplate of righteousness not our own, and it is His message of Good News that we stand on, and so forth.

5. How does faith relate to good works?

Good works should naturally flow from the result of faith (a relationship with God in which we are reckoned righteous), the source of which is God. Adversely, good works intended to achieve a relationship with God, righteous standing, or some benefit or reward is not considered faith in the Scriptures. The first definition is Christianity, the second religion, philosophy, or philanthropy, all finding man as the source.

6. Our study has been on faith. Yet Paul says that Love is the greatest goal we can achieve. How does love relate to faith?

This references I Corinthians 13:13, "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." Faith comes first and love follows. In I John 4:15-19 we read, 15: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. 16: We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17: By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. 18: There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. 19: We love, because He first loved us."

Notice that faith comes first in the passage. It is vitally important that we know without a doubt that God loves us, even in our worst moments. Once we are convinced of this and are at peace, we can then begin to grow in love for others without fear. I've stated it this way, "If we can be at peace in our relationship with God in our worst moments, our theology is sound." The aim of our study in the New Covenant we did a few years ago was to accomplish this.⁷

7. If the goal of the Christian life is to "know Him", how is this accomplished?

A very important question! First some passages to lay a foundation.

1. Philippians 3:8-10, 8: "More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, 10: that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death;

This passage lays a good foundation for both the goal and an understanding of God's gracious provision in Christ.

2. John 20:29: "Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed."

We don't have to see Him to know Him. But it takes more effort and time to get to know someone you do not live with. John writes,

⁷ Available in this web site.

3. I John 5:19-20, 19: “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. 20: And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding so 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.”

John intimates that understanding helps us know Him, but the understanding we gain must be true! This is critical, or we may come to believe all sorts of questionable things about God that gives us “understanding” that misinterprets who He really is.

4. II Corinthians 5:16, “Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him in this way* no longer.”

This verse suggests we do not know Christ in fleshly means now. Then how do we know Him?

A. Truthful information. If you want to get a close clear glimpse of Jesus without distortion, I think Luke 7:11-17, especially the second half of verse 15 can help. Of course some other passages of the scriptures help, especially the gospels.

B. By knowing those of God’s people who have been transformed by Jesus and know how He has touched their lives, but don’t put up a lot of pretense and façade. Sort out these people and get to know how Jesus touched their hearts.

C. Sometimes the Lord will do a special work by His Holy Spirit in your life, like a genuine spiritual experience that cannot come from this creation.

D. It is not as important that we know Him as that He knows us. (See: Matthew 25:31-46 for example). The bond of relationship (I define as real faith) bears its own witness and insight. For example, Romans 8:15-17 teaches about this.

8a. Would you consider that The Holy Spirit fills us more on special occasions for a special purpose, for reasons we may see until later?

8b. Or should we think, “God made the best out of a bad situation for us and for His good will and the furthering of His kingdom.” Romans 8:28

8c. What is “walking in the Spirit”?

a. Though we are born of the Spirit of God when we come to Christ in faith, the Holy Spirit will energize us on special occasions to pray, speak, or act in a way specifically directed by Him. For example, we know from Acts 2 that on the day of Pentecost the 120 were filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet many times later in the book the apostles are spoken of as “filled with the Holy Spirit they did this or that or preached a message”. It wasn’t as if the Holy Spirit left them and came back, but His power and presence was activated for special occasions.⁸

⁸ See this author’s work in this web site entitled, “A Brief Word Study On The Gifts Of The Holy Spirit”.

b. We must understand that what we see as either a bad situation or a good outcome from a bad situation is all in our limited minds. Not everything turns out “good” to our way of thinking. It is almost impossible to see how it is all going to work out let alone try to fathom the crisis in the first place. Isaiah 55: 8-9 says it best, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD. "For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways And My thoughts than your thoughts." That is why we must “walk by faith and not by sight”, because our sight and limited understanding may well mislead us. In order to walk by faith and not by sight, we must know Him so we can trust Him no matter what. That is why faith is defined in terms of relationship, not mental ascent or belief in something. Our minds cannot be the sole source of our faith or we will walk in darkness.

c. “Walking in The Spirit” follows right along with the previous point. Paul wrote, Galatians 5:5; 16-18: 5:5, “For we through the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. 16-17: But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17: For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18: But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”

Again there is a flow transitioning between God and us. This is a spiritual flow, bringing life to our souls. It is not a physical thing but creates results in us, in that our minds are transformed. Paul wrote, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation,…” II Corinthians 5:17-18

Jesus noted in John 3:3-8, 3: “Jesus answered (*Nicodemus*) and said to him, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’ 4: Nicodemus said to Him, ‘How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?’ 5: Jesus answered, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6: That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7: Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8: The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

What this teaches is that we “walk” (live our lives) by the direction of that which we cannot see. We cannot see the wind, but it effects us. Our lives also become like the wind in that we are directed by and live out our lives by that which no one can see. This is the essence of the flow between us and God. It is the essence of “walking by faith and not by sight”. What happens is that we no longer are dependant upon the law to instruct and guide us, nor should we be. We are free of that. Galatians 5:1 It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery.” But some say, “How then will we know how to live or know what God’s desire for us is?”

