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Chapter 1 : Introduction

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable..." (II Timothy 3:16a).

The Bible instructs its readers about itself. It teaches us how we are to think of it, how we are to understand it. If we believe the Bible, then we must think of it the way it presents itself. We must accept the things it says about itself, or we are not really accepting the Bible.

The Bible claims in the quote given from the book of Timothy to be "Given by inspiration of God", literally God-breathed. In the fullest possible sense it is declaring itself to be the very Word of God Himself. Just as the sounds and words that you form with your breath are the words spoken by you, the scripture is God's Word. The things you say are formed by you breathing them out, and the Bible was given by God speaking.

If we only had a book that contained some words or ideas from the Creator, that would be a great treasure - but we are told here that the Scripture (the writing) IS God's Word as the very breath of His mouth. We don't have to sort through it to find what things are God's Word, for all of the Bible is.

Some stumble at the human side of Bible authorship. But the Bible explains this for us too. "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). The men used by God to pen the Bible were "moved" or borne along by the Almighty power of the Holy Spirit of God. Now if there is such a person as God who is infinite in power, He certainly could do what He said. He did, and nobody has ever proved otherwise. It is clear that the Bible teaches it has not suffered in its Divine authorship at all by the fact that God gave the message through holy men chosen to write it out.

The things the Bible teaches about right and wrong, about coming prophetic events, about how to get to heaven rest upon this unique foundation. They claim to be a revelation from the God of heaven to us. The All-knowing God has revealed to us what we could not know without His Word of Truth.

Have you read it today? Have you considered its claims? We invite you to learn more as we study what the Bible teaches.

Chapter 2 : The First Commandment

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

The Old Testament is largely the story of God's dealing with the chosen nation of Israel. By the

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great leader Moses, God led them out of slavery in Egypt and also gave them His law. Central to this law was God's revelation of His holiness in a profound and majestic code engraved in tables of stone, the Ten Commandments. This law was given first to Israel so they would have a written transcript of right and wrong as defined by God's eternal nature.

Now since the Ten Commandments are rooted in who God is, there are principles in each commandment that are still vital today to our understanding of God and what He requires. (God's essential nature has not changed, can not change.) The very first commandment is "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).

God's first command is that things be kept straight about who is God. When God created mankind He made a being that would have relationships with his fellow creatures - but the first concern is his relationship to God, his Creator. This is not strange that God should insist upon being God, and that His creatures were forbidden to have other so-called gods. There is only one God. There can only be one. All others are false gods.

Some have suggested God is asking too much to be acknowledged as God, even that He is egotistical. No! It is the nature of things. It is reality. Is it unreasonable for a teacher to be acknowledged as teacher by the students. No, that's their relationship. Is it too much for the Prime Minister to expect his chauffeur to drive him where he wants. No, he is his driver. We would wonder if he expected Mr. Martin to drive him half the time. It is also a strange thing when men want to be like God. It would be egotistical for men to expect worship. It would be evil.

The acknowledgment of God for who He is, with all honesty about ourselves, is the essence of worship. Man was made in fact by God with a constitution to be a worshipping being. God knows all men are worshippers. He knows nobody ever stopped worshipping (anymore than they stopped thinking or feeling). People just worship "other gods". This is idol worship and it started with the first sin. Furthermore it is alive and well and thriving today in our Western world. We will see some examples of this in the next article dealing with the second commandment.

Sin has turned all mankind to the worship of other gods. Since sin is by its nature a rebellion against the Creator-God, man's worship life is left to be taken up with unlawful substitutes. This is a very serious and fundamental offense against the Almighty. Idolatry puts man in deep trouble. He has a two part problem. He must have a change of heart to love and serve God in true worship and he must have forgiveness for the violations of this commandment he has already committed. The only answer in the universe is God's own salvation plan through His Son Jesus Christ. He is the way back to God. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Chapter 3 : The Second Commandment

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4)

This is the essence of the second of the 10 commandments. In the first commandment God

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made it clear that only He is God, and it is forbidden to serve idols. But idolatry can happen in some subtle ways, so God has given this second commandment to expose what might otherwise pass as true worship.

This commandment shows us that worship must not only be directed toward the true God, it must also be in an acceptable manner. God cannot accept everything that is religious simply because it is done in His name. Israel was forbidden to use graven images or physical likenesses to represent Him in their worship. That was the stuff of idolatrous religion. That kind of worship is in fundamental disagreement with His revealed person.

The words of Jesus to a person from Samaria, a region rife with idolatry, help us to understand the message behind this second commandment. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). God must not be thought of or honoured in terms of created beings of a fallen creation. Rendering homage to Him by way of a likeness of a bull, or a fish, or a monster, or even a man is a great offense. It fails to acknowledge His perfections as a supernatural God who transcends the things He has made. It also ignores the problems of sin and its curse that have entered the creation through man.

Violation of this law takes place today in “unofficial” worship carried on outside of organized religion. Any physical thing that becomes loved or served the way only God should be is just like the ancient idols of gold, or stone or wood. The lifestyle of materialism which serves material things, money, or the pleasure it offers is in principle the same as the worship of graven images in God's sight. The unbounded longing after things of this world was reproved by Paul in Colossians 3:5 by the words “covetousness which is idolatry”. The philosophy of secular humanism also comes into sharp conflict with the teachings of the Bible as it gives the honour due to God unto mankind instead.

God is a pure Spirit, and is called in Colossians 1:15 the “Invisible God”. He is only faithfully represented and made known through the revelation He has made of Himself in the Bible. This is why Jesus says worship must be “in spirit and in truth”. This is why historic Christianity insists upon the centrality of the Bible in its worship services. God must be honoured by believing in Him and professing Him in the terms of the revelation He has given in His own Word.

Further, the Bible reveals that there is a person that is the truth incarnate. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). That is, God must be worshipped in the truth, and this can only be done when we approach God through a person, His own Son. Worship to God is only through Him. He is the one who came from heaven and was born miraculously into this world for the purpose of dying to pay for our sins. He rose again and offers to bring worshippers unto an infinitely Holy God if they will but receive Him personally by faith as Lord and Saviour.

Chapter 4 : The Third Commandment

“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Exodus 20:7)

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There is a pattern that we can see from our study so far of the Ten Commandments. The first commands have to do directly with the obligation to give to God the honour that is rightfully His as God and Creator.

This is confirmed in the New Testament. Jesus summarized the whole of man's responsibility into two great principles. "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

The Ten Commandments expand upon these two principles, first on how we relate to God and then on our relations to other human beings. The third commandment (quoted above from Exodus 20:7) shows us that man's dishonour toward God is evident in the way God's name is handled. The words we speak are the surest expression of our hearts and nobody can be loving God as they are commanded if their mouths are filled with blasphemy. There are many ways the third commandment is violated.

Many people profess to be atheists but use God's name all the time (in a disrespectful way). This suggests that His existence is not really questioned, but that there is a refusal to give Him reverence. The psalmist who loved God said, "holy and reverend is his name" (Psalms 111:9). The careless or thoughtless use of God's name so common in our culture is using it "in vain". Saying "My God" or "Jesus Christ" as a common expression may not seem like anything, but that is just the point. His name should be something to the creatures He made. The tendency to downplay the seriousness of this is probably why God followed up this command with the assurance that He, "will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain".

Taking oaths (swearing) without any real sense of the solemnity involved is a well known violation of this area of God's law. Following up a statement with "by" and then God's name in some form is a very serious thing to do. The implication is that there is a very solemn statement of truth or intention to be true and that it is made in God's presence. It is inviting God to intervene in judgment if the oath is broken. Saying such things lightly does not mean that God takes it lightly.

The cursing we hear so often is also forbidden by the third commandment. To curse is an expression of hatred so great that the individual calls on God to "damn" the object of the curse. We are called to bless others by God's law, not curse. There is a curse by God upon rebellion against His holy laws, but He is certainly not interested in joining in on petty human vengefulness and sinful hatred.

The sin of profanity is committed in an indirect way when we treat as common anything God has set apart as holy. There are some things established by God to be so directly a reflection of His holy person that to deal with them as common things is the sin of profanity. The later commandments deal specifically with such things as the sanctity of the truth, the sanctity of marriage, and the sanctity of the home.

Even the worship service in church may profane God's name by including things that God forbids in His Word at the same time as going through the forms of worship. Unholy behaviour joined to God's Holy name in this way is dragging down His name. It is taking His name in vain.

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Wow, a lot of people must be in trouble in with God. We're all in trouble if we are honest in the face of these teachings. But the good news is that there is forgiveness with God. God can forgive us for our failures to reverence His name and can change our lives. The law of God shows us our deep need of a Saviour. Jesus Christ always perfectly honoured His Heavenly Father. By His sacrifice on the cross He honoured God on our behalf. He faced the broken law and paid the price required for our sins in His blood. The resurrected Saviour now invites us to call upon Him in repentance and faith.

Chapter 5 : The Fourth Commandment

“Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy” (Exodus 20:8).

God commanded Israel for one day in seven to be set apart for Him in a special way. The challenge to the Bible student to be discerning about the things that are different between the Old Testament program of God and the New Testament is of great importance in the study of this fourth commandment.

We insist as Bible believers that we are not directly under Sabbath day obligations and restrictions given to Israel in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul wrote, “Let no man judge you ... of the sabbath days” (Colossians 2:16). The specifics of Sabbath day worship were suited to the nation of Israel and her calling to be a witness of the true God to the other nations who worshipped idols. The principle, however, of setting apart one day of the week especially for God is reflected in Lord's Day worship by Christians.

The verses following Exodus 20:8 help us understand why Israel observed the Sabbath day. “Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:9-11). Israel's Sabbath observance was a continuing testimony to the first Sabbath when God rested from creation. They were professing that they served the one true Creator God. People of faith still acknowledge the Biblical account of creation recorded in Genesis.

The importance of this commandment as one of the Ten for Israel is obvious. It is an acknowledgment of God's rights as Creator, and therefore also the authority of His laws given to them. Denial of creation truth under some theory such as Darwinian evolution always worsens human behaviour since the sense of obligation to God is weakened and people tend to forget there is a day of accounting to God. It is interesting to note that in fact Darwin was not originating many aspects of evolutionary thought but restating concepts found in ancient pagan thinking.

But Sabbath day observances involved far more than just restrictions. The Sabbath was central to their worship life as a nation, and the time when they would observe many Mosaic ordinances. “Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:30). On this day they would gather for public worship. “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day

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is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings” (Leviticus 23:3). So keeping the Sabbath meant an assembly (a “convocation”) to publicly exercise themselves in affirming their knowledge of the true God made known to them by the Mosaic revelation in acts of worship.

There is a lesson in all this for us in the New Testament age of God's program through His church. Israel was one chosen nation set apart unto God. Today God is calling a people in a worldwide program “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (Revelation 5:9c). He is calling to all by the Good News of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins and rose again. He is calling individuals to believe and become His people.

God's plan is for those who are believers in Jesus Christ also to take part in a program where Christians assemble together for fellowship and to affirm their belief in the God of the Bible. This is what the original plan for the church was. The word “church” (“ecclesia” in the Greek language) means a “called out assembly”.

So the fourth commandment reminds of God's call on man today. He wants people to receive His Son by personal faith to become a true worshipper of Him. This worship He is looking for includes a definite public corporate aspect. God's plan for His children includes a place for each believer in a Bible believing local church. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25)

Chapter 6 : The Fifth Commandment

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee” (Exodus 20:12)

The law is in two basic parts. “And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27). In the second part our relationship to God is tested through human relationships (how we live toward our neighbour). The first grouping of commandments is directly about our love to God. “And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (Matthew 22:39).

We will understand this better if we consider this fifth commandment closely. God's laws are ultimately about honouring Him, but this involves giving honour to our parents as He commands. Paul instructed children to honour their parents with obedience. “Children obey your parents” (Ephesians 6:1a). Children disobeying parents involves a measure of disobedience toward God.

Through this program of God for the home He brings to light the great principle of authority. He is the one in whom is vested all authority as the Creator. But in His design for humanity, He has delegated a certain amount of His authority in accordance with His purposes. God has designated parents to be in authority over their children. This is not bullying. It is the plan of God for life on this earth. To challenge these authority figures who act as His deputies in their given

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spheres is to challenge Him.

God has planned the home and its functioning so there would be an earthly reflection of heaven and of Himself. He is both loving and authoritative. In fact in his offer of salvation both of these facts must be faced. Jesus Christ is the Lord and the Saviour. He calls for repentance from sin and rebellion against Him. His call is also unto trust in His loving provision of salvation provided by His death for our sins and by rising again. Those who respond in faith to this revelation come to know God personally as their heavenly Father. God knows that our homes will work best if parents are both loving and in the place of authority over their children. He also knows it gives a background against which we can understand something about Him.

A famous person once said that it takes a whole community to raise a child. If by this it is meant that we all have to learn to live in our society and interact with our neighbours, policemen, businessmen, health officials, and so on, there is a truth in it. But if the meaning is intended to diminish the very distinct place of parents and their unique authority in the lives of their children then it is a simple denial of God's law.

The honour of father and mother is denoted by Paul as “the first commandment with promise” (Ephesians 6:2b) since it includes the words “that thy days may be long upon the land that the Lord thy God giveth thee”. Obedience to parents tends toward stability in the life. Parents are the best experts on matters of life for two reasons. They have experience, and they have the greatest interests in their children's well being.

Rebellion breaks down the protective hedge of commandments in the name of liberty but leaves the individual vulnerable to evil. “Whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him” (Ecclesiastes 10:8b). Israel enjoyed stability in the land of Canaan as she heeded the examples set by her fathers (the patriarchs) of faith and obedience toward God. The world today is becoming a very unstable place as the truths of Bible Christianity are being left behind. The apostles' teachings in the New Testament concerning salvation through Jesus Christ and concerning God's plan for this age cannot be forgotten without consequences.

Chapter 7 : The Sixth Commandment

“Thou shalt not kill” (Exodus 20:13).

It is important to understand that the commandments are only brief statements of very broad principles of righteousness. Jesus expounded this sixth commandment in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5). He showed that there are many kinds of self-centered hateful actions that violate that command. He was correcting the deficient view of righteousness that would clear a man of breaking the sixth commandment as long as he never actually plunged the murder's knife into his victim.

Solomon recognized the tongue as an instrument of murder. “The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly” (Proverbs 26:22). Malicious gossip breaks the command, thou shalt not kill. He goes on to show that the root crime is

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“hatred” (Proverbs 26:24-28).

Hate of course is in conflict with the fundamental requirement of God's law for us to love our neighbour as ourselves. The Apostle Paul said, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). Killing stands at the head of a long list of evildoing toward others which are all rooted in hatred.

Hatred is characterized by malice that desires evil upon others. Love seeks for true good, even if it is misunderstood or unappreciated. The Bible teaches us that love must be without dissimulation (hypocrisy). Love must work for the real good of another or it is fake. “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Romans 12:9). Love even necessarily involves a measure of hate in that it abhors evil. It is not a “hate crime” to stand against the things that lead to the ruination of lives.

In light of the Bible's teaching of what is comprehended in the command not to kill, we all stand convicted of countless violations. In contrast, we have the Bible truth, “God is love” (1 John 4:8b). In fact, even when man was killing God's only begotten Son by crucifixion, God was working for man's greatest good. Man's part in that death revealed the sinful hate that plagues the human heart. In the same event God's love was being made known by the price He was willing to pay for our salvation. His sacrifice even paid the penalty for the sins of the very ones who nailed Him there. God offers this love to every guilty sinner today who will receive the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour.

We should note in closing that there are some aspects of killing that are not unlawful. The key to the commandment is hatred so that it has the sense that man shall do no murder. Killing animals for human consumption is clearly not unlawful for many reasons. The Bible shows God's approval in many places of killing animals and eating meat. He could not be forbidding in one part of His Word what He approves in another. There is no element of malice in animal slaughter. There is often a measure of sadness. Animals are not made in the image of God like mankind was, so butchering beef or chickens does not touch on the issue of the sanctity of human life.

Even human lives may be taken in certain situations according to the Bible. In war our soldiers are not guilty of murder when they take the life of the enemy. God also gave lawful government the right to uphold justice by the death penalty when murder is committed. No hate is involved, simply the maintenance of justice by lawfully appointed representatives of the state. The maintenance of law and order by rulers is authorized by God. “But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:4b).

Chapter 8 : The Seventh Commandment

“Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14).

We can study this commandment like other ones by first identifying a fact of God's nature that it involves and then go on to consider the significance to mankind. God is faithful and therefore

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requires it of the creatures He made in His image.

Faithfulness is a fundamental attribute of the God of the Bible. Satan first drove a wedge between mankind and the Creator when he slandered God's faithfulness in the Garden of Eden. Ever since then sinfulness and hard suspicious thoughts toward God have been a package deal for members of the human race.

But still God has been faithful to us. His faithfulness has led Him to provide us a way of escape from sin and its curse, even at great personal cost to Himself. He has not abandoned man because of his rebellion. The Lord was faithful unto death. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a message of God's love and His trustworthiness.

Distrust and disobedience by Adam in paradise was the way sin entered the world. The coming of God's Son into the world to suffer and die for our sins was the ultimate act of good faith. Through this the resurrected Saviour is challenging sinful men to turn from sin and distrust and come back to God. He is calling on each individual to accept the Lord personally which means renouncing sin and repenting of distrust and accepting the gift of salvation provided through Jesus Christ. It is all-important to realize God's faithfulness to us. The challenge is what will we do with it?

God has also ordained that faithfulness would lie at the base of human relationships. He is the Author of the home, and He has planned for procreation to take place in an environment of love and stability sustained by faithfulness. Society suffers greatly when God's hedge of safety is broken down in the pursuit of pleasure without responsibility. Experiments in new morality have long reaching consequences often realized when the damage is too late to repair.

Every traditional marriage ceremony reminds us of the fact that God has planned life on earth to contain patterns of heavenly things for our blessing. The union of a man and a woman in marriage is a picture of the relationship God has with His people in a spiritual sense. When people become part of the spiritual bride of Christ by faith they enter into a relationship of love, eternal security, joy, and happiness. There are shadows of these things in earthly marriage as the couple enter into God's patterns of marriage blessing.

When people depart from God in sin and take up with idols it is unfaithfulness to Him and brings ruin. When people are unfaithful in marriage a corresponding measure of sorrow and ruin comes to all involved. Like all the commandments, the scope is broad as a comparison of other scriptures makes clear. The sexual sin of adultery stands at the head of a number of deviations from the plan of God that are all violations of the seventh commandment.

Three facts of sexuality are clearly taught in the Bible that make it clear that God intended it only for use within the marriage bonds.

It is a physical and emotional sharing of love that is suited to the intimacy of marriage. "And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh" (Matthew 19:5).

It is the expression of a complementary relationship which necessarily involves one man and one woman in accordance with God's original blueprint for marriage. "And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam

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said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Genesis 2:22-24). The creation of woman involved taking something from man which resulted in a complementary relationship between man and woman when brought back together.

It is to be experienced within a setting of mutual commitment as laid out in the Biblical pattern of marriage. Marriage vows have far more importance than is often placed upon them in many relationships. The king's mother in Proverbs 31:2 not only referred to him as "the son of my womb" but also as "the son of my vows". While some who have never had a wedding have demonstrated a high degree of commitment in their relationship, there is good reason to encourage the public exchange of vows as people have for centuries.

Chapter 9 : Easter Message

"He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12d)

Isaiah 53 is a very appropriate passage to think on at this season of the year. The prophet Isaiah saw the coming of the Messiah and His suffering centuries before Jesus Christ actually came into the world.

You can tell a lot about a person by the places he chooses to go. The coming of the Messiah into this world is told of in this chapter of Isaiah. What we can learn of Him centers around three facts in this chapter.

First, we might say that He was numbered with humanity. "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him" (Isaiah 53:2). This verse describes how fully the Son of God came down to this world and became a part of the human race.

It involved what most people would consider quite a demotion when we think of His eternal status as God the Son and His glorious home in heaven. In a day when we think so much of our image, we find God Himself was veiled in human flesh. And even in that He was not born in a palace but in a stable. He did not wear a crown or even glow with a halo. He had "no form nor comeliness".

He didn't covet a high rung in the social ladder. He did not come to be Mr. Cool or to impress with the latest fashions. There was "no beauty that we should desire him". It is hard for us to understand how anybody could leave behind what He had and be numbered with unlovely humanity. But God's Son did it because of His love for all mankind.

Second, we see He was numbered with sorrowing humanity. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not" (Isaiah 53:3). The life of Jesus in the Gospels make it clear that He came not to be served, but to be the perfect sinless servant. This meant that He

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was most often found among the sorrowing and the needy.

He lived a perfectly unselfish life. He healed the sick, taught the erring, comforted the mourners, and fed the hungry. He didn't avoid the unpleasant facts of human life but ministered to them. This tells us a great deal about Him. By His own choice He left the place where all tears are wiped away to come to this sorrowing world. His acquaintance with grief was more than just as a spectator. Standing among His friends mourning the loss of Lazarus, John tells us "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

But the most revealing fact of all is that He was numbered with suffering humanity. He left heavenly perfection to come to a world where he would suffer more than any man can ever grasp. We need to look closely at this scripture, "He was numbered with the transgressors."