Paul makes it very simple. We know! 17: “or the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18: But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law.”

So we have an inner director, similar to our conscience, that let's us know, except that this director impresses upon us Divine direction and not just earthly. So why are people confused?

The problem comes when people substitute "works of the flesh" for the leading of the Spirit. By this I mean essentially religious works, something we can see, observe and feel good about. We can, after performing certain religious acts or good deeds say, "There, I did what God wanted me to do, good for me. I now have another crown set aside for me in heaven." We walk by what we do and evaluate our spiritual life by it. We keep a spiritual scorecard. It makes us feel better. But it is not necessarily walking in the Spirit.

"Walking in the Spirit" involves a very subtle change in the motivation and heart of each of us. Much like those who are afraid that others believing in "salvation by grace alone through faith" will simply go out and live a licentious life because of the "once saved always saved idea". What they fail to realize is that God changes the "wants" in the human heart.

What we need to do to walk in the Spirit is to move all the other stuff we depend on, the religious "clutter", out of our "house" and fearlessly and openly seek the Spirit who speaks with a gentle yet firm voice to our hearts.

The reason for this necessity is so that the living Spirit can transform us into fruit bearing people. Obedience to religious regulations, the Law, for example, cannot produce Spiritual fruit. In fact, Paul notes in II Corinthians 3:5-6, 5: "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as *coming* from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, 6: who also made us adequate *as* servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

Therefore there is no way that keeping the Law or any religious mandates can produce the fruit of the Spirit, can they? Note Paul's words in Galatians 5:22-25,

22: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23: Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. 24: And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. 25: If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

If we are going to strive to walk in the Spirit, should then we not strive to produce this fruit? But striving to do so through "works" can't accomplish it can it? Then what actually accomplishes this fruit, if it does not come by works? Think about this. By the way, some churches turn the work of the "Spirit" into "works" of the flesh. Though open to the "spirit", they often seek to control the "Spirit" and the result is an odd mix of flesh and Spirit Paul deals with in detail in his letters to the church of Corinth.

Then what does reading the Scripture do for us?

1. It tells us the truth, and shows us portraits.

About what? The difference between those of faith, who are walking not by sight but by the Spirit of God. Example, the role call in Hebrews 11.

2. It teaches us how to discern the truth from error.

For Example, I Corinthians 2:12-14, says, 12: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may know the things freely given to us by God, 13: which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual *thoughts* with spiritual *words*. 14: But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” So if our spiritual life is just simply religious activity like the world, we have stifled the Spirit’s ability to take control of our lives. Note Paul’s words in I Thessalonians 5:16-23, 16: “Rejoice always; 18: pray without ceasing; 18: in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus. 19: Do not quench the Spirit; 21: do not despise prophetic utterances. 21: But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; 23: abstain from every form of evil. 24: Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

3. It keeps us reminded of the need to walk by faith in The Spirit and avoid slipping into self-righteous works of the flesh that stifle the Spirit’s ability to develop His fruit in us.

Paul is clear about this point when he writes in Philippians 3:2-3, 2: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; (*Those who would say that walking in the Spirit is defined by religious works and obedience to the Law*) for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” (Italics mine)

4. It encourages us and teaches us who we are in Christ and what our mind and attitude should be as a result, so our lives will be fruitful and glorify Jesus with the ultimate goal of persuading others to His kingdom.

There are so many passages we could quote. Ephesians, chapters 1-4; Philippians 1-2; and a host of others.

5. It defines the Christian life as led by the Spirit rather than by man’s own religious efforts, and encourages us.

I Corinthians 12:3, “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus is accursed”; and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.”

I John 4:1-6, 1: Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2: By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3: and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the *spirit* of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. 4: You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. 5: They are from the world; therefore they speak *as* from the world, and the world listens to them. 6: We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Romans 8:1-17, 8: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2: For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3: For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in

the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4: so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5: For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6: For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, 7: because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, 8: and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9: However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. 10: If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. 11: But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. 12: So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—13: for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14: For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15: For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" 16: The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17: and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*."

6. It clarifies the plan of God for all creation and makes clear the provisions of the New Covenant in Christ. Particularly important in the regard are the books of Galatians, Romans, Hebrews and Philippians. Acts, chapter 15 is critical as well as I Corinthians 15.

7. It forces us to realize that we live in a world that is "evil" and counsels us how to spend our lives.

We are not exempted from the effects of a wicked and corrupt generation. Sooner or later we will be hit with disaster and pain. Sooner or later, something is "gonna git us". Our time is short. For some, shorter than for others. So the counsel of the Scripture is,

"Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:15-16

"Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm." Ephesians 6:13

"Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith." Galatians 6:9-10

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness," II Peter 3:10-11

"If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay *on earth*; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but

with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, *the blood* of Christ.” I Peter 1:17-19

“Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law. *Do* this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.” Romans 13:10-14

Time is short for all of us, no matter how long we live or are able to function.

These are just a few important things the study of Scripture does for us.