This does not mean He joined in with the law breaking of the rest of the world. Mark's Gospel explains the significance. "And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors" (Mark 15:27-28). He was numbered with the law breakers in the place of punishment. He went to a criminal's place. He was nailed to a Roman cross, between two thieves.

Why? He had no transgressions of His own to pay for. This is the good news of God's love for us. He paid the price for OUR sins in His own lifeblood. He took our place. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:5-6).

His resurrection three days later was the full proof that the debt was paid. The message today is that all that are willing turn from sin and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will receive personal forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life.

Chapter 10 : The Eight Commandment

"Thou shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15).

God recognizes ownership. God Himself is the real owner of everything. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psalm 24:1). As absolute Proprietor (He made it all), He has allowed people to possess certain things on an earthly level of ownership. This has been done in accordance with certain laws and principles that provide for a just basis of owning things. We can legitimately acquire things as gifts, as inheritances, as purchases, and various other lawful means.

To take something in a way which violates the legitimate ownership of another is condemned in the Eighth Commandment as stealing. Man's problem with this sin began when he first sinned by

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taking the forbidden fruit. He took what was God's first. Since then sin has led mankind to take many things that are rightfully God's. The prophet Malachi pointed out the audacity of such a crime with the words, "Will a man rob God?" (Malachi 3:8a).

The willingness of men to violate the boundaries of lawful ownership by theft soon progressed to the possessions of other human beings. If a person does not respect God it is a small matter to then disregard the claims of other people on their possessions. Look where it has taken the world today because of the constant threat of robbery. Imagine what we could save in prisons, courts, lawyers, insurance, security, and law enforcement costs if all stealing was stopped.

And stealing is hardly limited to certain professional crooks but is shown in the Bible to be an epidemic in all the world. Employees steal from employers - employers steal from employees. Investors steal from corporations - corporations steal from investors. Citizens steal from governments - governments steal from citizens. The poor steal from the rich - the rich steal from the poor. Customers steal from merchants - merchants steal from customers. People steal money, goods, services, time, praise, virtue, happiness, and just about everything others possess.

The insanity of stealing is evident from the Bible. It is a crime which is first against God who told us of His laws. Though done in this life it will follow the sinner into the next when he stands before God. However, any goods he has stolen (or even acquired legitimately) will not. "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7) It is the height of folly to trade away eternity for illicit possessions had for a few brief years at most.

This Commandment is another one that convicts us all in some way as law breakers. We have broken God's law against stealing and there is only one way that the debt can be settled. Like all crimes against a perfect God its magnitude is beyond our ability to pay for ourselves. But Jesus Christ has already paid for our crime when He died on the cross of Calvary. The Psalmist foretold that event and its significance. "I restored that which I took not away" (Psalm 69:4c).

It was also a thief that was crucified beside Him at His crucifixion and was fully pardoned. He acknowledged his sins and trusted the One offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. "And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Chapter 11 : The Ninth Commandment

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16).

Perhaps the best way to comment on this commandment is to itemize some clear Bible facts about the sin of lying.

Lying is another fundamental departure from the image of God. One of His perfections is that He is absolutely truthful. In fact, He is referred to as "God that cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). God in His infinite knowledge (omniscience) sees everything exactly as it is, and in His infinite truthfulness or

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veracity always tells it exactly as it is. If God says something, that is reality.

Lying originated with Satan. "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44c). He lied to himself when he rebelled against God and thought he could take God's place. He lied to the fallen angels. He lied to man in the Garden of Eden when he contradicted God and said that sin would not bring death.

Lying is a common feature in this world because of the successful influence of Satan over man. This is not only true in the sense of people misrepresenting themselves to others in the countless lies told on every level of human life. It also applies to many popular ideals and philosophies that countless people live by. Any idea advocated (even a religious one) which denies the God of the Bible and His rightful place in His creation is defined in the Bible as a lie. A person may learn in this world that the highest goal of human life is money, or perhaps fame, or pleasure. In light of eternity and the reality of God, these ideals are lies.

All lying is confronted by a standard of truth given by God in a book called the Bible. The Book of God has the ability to set us apart (sanctify) from the lies and deceptions prevailing on every hand. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). Our natural, inborn way is to be part of this world's program of lies. But the Word of God can change us to people of light and truth. "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:104).

Lies against God's truth have a certain attraction to every one of us because they lend themselves to the support of self-will in our hearts and sin in our lives. However the truth of God's Word can set us free from this self-destructive course which wars against God. This is because the Bible also tells us the truth about a way of salvation provided by a loving God. This way is the Lord Jesus Christ Who said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Jesus Christ is the door to take us from the lie of sin to a right relationship with the God of all truth. He faced our sinfulness fully and took the punishment we deserved by His death on the terrible cross. This was being true to God's holy person and laws, but it was also a way of saving grace to the sinner. "Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17b). God calls to us to be truthful with Him right now and confess to Him our sin and need of His Son as our Saviour.

Chapter 12 : Broken Commandments

"And they said unto Moses ... let not God speak with us lest we die" (Exodus 20:19).

Exodus chapter 20 not only lists for us the Ten Commandments, but also tells us the effect they had upon the people when they heard them. First of all, they realized the very sober significance of this law from God. The words they heard were accompanied with a solemn display in nature. "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the

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mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off” (Exodus 20:18). Mount Sinai itself breathed the majesty and threatenings of God's holy law.

Second, the people realized that they themselves fell short of the law's holy demand. They “stood afar off” from the threatening mountain. The words of God's law were so searching and convicting in their hearts that they asked that God not speak directly to them. Apparently some people today still are uncomfortable with God's law judging from the efforts some have made to remove the Ten Commandments from public places.

Third, they became conscious that the law condemned them to the death penalty. “Let not God speak with us lest we die.” This is how serious God is about His Commandments. God's perfect justice pronounces the death penalty upon those who break His law. The first command He gave Adam in the Garden of Eden made this very clear. “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:17). The prophet Ezekiel also warned of the law's penalty: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20a).

Every time a death takes place we are witnessing the consequences of the sin that entered the human race back when Adam first broke God's command. We were born into a dying race. The Bible also makes it clear that there are several things included in the death penalty. As grim as physical death is there is an even more sober aspect to death after the grave. That is the prospect of eternal punishment.

There is no question about what Jesus taught about hell. “It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:43b). He also described the cry of a man enduring terrible conscious suffering there. “And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame” (Luke 16:24). Before Jesus came into the world the Psalmist warned of the same thing. “Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup” (Psalms 11:6). Apparently Jesus took the Bible warnings of hell literally.

It is also apparent that those who warned of hellfire and brimstone down through the years have been true to the Christian message by the only standard that exists, the Bible. It is a simple matter of Bible facts. Simply wishing that this wasn't taught or holding opinions against it is not the same as sharing the results of unbiased Bible study.

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The Bible teaches there will be one final appearance before His throne of judgment for all the dead. “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened” (Revelation 20:12a). “The dead” here are those who have never come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and eternal life. Countless will have died by then. Jesus spoke of this time as “the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29c). Even hell will be emptied and everyone who has not believed unto salvation will receive the final eternal sentence demanded by God's holy and just law. “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14-15).

This is distinct from physical death. It is called the “second death” as it comes after, but it is the rest of what is included in that original warning God made, “thou shalt surely die”. It is this place of eternal suffering that the Lord Jesus Christ came to rescue us from by Himself taking our punishment on the cross. Since He paid this death penalty and rose again He has the power to give eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Chapter 13 : The Tenth Commandment

“Thou shalt not covet...” (Exodus 20:17a)

The principles of righteousness seen in the Ten Commandments are certainly far-reaching, comprehensive, and interrelated one with the other. Not only is it wrong to steal your neighbour's possessions, it is unlawful also to covet his house or his servants or anything. Not only is it wrong to commit adultery, it is sinful to covet your neighbour's wife.

The law of God begins with our worship life with God; it extends also to our actions before our fellow man; and it even has to do with the desires of our hearts. Coveting is having a heart desire for that which belongs to someone else and those things which cannot be lawfully obtained. It is an inordinate affection.

Just because someone desires something or somebody with all his heart it does not make what he does beautiful or even acceptable just because it is called “love”. It is wrong to love outside the boundaries of righteousness laid down in God's law. Unlawful love is lust. And God's law requires not only that we “do” but also that we “be”. This goes to the root of our sin problem. Not only have we committed acts of sin, we have sin engraved deeply in our innermost being. “The sin of Judah is written with a pen iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the tables of their heart...” (Jeremiah 17:1).

The Apostle Paul before he was a Christian was a self-righteous Pharisee. When he read the first nine commandments he excused himself with the idea he had never physically murdered anyone or committed adultery etc.. He was by his own words “touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Philippians 3:6b). This meant he had no public scandal or scar of sin before the eyes of other men.

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But the truth of the tenth commandment made him realize the extent of God's Holy Law and his personal condemnation without Christ. "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Romans 7:7b). This testimony of the law against Him led him to trust the Lord Jesus Christ to forgive his sin and be his Saviour. Before fully considering this tenth commandment in the law he was smug and proud of his status as a brilliant religious figure. The power of the truth, however, turned him around to the realization of his deep sinfulness and need of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (I Timothy 1:15).

This means Paul is an example for all of us. He was as morally upright as the best - according to human evaluation, but he was led by God's law to see himself as the worst of sinners. The conclusion is that God can save from sin and hell anyone that follows his example and accepts the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment for their own sin. "Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (I Timothy 1:16)

Chapter 14 : Prophecy Fulfilled

"I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isaiah 42:8-9).

The ability to foretell events with absolute certainty and perfect reliability is unique to God. Only a being who is omniscient (all-knowing) could claim this power. Isaiah challenges false gods to try to do this work of the one true God. "Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold it together. Behold, ye are of nothing, and your work of nought: an abomination is he that chooseth you" (Isaiah 42:8-9).

Prophecy of future events come in three sorts in the Bible. The first kind is that which told of future events when first given but which have since been fulfilled. We are assured of the perfection of Bible prophecy when we consider the prophecies which have already come to pass. Many are in this category.

In the Book of Daniel the course of world dominion by successive "superpowers" from the ancient Gentile world was amazingly foretold. "As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass" (Daniel 2:29). From Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon (when the prophecy was given) there has come to pass Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires exactly as the prophecy indicated. Even the names of kings, and conquerors were given at times

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long before they were born, such as the prophecy of Cyrus in Isaiah 45:1 whose empire later succeeded Babylon.

Most significant of all Bible prophecy which has come to pass is the extensive amount of Scripture which foretold the coming of God's Messiah. The Old Testament began to promise this coming Saviour immediately after sin entered the world. Genesis 3:15 speaks of Him as a woman's seed, pointing to the virgin birth, as confirmed by the later prophecy of Isaiah. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). That prophecy is particularly interesting since it also tells the great truth of the Deity of the Messiah. Immanuel means "God with us". Read Matthew 1:18-23.

His birthplace was foretold by Micah. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting" (Micah 5:2). These and many others have been fulfilled literally and perfectly by the Lord Jesus Christ. See also Matthew 1:2, 2:5, 2:15, 2:17, and 2:23.

The Prophet Isaiah also foretold His sacrificial death. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Peter's preaching in Acts 2 pointed out that His resurrection from the dead was absolute proof that Jesus is the promised Messiah.

The implication of this is profound. It means that Jesus Christ is God's Son, the Saviour of the world and the only one who has a rightful claim to your faith as Lord and Saviour. It also means the prophecies of His second coming are absolutely true in every respect. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (II Peter 1:19).

Chapter 15 : Prophecy Being Fulfilled Today

"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come" (II Timothy 3:1).

Some prophecies given in the Bible have been already fulfilled, such as those which told of God's Son coming into the world to be our Saviour. Some prophecies will be fulfilled in a future age. However, many prophecies are being fulfilled in the present time. The course of this present age has been told of by the Word of God. We can look at things taking place around us, look into the prophetic scriptures, and see an exact correspondence.

To have a program written beforehand when we are puzzled and disturbed by present world events is enlightening and comforting. We can understand much better what is happening, and we can know with full assurance where it is leading. We can also make sure we are on God's side since He wins in the end.

Many people still living today have witnessed the drama of prophetic fulfillment in the

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reestablishment of the Jews in their homeland as the modern nation of Israel. What other people have ever done this after hundreds - even thousands of years of removal and alienation in a worldwide Diaspora? The Bible foretold it clearly - and it has happened. "Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely" (Jeremiah 32:37). There is still more to God's prophetic plan for the Jewish nation to fulfill this completely, but we see the beginning of it right now.

God also foresaw that this present age of the church would end with a rejection of His Word. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine... And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (II Timothy 4:3-4). Paul foretold the effect this rejection would have on everyday life. "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (II Timothy 3:2-4). In other words, people would love themselves (selfishness), love money (materialism), and love glory (vanity). They would despise humility, God, parents, blessings, and sanctities. Intense selfishness would turn men into an unfeeling, savage, reckless, unrestrained, untrustworthy society.

This is not a pretty picture, but who can fail to see the growth of these things today? Who would have foreseen such a course of events? With democracy spreading around the globe, with growth of powerful new technologies, with multiplied social programs and human rights talked of on every hand what is going wrong?

God foresaw the events and God foretold the underlying cause. The next verse is very significant. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (II Timothy 3:5). Christianity would continue in a certain form but it would be without the life changing power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Churches themselves would fail to preach and exhibit the reality of Bible Christianity.

But even at this point Christ is still calling to individuals to open their hearts to Him. "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Where is the present course of events leading? This is a subject of the prophecy which deals with the final events of human history.

Chapter 16 : Things To Come

"The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass" (Revelation 1:1a). Much of the prophecy of the Bible concerns those things which are in the strictest sense of the word end time events. The Bible teaches that things will not continue in the present order indefinitely but that very soon God will intervene and the things of the last days will be set in motion.

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It is the Bible's account of the end that puts the present in context. The central event of all end time prophecy is the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to this world. This is a very serious matter to those who reject His claims, while those who believe in Him now are promised to escape from the apocalyptic events the world is to experience.

The actual return of the Lord to establish His kingdom on the earth is to be preceded, according to prophecy, by a time of troubling like this world has never seen. "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matthew 24:21).

From the time when sin first entered the human race until the present God has allowed life on earth to feel some of the effects of His displeasure with man's rebellion. Every drought, flood, famine, war, and disaster reminds us things are out of order. Human sin has rejected the God of Heaven and subjected life on earth to the sorrows of Satan's rule. Thorns and thistles, death and suffering, tragedy and slaughter have been the witnesses on earth of what it means to be under Satan's dominion, ever since Adam first sinned. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:22).

But the troubles of the present are just a foretaste of what is prophesied to happen in the next period of God's dealing with this earth before His Son comes back. The scriptures tell us a time will come when the present age of opportunity and widespread preaching of the Gospel of salvation will come to an end. In its place will come a period of worldwide shaking under God's Almighty hand. "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth.

And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake. The earth is utterly broken down, the earth is clean dissolved, the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again" (Isaiah 24:17-22). Amos wrote "Prepare to meet thy God" in Amos 4:12. These are the same group of prophets that wrote so accurately of the first coming of the Messiah into the world to provide salvation.

The Revelation, written by John in the New Testament is full of alarming detail after detail of that time of tribulation. We are compelled to take these very seriously as we see the course of events leading us up to that time. On the world stage there have been in the last hundred years violent deaths in numbers that stagger the mind. There have been famines, disasters, earthquakes, and especially countless wars. It seems obvious the direction the world is going.

Drastic changes for the worse have taken place in other areas of life, even on this Island have taken place. As a youngster I helped my grandfather and uncles haul fishing trawls in Island waters loaded with codfish and hake. Now we are not allowed to fish them at all. Small family farms used to be all about, and now they are rarities. Families themselves are struggling under heavy burdens and problems while the very fabric of society is bearing the strain of new ideas of morality. Who does not wish for the old days and what some called the Island way of life? The truth is these declines in God's blessings are just small preludes to what is coming to a world that is on a collision course with the events of Bible prophecy.

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Chapter 17 : Globalization

“And the whole world was of one language, and of one speech” (Genesis 11:1). One of the prevailing trends in world current events that assures us prophecy is accurate is globalization. The apocalyptic events coming to this world in the next part of God's prophetic calendar are spoken of in the Bible in connection with a globalized world order.

The reason for this is simple. Jesus Christ is the chosen Messiah. He is God's chosen king for this world and the present plan in place for one world order leaves him out. He came the first time to provide salvation by dying on the cross for the sins of the world and rose from the dead in victory. This present time is God's period of wide open opportunity and gracious invitation to all who have sinned to turn from their sins and receive His Son Jesus by faith as personal Lord and Saviour. One day He will come back to earth as King. He taught His disciples to pray and wait for that day when His throne is established fully on this earth. “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

And so Bible prophecy repeats this message many times. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:44). The cause of all the trouble is that the returning rightful King will find the tenants of the earth will have already established a one world order in defiance of God and His Christ. God's solution to this rebellion will be to shake this earth with the horrific events spoken of in The Revelation and other prophetic passages. “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book” (Daniel 12:1).

The first attempt at a one world order (globalization) is recorded in Genesis 11. There was a great social-political-religious program under construction to unite all mankind in a godless worldwide amalgamation. Some may know of the historical figure Nimrod and his part in this beginning of world idolatry. God had other plans and divided the world into many nations, all with different languages. It was His way of restraining evil and preparing the way for His own plans for the Messiah He would send to rule the earth. “Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9).

The current effort at globalization without God has been foreseen by God's prophets who also announce its destruction by the return of Jesus Christ in judgment. We can see the beginning of the fulfillment of this prophecy in the pressure to break down national sovereignty by entities such as the EU, the world court, the UN in its attempts to pass laws which supersede national laws, and a general brainwashing program to make everyone think globally. A one world monetary system taking control of trade is clearly developing. In religion too, we are told not to have any distinct beliefs to disrupt “unity”. So a new unified religion is emerging - at the expense of the commands of the Bible standard of truth. “Globalize!” is the gospel of the third millennium.

In all the excitement and amid all the fair sounding talk about a better world with global unity and global peace, the underlying rebellion towards God is not as obvious at first. However prophecy tells us its anti-God character will develop into a monstrosity. It will be marked by

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violence, totalitarianism, and oppression like the world has never known - even during its brief "rehearsals" under Nazism and Communism. At the head of it all ultimately will emerge a Satan possessed world figure, the Antichrist. This is not just entertaining lore for horror movies. It is Bible fact. It is revealed so we will turn to Christ now in this season of opportunity in faith and repentance and become part of His kingdom which will never end.

Chapter 18 : The AntiChrist

"I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive" (John 5:43). Present day events are leading us to the fulfillment of this prophecy on a worldwide level. The world is preparing to receive the person known as the antichrist.

The underlying spiritual conflict reflected in Jesus' quote has continued from His time to ours and has ripened as the time for fulfillment draws closer. There are two choices set before mankind, two ideals, two worship orders, and both have an ultimate embodiment in human flesh. God has come down to this world and revealed His holiness and His love in the incarnation of His Son and by His suffering in our place on the cross. This resurrected Saviour is God's Christ, and the message of salvation through Him has been preached to this world now for about two thousand years. Prophecy teaches us that the true nature of rejection of Him will also have an embodiment. Satan will send his own man to a world that says no to God's grace in Jesus Christ. This person will establish a worldwide order of wickedness, in complete opposition to the truth of the Bible and is rightly called the antichrist. The spirit of this rebellion against God is being revealed in increasing magnitude in the world today, but will also come to a fulness in the person and kingdom of the antichrist. "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (I John 2:18).

The antichrist is a fascinating figure for students of prophecy and also for a wider interest group since he has been the subject of the film industry. Only the Bible faithfully reveals what may be known about him. It may be interesting to sift through the details of ancient prophecy and speculate as to his national origin, his religion, and other questions such as who today could possibly be this evil figure waiting in the wings. However, the big picture and its revelation of the underlying conflict between God's Messiah and Satan's man is perhaps the most profitable thing to meditate on. The antichrist will come for a final world showdown which will end with the return of the true Christ as King of Kings. "And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming" (II Thessalonians 2:8). But the most important question for you and I as individuals right now is whose side we are on.

There is no question as to who will win the battle for the earth when Jesus Christ returns to claim His rightful throne. "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (II Thessalonians 1:7-8). The challenge before us today is to personally believe in the testimony of Jesus Christ found in God's

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Word and wait for His coming kingdom. "When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day" (II Thessalonians 1:10).

When the message of salvation through Jesus Christ is genuinely received, it manifests itself by the establishment of Bible Christianity. Jesus Christ came to forgive men of their sins and lead all who believe in the ways laid out in the Bible. Antichristian thought of course establishes an order of things contrary to Christ. This is the only explanation for the radically changed social and moral order taking form round about us today. The road is being paved for global acceptance of Satan's substitute for God's Christ, the one called also in Scripture the Man of Sin.

We all must decide which order we will be a part of. Only Jesus Christ can deliver peace with God and eternal life. We must personally take His salvation by faith as Peter challenged others many years ago. "And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (Acts 2:40).

Chapter 19 : Missing Info

"And he said unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's" (Luke 20:25). These things were spoken by Jesus to men who tried to trap Him with the words, "Is it lawful for us to give tribute unto Caesar, or no?" (Luke 20:22). If He said yes they would accuse Him of being unfaithful to His Jewish heritage and their rights to the land of Israel. If He said no they would deliver Him over to the ruling Roman authorities. His answer simply commended them to meeting their obligations both to Caesar (the Roman government) and to God.

Further, Jesus' answer treated the two areas of responsibility as distinct from each other. This is one passage that has been recognized as teaching the separation of church and state. The church has no place enacting civil laws to impose its will on the country. Neither does the state have any authority to legislate laws controlling the church. Even in Israel of old the worship life of the temple was presided over by the family of Aaron of the tribe of Levi and the nation was ruled by a king from the house of David of the tribe of Judah.

In more recent history, the confusing of the roles of the civil and the religious institutions has always resulted in corruption, oppression, and martyrdom. For hundreds of years Europe languished in the Dark Ages and the terror of the Inquisition because of a failure to keep church and state separate. North America has enjoyed unparalleled liberty because of the wisdom of our forebears to refuse to any religious body the place of state church and to refuse to government any power to control the churches.

The present interest in transferring areas of spiritual, religious, and moral life to the control and sovereignty of the state is interesting in light of Bible prophecy. The coming antichrist will not be anti religion. He will simply combine in himself both the power of world ruler and the headship of a new world religion. All the long standing lines between church and state will be renounced and everything put under this enemy of Christ. Not only will he control religion, he will turn it to the

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worship of himself. “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (II Thessalonians 2:4).

Apparently the world today is gradually being acclimatized to think along these new lines. Prophecy shines a Biblical light on present trends to have the state replace the churches in their traditional role. When a government inacts laws reflecting neither scriptural precepts nor for that matter even the collective conscience of the majority it is clearly taking on the role of an oracle (thus saith the state). If this is accepted it will take on more and more of the place of godlike institution whose place is to instruct and guide the conscience of the populace with absolute authority.

This will of course happen when

Chapter 20 : The Born Again Experience

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). Jesus said these words to a very religious man named Nicodemus. It is obvious that one does not enter the kingdom of God by engaging in some religious activity but by what Jesus calls being born again. “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3). Those who have been serious about Christianity through the years have recognized that being born again is a “must” according to the Bible.

What some have not agreed about is what the Bible means by this term “born again” or “the new birth”. Some have equated it with an ecstatic emotional experience. Some think it happens in some way when a person is baptized. A popular singer even compared the experience of seeing a meteor shower with this. However there is no need for misunderstanding what it means since there is clear teaching about it in a number of Bible texts. It can be described and explained in good measure by careful Bible study.

The text in John 3 is certainly a key one for helping us understand what is meant by this term. First, Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that it was a different kind of birth from the first birth (that brought us into this world). “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6) The new birth is an entrance into God's kingdom and is of a spiritual nature. The attempt by psychologists to define it in terms of a natural experience is simply a denial of what Jesus taught. It is brought to pass by God's Spirit rather than the natural processes of human life. Some call it a religious experience, but man has the capacity for religious experiences without the supernatural power of God being involved. God's Holy Spirit must bring it to pass. The New Birth is a real experience, but it is in the realm of spirit, rather than flesh. If eternal life were a matter of birthright in this world, or things done in this body, men like Nicodemus would be all right. But even the religious leaders of God's chosen nation needed to be born again.

Jesus also taught Nicodemus God's plan to provide this new kind of life to sinful men. He would die on the cross to pay for the sins men have committed and rise from the dead to provide

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new life. He would then give this gift of eternal life which He provided to all that personally believe in Him. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). So the new birth is made a personal reality by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (I John 5:12).

The new birth is the beginning of a life that never ends but will be spent in eternity with God in heaven. It starts when a person believes God's testimony in the Word of God about His Son and the salvation He came into this world to provide. The Bible is the seed of eternal life. “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (I Peter 1:23). When Adam first sinned in the Garden of Eden he made our natural life subject to death. By God's salvation plan in Jesus Christ, God offers each person a new life that is eternal and finds satisfaction in the things of God. This life is in His Son and becomes your own when you recognize your sinful condition and believe in the Christ of the Bible for your own salvation. “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (I John 5:12).

Chapter 21 : Nominal Christianity

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (II Timothy 3:5). God designed, planned and instituted Christianity. He sent His own Son to die so Christianity would be possible. He sent out the apostles to get it started and gave us the Bible for its continuation. God also foretold its deterioration in practice as time passes.

Our opening text regarding a form of godliness is very revealing. When movie makers want to film a Western they do their best to make it look real. They build a set which looks to the eye of the camera like the real thing. They do not, however, go behind all the facades on main street to ensure the unseen parts are genuine. They do not really build a town exactly like Dodge City or Abilene or Tombstone was over a hundred years ago. In fact it is empty. It is only a “form”. It is not a real town at all. Even when people are there they are only acting a part. This illustrates well what this verse is talking about. Church going and religion may flourish while Bible Christianity is absent altogether.

God has shown us beforehand that with time Christianity would deteriorate from the life-changing reality revealed in the New Testament. We are warned of a lifeless form with no “power” against the great problem of humanity's sin. In fact, the earlier verses in the chapter recite a long list of sins that we are told will prevail in lives as Christianity becomes simply a nominal religion. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (II Timothy 3:1-4).

These are the same people that are described in the next verse as “having a form of godliness” (verse 5). The attitude is very up to date. Many people now have the idea that they can make

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Christianity to be what they want it to be and nobody dare wonder at the inconsistencies. The point of this passage is to refute such confusion and that Christianity must be what God says it is. Bible Christianity cannot be made to coexist with what the Bible condemns as evil. Three things stand out in the list of sins which will emerge and be embraced in the last days. Men will love self, money (“covetous”), and pleasures (rather than God). This self-centered, self-indulgent, self-worshipping lifestyle has many other things that go along with it. Many of the sins mentioned speak for themselves, and a little comment helps us understand some of the others.

“Unholy” people drag the holy things of God down to the level of common things. “Without natural affection” describes those without even normal human feelings towards others who should be dear to them.. This leads to abuses of all kinds: elder abuse, wife abuse, child abuse, infant abuse, and even hardness of heart to the unborn by abortion. “Trucebreakers” refers to a heart condition that will not allow itself to be reconciled to others but clings to hatred and grudges. “Incontinent” means an absence of self control morally, “fierce” means savage, and “heady” describes a person who is driven to a reckless state, disregarding the consequences of his actions.

These things are revealed so that those who live in these last days of the church age would be able to see if they have missed the life-transforming salvation offered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Bible distinguishes in many passages between nominal Christianity and the Christianity of the New Testament preached by the apostles. Bible Christianity cannot be made to fit into a lifestyle of sin. It is God's answer to sin. It opposes sin. It imparts forgiveness from sin. It is a new life that is lived in harmony with God. Bible Christianity is a gift for those who are willing to receive the Saviour from sin, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 22 : The Patriarch Noah

“And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly” (II Peter 2:5). Noah is an important figure in the Biblical record. He had a very crucial role to play in a critical point of world history, the Great Flood. He has continued to be important down through the years because of the testimony we receive through Him of God's dealings with men. The events of his lifetime are a lesson of the consequences of persisting in sin.

As most know, Noah was chosen by God to build a great boat for the preservation of animal and human life through the worldwide judgment of the flood. The occurrence of this flood has been confirmed also by good science. We can still observe today the many evidences that were left upon the earth by the flood water's action. God intended that this event would be considered by later generations for what it revealed about God and His hatred of sin.

The historical account of Noah in Genesis reveals in more detail what Peter later referred to as “the world of the ungodly”. Noah lived in a time when all restraint of sin was breaking down and moral standards were crumbling in human society. “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). All men are born sinners and sin has been around a long time but

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there are occasions when God is provoked by the extent of human wickedness and unbelief. The ancient world at this point in history was on a roller coaster ride down into evil and depravity. They were making it clear that they were intent upon forgetting God and never coming back. The continual preoccupation of mankind was of sin and corruption.

This worldwide provocation of God brought down His wrath in the Great Flood. Only Noah and his family escaped the waters of judgment because he believed God's warnings and obeyed God's instructions to prepare. "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Hebrews 11:7). Noah is an example of God's plan of safety through believing. God tells us too of a coming judgment day. He also instructs us to be prepared against that time of wrath. Our way of safety is not a boat but a person, the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Noah was a preacher of righteousness so others too apparently heard the way of escape, but perished because they didn't obey the call to flee to the ark. When the flood came it was too late. Jesus Christ died for our sins on the cross and rose again proclaiming forgiveness of sin. But our opportunity to secure safety in Him is right now. This is the time of opportunity, the day of salvation.

The Bible teaches another great lesson from Noah and his time. We are told that the world will repeat the same ungodly ways of Noah's generation in the time before Christ's second coming. "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:37). This rebellion against God (which we see in current attitudes against God's laws) will be dealt with directly by God Himself in the return of His Son as King of Kings. We are soberly commanded to be prepared for that coming by the prophets of God. "... prepare to meet thy God..." (Amos 4:12)

Chapter 23 : The Beginning of Wisdom

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Proverbs 1:7). This was written by the wisest man that ever lived, King Solomon. He taught us that the most important thing for a man is not money, or fun, or an easy life on earth, but the possession of true wisdom. "She is more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her" (Proverbs 3:15-18).

To Solomon, searching out wisdom and understanding was the highest pursuit and the way of life. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding" (Proverbs 4:7). Wisdom gathers in all the facts, considers the laws governing all things, and acts to secure the greatest and most enduring good. This can be illustrated in house building. The builder must use the building material at his disposal to fashion a home that will be of good use to the owner and also be able structurally to withstand the storms and stresses that

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will surely come. It would be unwise to fail to consider the possibility of a hurricane and it would not be the same blessing to the owner if he had to sit through every heavy wind worrying if it might all come down around him.

The whole of human life looks for good far beyond those things offered by an earthly house. Wisdom is even more important here to insure a true and lasting good. It can only be good in the fullest sense if eternity itself is secure. The wise man considers this present life and the life in the world to come, making choices that bring blessings from God in both. God's blessing is the true good. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). "The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (Proverbs 10:22). Great wisdom indeed is needed in view of such a sublime goal.

The natural wisdom of humanity is simply insufficient, as a glance at today's world quickly convinces us. There is one fatal flaw in the human race, alienation from God and His infinite wisdom, which has been brought on by sin. Sinning is by its nature the way of the fool, in that it is self destructive, bringing the greatest evil (which is death). Good that is deep and lasting cannot come to those who embrace sin. The rebellion of the sinner assures him the curse of God no matter how good things may look in the short term. This is very sad.

God identifies the way of the fool in some surprising places. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (Romans 1:22). Apparently some of the greatest centers of pretended learning are found in God's eyes as a collection of fools. Often atheism is promoted on the supposed superior intellect of the "thinking man". This is not how God sees it. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psalms 14:1a). I don't know how anyone could fail to see the significance of this toward the theory of evolution.

As there is a root problem behind the failure of man's wisdom, there is also a simple basis for the realization of true wisdom in a life. The Psalmist taught the same principle as Solomon. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Psalm 110:11). Repenting of sin and getting right with God is the root of the truest wisdom. This brings a man to God's blessing on this earth and the blessing of heaven too. Of course we can only be right with God through the salvation which is in Jesus Christ. He came to the world to provide a way of salvation only God could devise. He is Jesus Christ the Saviour, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God" (I Corinthians 1:24c).

Chapter 24 : The Poor In Spirit

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Perhaps the best known sermon in all the world is Jesus' sermon recorded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus came proclaiming a heavenly kingdom which was different from the kingdoms of this world. They would all pass away; His was eternal. The world's kingdoms are all infected with sin and corruption. This King loved only righteousness. The glory of His kingdom to be manifested in the world to come carries a promise of unending happiness and satisfaction.

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The very first part of this sermon focuses on this condition of true happiness by repeated pronouncements of blessedness ("Blessed are the ..."). We call these the Beatitudes and they are found in Matthew 5:3-16. These beatitudes each have a condition, or a statement of one of the principles whereby blessedness is realized. They help us understand about entrance into God's kingdom and also prospering within that kingdom order. These two things are the supports of all true blessedness - to be in God's kingdom and doing well there.

The first beatitude stands out immediately as distinct from ideas of happiness associated with earthly kingdoms. "Blessed are the rich..." would describe better the thinking of the administrations of this world. However God does not bestow His greatest blessings to those with the most money. In fact the Bible is full of warnings about riches because of their tendency to take away interest in God and eternity. If we have lots of money it enhances our interest in temporal things and tends to make us trust money instead of God. "And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God" (Matthew 10:24).

However, this beatitude is not primarily referring to financial poverty. It pronounces blessedness for the "poor in spirit". This is inward rather than outward. This is a consciousness of need - especially spiritual need. "Poor" suggests empty and the opposite of being poor in spirit is in effect being full of yourself.

The one poor in spirit has realized the falsehood of Satan's original lie in the Garden of Eden when the devil said "ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 2:5c). Poverty of spirit is the brokenness that comes through a realization rather of what was lost through following Satan into sin. The Prophet Isaiah saw a vision of the holiness of God and it emptied him. "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

The Apostle Peter also evidenced poverty of spirit after seeing the Lord's miracle working power to fill his nets. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord" (Luke 5:8). The very word "poor" in the original language suggests cowering like a beggar. This teaches us the appropriate sense of our sinfulness and need before God the Creator and Saviour.

It is to these who have been exercised with a proper brokenness in view of our fallen sinful condition that Jesus identifies as possessors of the kingdom. This is the person who rejoices by faith in the free gift of salvation through the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God fills the life and heart of the one who looks to Him in faith with the gift of His own Son.

Chapter 25 : The Second Beatitude

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). This Beatitude, like the first, cuts across the grain of conventional worldly wisdom. The Lord is proclaiming blessedness from the perspective of His kingdom - a deeper, more genuine, lasting blessedness. And, according to this Beatitude, it is not just reserved for those who are partying or celebrating.

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In fact, it is reserved for those that mourn. In the thinking of this world, the two concepts of blessedness and mourning are irreconcilable; in the laws of God's heavenly kingdom they are inseparable.

Notice that the blessing is not necessarily upon suffering. Some suffer in this life, yet may remain outside kingdom blessings. It might be said that all suffer in some measure, but not all are blessed. This Beatitude does not even pronounce blessing on sorrowing. There are kinds of sorrow that are actually self centered and unrepentant toward God. There is no expectation of blessing given for that either. The word used in our text is "mourn", and its significance can be judged from its use in another passage of scripture. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:8-10).

This is the kind of mourning Jesus is speaking of, mourning over sin. This is the person who sees that no matter what else he is, has, or does, his life has been marred and defiled by sin. Sin hangs like a dark cloud casting a shadow on a person's worst and his best. To mourn for sin is to see it in its offensiveness to God, its hurt to others, and its corruption and guilt to self.

It is common for people to avoid the message of this Beatitude and turn life into a big party with never a sober thought for the sin problem. "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion ... That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick, like David; That drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph" (Amos 6:1a,4-6). The apostles also warned of living by the philosophy, "let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die" (I Corinthians 15:32c). That is no way to prepare for the day you die.

This Beatitude is not in praise of "doom and gloom" but is consistent with joy in God. "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Philippians 4:4). In fact, the key to full blessing is Jesus Christ. Mourning over our sin leads us to God's provision for the problem of sin, the salvation which is in Jesus Christ. There is no need to avoid facing the issue of sin. Many try that by immersing themselves in parties and pleasures. Alcohol is used to deaden the sense of a person's sin and block out the contemplation of one day meeting God. The liquor bottle is a testimony of a man's hopelessness. "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish" (Proverbs 31:6a). Amos spoke of "the wine of the condemned" in Amos 2:8. Far better to face our sins in godly sorrow and accept the gift of salvation through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. The Beatitude promises comfort, and this is given with the knowledge of sins forgiven now and the promise of eternal comforts in the next world.

Chapter 26 : Blessed Are The Meek

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). This is another Beatitude which clearly exhibits the differences between the kingdoms and administrations of this world and the kingdom of Jesus Christ. The blessedness that the Lord speaks of here is a sure inheritance.

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The world has its “beatitudes” too, but they are the opposite of the principles taught by heaven's king. Consider some popular sayings in the world we know that have to do with getting your piece of the pie so to speak. “The squeaky wheel gets the grease.” That is, stand up for yourself. Assert yourself. You have your rights. Claim them in the loudest voice possible. Be aggressive. Claw your way to the top. Look out for Number One. Let your brother look out for himself. Don't be too worried even about what is right and wrong or about what God thinks. It's a jungle out there, a dog-eat-dog world, and you have to fight for every square of inch in this old world. Times have not changed greatly from what the world was like in Jesus' day too. But He had a very different message. “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”. This tells us God's kingdom is fundamentally different from the natural way of things. And despite the prevalence of pushy, self-assertive people, anyone can see the beauty and the reasonableness of God's order. Nobody is more abrasive to us than the man who pushes and bullies and blows his own horn to get what he wants at the expense of others, the “loudmouthed schnook”. And nobody is a greater delight to be around than the truly meek. But this Beatitude is not exclusively, or even primarily, about human relationships. True meekness is first before God. This meekness is put to the test when God's dealings and our ways conflict. Meekness especially is tested when a man is confronted with truth that rebukes himself. The revealed laws of God are a rebuke to all of us because of our sin. Some accept God's truth meekly; some take offense and turn away from God on a high horse. God's Word shows that by birth we are sinners like our forefather Adam. It also condemns the acts of sin found in our lives. It is not easy to face these things that go against our own self-image, but God promises forgiveness through Jesus Christ. He died to pay the penalty for sin and rose again. Salvation is available for all. But each man must face his own sin, acknowledge it before God, and turn in faith to the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. When God gave His law originally on the fiery mount, His servant Moses was Israel's example. He did not carry the commandments as a club against others, but first accepted them himself in great meekness. “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Then when God's own Son came from His home in heaven to pay the price of sin, He first humbled Himself to live as a man in the world He created. Then He allowed Himself to be crucified by wicked hands so He could suffer in our place and pay our penalty for sin. He meekly submitted to all the abuse and accusations while dying a criminal's death. He did this for you and me. Now there is a coming day when His kingdom will cover the earth. It is a future inheritance and one which He will share with those who respond to the truth of this Beatitude. He was meek who is the Lord of Glory. How much more is it appropriate for us to be meek when we are guilty sinners deserving hell.

Chapter 27 : The Fourth Beatitude

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matthew 5:6).

This beatitude pronounces the blessing of God upon people with a passion, a deep desire for righteousness. Righteousness might be defined as the right ways of God. Righteousness involves an inward heart-conformity to God's laws and is proven by practical obedience to the righteousness of the Bible. Righteousness is that which is like God, that which is approved by God, and that which God blesses. Everybody has a purpose and passion of life. Many hunger

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and thirst for the things of this life like money, applause, or pleasure. This scripture reveals that God's blessing is assured to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

This beatitude suggests a certain perception of things on the part of the people who obtain the blessing. First they evidently believe nothing is more important than God's blessing. They have much more than a casual passing interest. Second, they see an unbreakable link between God's righteousness and God's blessing. That is an important perception. Many people fail to see the whole truth. When they see great disasters or tragedies take place in the world they ask where God is. Some are prone to believe that there is no God because they are not witnessing His blessings. The truth is that man's unrighteousness and sin has robbed us of God's blessings and made us vulnerable to suffering and death throughout the whole human race. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). The absence of God's blessing in a situation in no way implies He does not exist. We need to consider the basis for His blessing, the issue of righteousness.

The fourth beatitude also suggests a certain perspective, a way of looking at things. It is a perspective of honesty about shortcoming. To hunger and thirst after righteousness means we realize we have not arrived. If God's blessing is connected to righteousness then we would be foolish to pretend to having what God knows we do not. We need God to provide what we cannot. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only solution to the problem we face. He died to pay for our crimes against God's Law and rose again to demonstrate that the debt was paid in full. God offers us righteousness in Him. The believer in Jesus Christ has the acceptance of a righteousness man through God's Son. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isaiah 44:22). This is the beginning and basis for all blessing. The new life He gives is passionate for righteousness and hungers and thirsts after God each day.

The promise of this beatitude is in the personal realization of what is hungered for. "They shall be filled." The assurance of blessing is the assurance that righteousness is obtained by those who hunger and thirst after it. This is not the person who stops short by being content with his own self righteousness. We also need to understand that there is no such promise to other passions. You may hunger for money and remain poor. You may live for popularity but be despised by many. But God will not withhold His blessings for those who respond to His invitation through His Son. If you truly seek after God He is willing to be found. The promises of God for eternal life itself are sure in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 28 : Emmanuel, God With Us

"Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). This time of the year is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the basics of Christianity. We can start with the very Scripture texts that we are made familiar with in the celebrations of the Christmas season.

This verse begins with the announcement of a miracle. The coming of Jesus Christ was, according to the Bible, a supernatural event. There are those who profess a belief in Christianity

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and enjoy the respectability and even some of the benefits of Christianity, while they deny its basic truths. This is euphemistically called a "liberal" approach to the Bible and theology. In Bible language it is called unbelief. Why would anyone think God could not perform a miracle? God said He sent His Son down to this world by the virgin birth and He certainly could do it. If a man refuses to believe God did something simply because he himself could not do it he is only denying there is an Almighty Being who has revealed Himself to us in the Bible.

We need to realize also that the Virgin Birth of the Saviour is one of the basics, one of the fundamentals of the Christian faith. It is an absolute necessity for the chosen Saviour to have been born in such a way that He would be free from the cycle of sin that takes place in the generations of humanity. The problem of human sin that began in Adam was not found in Jesus. The miracle of the Virgin Birth and the truth of the sinless humanity of Jesus Christ go hand in hand. It was necessary in God's plan of salvation that God's Saviour come into the human race. It was also necessary that He be a man without the sin of Adam that the rest of humanity is burdened with. This is a miracle worked by God.

The second truth about the Saviour here centers around a special name given to Him hundreds of years before His birth, Emmanuel. In fact this verse in Matthew 1:23 is a quotation from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. Matthew acknowledges this fact in the previous verse and it is confirmed by reading Isaiah 7:14. This is a name with a meaning as Matthew also interprets for us here to be "God with us". What could be plainer language to show us that both the holy prophets of the Old Testament and the holy apostles of the New Testament agree that the promised Saviour must be God Himself.

God is very protective about His name, so we can be sure His spokesmen meant "God" when they said "God". Some deny this out of hand, but they are only opposing their own opinions and notions against the revealed Word of God. We must always be careful to maintain a Biblical concept of the deity of Jesus Christ. He is not just an ascending or evolving man like some kind of improved version of the rest of us. No, He is the Almighty, the Eternal One, The Creator, Lord and Sovereign of all, God of very God.

We can be saved and brought into God's family by grace and through faith in Him. But we will never be God; we are then only saved creatures. He is the Creator; He always was, and He always will be. This truth of His essential deity is another fundamental teaching of Christianity, and is confirmed over and over in the Scriptures. If He were not God He would not be a sufficient Saviour for man. "There is no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:21b-22).

From this one verse in Matthew's Gospel we have a thumbnail sketch of who the Saviour is that came to this world about 2000 years. God the Son was born into the human family and brought about a union in one person of essential deity and sinless humanity. Let us remember He did this so He could pay for our sins with His own lifeblood and bring salvation to all who believe.

Chapter 29 : God With Us Part 2

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"Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and not a God afar off?" (Jeremiah 23:23). The prophets of God spoke much of the sublime subject of the nearness and presence of God. They lamented if He seemed far away. "Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me" (Psalm 38:21). They overflowed with joy when they felt Him near, even if sorrows or problems plagued their lives. "Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (Psalm 23:5). David's enjoyment of the Lord's presence was like a great feast in the best hotel, even when threatened on all sides by his enemies.

It is fair to say that most people do not have an experience of God like this. To most, God is a stranger, a "God afar off". This should make us think again of the comforting message in that Bible verse we hear so much at this Christmas season. "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (Matthew 1:23). In His Son, Jesus Christ, God comes very near. His name means "God with us".

To understand how that is so, we must understand the problem a man has without Jesus Christ. He is separated far from God. In the beginning this was not so. God made man in His image and Creator and creature enjoyed close fellowship in the Garden of Eden. God was friend and provider and He was all things, as the original creation plan intended. It was the entrance of sin into the world that changed everything for the first man Adam. God's great goodness in creation and His faithful care afterwards did not change the fact that God is also holy. God is absolutely set apart from all sin. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Habakkuk 1:13a). So when Adam disobeyed the law of God he became alienated from the Almighty. Sinfulness became a fixed trait or nature to him. The Bible also teaches us that the whole human race he fathered has shared the same sinfulness with the separation from God it brings. "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). It is a very serious thing to be cut off from the God of all life.

Man's sin leaves him guilty, condemned, and totally unable to solve His problem. He cannot overcome the great distance he has been removed from God because of his sin. All religion that depends upon human goodness to restore mankind to favour with God puts man under an impossible burden and is in open contradiction of God's Word about the way to heaven.

But God in infinite wisdom and love took it upon Himself to do what man could not. He came where we were in our need. This is the significance of the prophet Isaiah's giving to Christ the name Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God come down to the world of men to lead a people back to God. He became God in human flesh by the miracle of the virgin birth, the God-Man.

He did not and could not involve Himself in any way with sin. He did, however, go to the sinner's place of judgment. He died a criminal's death on a Roman cross, but not for any sins of His own. He had none. So God came all the way for us - even to our place of punishment. But this was all done so that through His payment for our sins we could escape the condemnation of hell and enjoy eternal life with the resurrected Saviour. All that believe the message and turn from their rebellion against God to receive Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Saviour are reconciled to God. In Jesus Christ the believer is restored to God, and to righteousness, and has eternal life.

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Chapter 30 : A New Start

"Enter ye in at the strait gate" (Matthew 7:13a). There are a lot of schemes in the world to leave behind the past and start off afresh. New Years resolutions offer, it seems, a psychological advantage to help folk redirect their lives toward better ideals. More often than not they are short-lived and the things of lighthearted humour rather than serious change.

Jesus offered a new life and the power to effect changes through Bible Christianity. The text quoted above is part of His invitation to a genuine change described in two simple verses. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Jesus used a well-known figure of life; a journey, a road or "way" being traveled. He depicted the great crowds of the human race making their way along what He called the broad way. He envisioned a road so broad it would accommodate all the nations, the great variety of philosophies, the different lifestyles, and even the many the moral standards of humanity. It must have lanes also for the many religions of the world too, since the road accommodates religious as well as profane. Churchgoers and atheists proceed along this great road shoulder to shoulder. It offers breadth and passage sufficient for any man born into the human race with any ideas he clings to and any lifestyle he embraces.

The problem with the road is where it ends, "destruction". This word does not mean annihilation, but ruin - destruction of well being for all eternity. It corresponds to what Jesus warned of in another place. "The rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments" (Luke 16:22b-23a). This is the greatest reason of all for a change.

Jesus spoke of the necessary change as a real possibility. He spoke of a different life, a different pilgrimage, a different road than the one terminating in hell. This road is apparently far less accommodating of the great moral and spiritual breadth represented in the human race. It is described as a narrow road. The word suggests discrimination about right and wrong and a word that has nearly passed from our vocabulary - holiness. But despite all the slurs against such a way of life today, it has a rather nice feature. Jesus Himself says it "leadeth unto life". Jesus taught of a real place called heaven as well as a place called hell. This passage contains a sober caution against being content with the majority approach to these matters of heaven and hell since the narrow road to heaven has "few".

But we need to listen very carefully to His exact words. The challenge is to, "Enter ye in at the strait gate". He is telling of a better life to be lived (narrow way) and a better place to be going at the end of this pilgrimage (life), but we must take careful note of how He tells us to start. This is the truth of the "strait gate" (strait means narrow). Every road has a beginning and so the Lord draws our attention to this need for a departure from the broad road to take up the narrow one by way of passage through the narrow gate. Some think they can live a good life like the ones on the narrow road without passing through the narrow gate. However, without the gate, a person is still on the broad road - in the self-righteous lane. He is still destined for eternal destruction and ruin.

Jesus tells us what that all-important narrow gate is. "I am the door: by me if any man enter in,

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he shall be saved" (John 10:9a). Jesus Christ came into this world to pay for our sins by His death on the cross. He rose again and gives a new life for those who believe. We go through that narrow gate by putting our trust in Him personally for our salvation. He puts us on the road to heaven. This is the only new start which perfectly meets the need of the human race in its condition of sin.

Chapter 31 : Pound The Pulpit

"Thus saith the Lord GOD; Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy foot, and say, Alas for all the evil abominations of the house of Israel! for they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence" (Ezekiel 6:11). This was written by one of the major Old Testament prophets who had an energetic preaching ministry during his life and who also left us the book bearing his name, Ezekiel. The prophets were messengers sent by God to preach His Word according to the need of the day. Their ministries and messages that we read of in the Bible are enduring examples of what a preacher should be and do.

These were not men with their own agenda or men preoccupied with their own opinion. They were characterized by a profound reverence for God and His truth. "Thus saith the Lord GOD", was the authority for their lives and the key to their preaching. I wonder how many this could be said for today. If a man does not believe the Bible it is very inconsistent and hypocritical to fill the pulpit of a Christian church. By definition a preacher or a prophet is one who heralds God's Word. By God's order, he is himself to be subject to the same Word. "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee" (Psalm 50:16-17).

Second, Ezekiel and the prophets of the Bible addressed the issues that were of the first concern to God. It may seem pleasant to go and listen to an engaging homily on neutral topics that upset nobody, but God wants people to know about their sin problem. Ezekiel was called to proclaim "the evil abominations of the house of Israel". Unfortunately, a lot of pulpits today have become displays of political skill, rather than prophetic boldness and unction. In fact, this is the common approach to church life today by both pulpit and pew. "Which say to the ... prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophecy deceits" (Isaiah 30:10). The desire is to find a comfortable working relationship like that between political candidates and members of the riding. The problem with this is that the preacher abandons his true responsibility of being a spokesman for God against sin. When the time comes for the people to stand before God (one-by-one) they find out too late they have been robbed of the truth and now face God with a fatal sin problem.

Our text also emphasizes why faithful warning against sin is so important for the hearers. Sin places people in peril. "For they shall fall by the sword, by the famine, and by pestilence". God is holy. Sin brings His judgment. He confronts sin so people He loves will escape judgment. There is a counterpart to this same thing today in the Bible's warnings of sin and hell. The Bible clearly teaches that the sinner who dies without Jesus Christ will be tormented for all eternity in the fiery lake. There is much in this world and in our own nature to keep us from ever pondering this sober warning. It is the solemn responsibility of the Christian pulpit to make sure this warning is

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included in the messages preached. Where else will people encounter it if God's words are diminished here too? What will keep people from neglecting their own souls?

Finally, notice also the preaching style that is encouraged in light of the sure and sober warnings from God. It is to be earnest and challenging. "Smite with thine hand, and stamp with thy feet and say...". Certainly some personalities are more placid than others, and there is a place for quiet scholarly instruction from the Bible. However, sin and its looming judgment is a call to the preacher to be earnest and energetic. The dangers are real. The preacher should apply himself wholeheartedly to the great work of decrying sin and stirring up the people to seek God. Where is this today? "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isaiah 58:1).

Chapter 32 : The Time Of Your Life

"For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14b,c). The Bible asks the deepest and most significant questions of humanity, and then goes on to answer them. "What is your life?" This question refers to a man's brief journey on planet earth between the cradle and the grave.

The observations in this passage about life are very sobering. Life is unsure. The first part of the verse James 4:14 says, "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow." Life is insubstantial, like a vapour. Solomon looked at this life under the sun and wrote, "vanity of vanities; all is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 1:2b). Life is insignificant - in regard to its length. Compared to eternity which lasts forever, this life which vanishes away is truly like a vapour.

But while life is insignificant in length, it is not in importance. The Bible goes on to teach us that the short span of life on earth is significant indeed. Eternity depends upon it. We will make decisions in time that determine matters of eternity for us. The wise man sees time as an opportunity to prepare for his eternal well being. God left His Word to challenge us about this opportunity. The Bible speaks authoritatively about things we can know about no other way.

God teaches us that the end of life here is the end of this opportunity. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). The brief span of time given in this life is the opportunity we have to prepare for when we must face God and enter eternity. This is the single most important use of time, to search out God's program for our eternity, to ponder heaven and hell, and to see to it that we enter the Door of eternal life.

Our present life is truly a gift from God. We cannot say we deserve it in view of the sins we have committed. To be alive is a gift of God's goodness. We partake of God's goodness every day. The provisions He makes to sustain human life are not obtained because man is good but because God is good. "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). God is good to the just and the unjust. Only God's goodness and longsuffering has kept us alive so we still live in within the pale of opportunity. If God's judgment for sin were to fall upon men the moment they sinned, all human life would have ended long ago.

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Many people mistake the extra time He allows through His forbearance for an opportunity to sin further. "Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance" (Romans 2:4). God's intention is that people respond to His goodness by having a change of mind about sin (repenting) and turning to Him. This brings us to an even greater experience of God's goodness, eternal life in Jesus Christ. God sent His own Son to this earth to die in the place of sinners. His death means God has already paid the price for your sin. You must simply turn from sin and receive the resurrected Saviour by faith. Eternal life is the gift of God's goodness through Jesus Christ. The present life is the gift of opportunity to make it your own. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (II Corinthians 6:2b)

Chapter 33 : The Wisdom of Solomon

"Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman: That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words" (Proverbs 7:4-5). One man stands out in history for his unparalleled wisdom, King Solomon. God appeared to Solomon early in his reign and invited him to ask something from Him. When Solomon chose wisdom, God was pleased with him and gave him a very special gift. He also became the author of the book of the Bible that has wisdom as its theme, Proverbs. "The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel; To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding" (Proverbs 1:1-2).

Wisdom does not come easily or naturally to us in this world. The entrance of sin into the human family has made us inclined to be foolish. We need help. Solomon offers it through his proverbs. "To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings" (Proverbs 1:6). A proverb teaches by the process of comparison. It speaks about things often that we are familiar with, but also has a rhyme of thought to reveal things that are more profound. So Solomon writes that we might understand his proverbs, and the "interpretation".

Bible wisdom is ultimately about a right relationship with God. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever" (Psalms 110:10). The fool in Solomon's writings is not a mentally deficient person primarily but one whose ways and choices are foolish in view of God's existence and in view of eternity.

In Proverbs, chapter 7, Solomon's proverb is the story of a young fool that gets taken in by a woman of ill repute. He describes his subject as one of the "simple ones", a "young man void of understanding", in verse 7. He reveals his character by being unconcerned and unguarded about the dangers of this woman Solomon calls the "strange woman". The young man wanders into her neighbourhood. "Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house, In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night" (Proverbs 7:9).

Solomon goes on to describe his seduction when he meets this woman "with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart". In today's words, she was dressed like a hooker. With her words and her ways she draws him into her net. "He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the

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slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks” (Proverbs 7:22). Without the defense of wisdom he is snared as the next verse tells. “Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.”

This eastern description of a scene observed from the king's window is a proverb. Now it is true that Solomon's words are in themselves a warning about the dangers of being snared into prostitution. But there is more in the dark sayings of the wise. The seduction described here is a proverb about the lure of sin, all sin. The young man is a fool, not because he is mentally deficient, but because he is deficient morally and especially spiritually. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God”, begins Psalm 14:1 and goes on to show where it leads: “They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.” The proverb of the strange woman is a drama of the course of sin in its attraction and final end. “Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths. For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” (Proverbs 7:25-27). “

So God portrays the choice of every life between the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ and the folly of sin. This is the consistent message of the Bible, the choice of life or of death.

Chapter 34 : Christian Foundations - God's Word

“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (I Thessalonians 2:13)

There is no question that Christianity is in a class by itself for the wonderful promises it makes to those who have the real thing. Where else can a person go to obtain forgiveness of their sins, a home in heaven after death, a new body of perfection, eternal life, and even God's help and grace in the present world? We need to emphasize the qualification, “real thing”. Many Bible passages were written with a concern that a true relationship of faith in God be distinguished from other spiritual experiences. There have been many look-alikes, imitations, knockoffs, and pretenses to Christianity. But only the real thing carries the rich promises and assurances made by God in the Bible.

In the book of I Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul rejoiced that the people he had shared the gospel with had themselves come to possess the real thing. Before he came preaching the message of Jesus Christ they lived and worshipped to the prevailing religion of that place. But when he related to them the message of salvation from sin through Jesus Christ they became genuine believers. They became Christians in the true Bible sense of the word. They experienced a life changing spiritual transformation that testified of reality. “For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (I Thessalonians 1:9-10).

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Our opening text (in I Thessalonians 2:13) notes one particular that Paul observed in these people that was foundational to the genuine nature of their Christianity. They received the message Paul was delivering “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.” Paul was in effect only like a messenger boy sent by God. They came to the realization that what he preached to them was the Word of God. This is a fundamental characteristic of Christianity. Christians believe that God has spoken to us. Christians believe that this word is written down in a book called the Bible. There is no way to separate between faith in Jesus Christ and belief that the Bible is God's Word. The faith that believes the offer of salvation through God's Son cannot then turn and question the Book in which the truth is written.

In fact, the spiritual lives of all men depend upon some kind of revelation that has been delivered to them for their acceptance. Every religion has its holy book or oracles or authoritative prophets. The spiritual life of mankind is beyond natural studies such as the sciences to be able to determine truth. It does no good to deny this. Those who profess to have escaped this necessity and call themselves secular humanists or of some similar school of thought have simply chosen another kind of revelation delivered to them. Evolutionary theory, for example (which is a pillar of humanism), is not based on verifiable facts like it pretends. Close examination shows that its advocates are left dependent on teachings and assertions that nobody can prove by methods of science. The same is true of other supports of humanistic thinking. They ultimately trace back to some authority figure like Charles Darwin or Freud or a “panel of experts” who say you must believe because they say so. This is a system of faith with its own oracles just as much as any religion.

Really, the Bible is the only consistent and honest source for eternal truth. It claims to be a revelation sent from God and calls for man to believe it because of this unique authority. It also is substantiated of course by the facts of history and science and especially by the effect it has in the lives of those who have believed it. It tends to substantiate itself also in a direct sense to the honestly inquiring mind since it is essential truth and rings true. When it is believed it brings a person to the things of God; it is the foundation for genuine Christianity. Paul then goes on in I Thessalonians to give some of the wonderful promises that belong to those who believe. Read the epistle yourself to get them first hand.

Chapter 35 : Between Two Thieves

“And with him they crucify two thieves; the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors” (Mark 15:27-28).

Many of the statements of the Scriptures startle us. The subject of the Bible is no ordinary matter, and requires serious thought. We are moved at times to meditation and deep reflection by statements which at first seem to contradict everything we think of as normal.

The purpose of the coming of Jesus Christ into the world is one of those subjects that many are familiar with, but few think on the significance of. People celebrate the Virgin Birth every year at Christmas but give no attention to the meaning of such a miracle. It was part of a very startling

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prophecy announced by the prophet Isaiah, that God was sending His own Son into the world of men. The name He was given was Immanuel which means God with us. His cradle was a manger and yet the baby was God's own Son in human flesh, the Lord of glory. The teacher walking the dusty Galilaeen hills is the One who created it all. Who could fail to be interested by such a subject.

The ministry He went on to carry out in fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies also claims our close attention at every turn. He healed the blind, raised the dead, and performed countless miracles. But perhaps the most surprising thing again was the company He kept. Not only did God see fit to come down and move among common mortals, He was found working with people who seem to have little to do with a Holy God. He was after all the same God who displayed the majesty of His glorious law in the smoke enshrouded Mount Sinai. He was the God who intervened over and over to judge the wicked and show His hatred for sin. But when He came to earth He was not found with the religious leaders of Israel but with folk they avoided. "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them" (Luke 15:1-2). He was showing that He came to earth to provide salvation for sinners, not to flatter some who thought they were not. "When Jesus heard it, he saith unto them, They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2:17).

But it is in the place of His death that the most startling thing yet is found. To see God walking among the men He made commands the attention of the thoughtful. Then to see that Person the Bible calls the Holy One eating with the noteworthy sinners of the world is even more amazing. But now we learn that He died in the place of the condemned criminal. How can anyone pass over that without a deep desire to discover what God is revealing to us? Here is God in sinless human flesh being taken away to suffer the Roman government's death sentence, to be hung up on a cross between two thieves. What is happening? God expects us to ask this question.

Neither is this a mere accident but the fulfillment of a prophecy made by Isaiah. "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12). The scene there on Mount Calvary was a testimony of what God was doing for sinners in the death of His Son. He had no sin of His own to pay for. His death was the death of a sacrifice. He was paying for the sins of others, of the whole world. This means first that all have sinned. It means also that anyone can be saved. No matter how great the crime against God or man, if that person will simply realize his guilt before God and need of a Saviour, God will forgive. If a person can see that he is one of the transgressors (law breakers) that Jesus died for and trust Him for personal salvation, he also will be included among those the Bible calls Christians.

Chapter 36 : Christian Foundations - Faith

" For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

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Who doesn't know that the key to Christianity is believing? Its promises are personally appropriated by faith alone. The principles and teachings of Christianity in the Bible are called "the faith". But what is faith? All are not in agreement about this.

Faith is, in fact, often misrepresented by those who dislike the claims it makes upon the one that would live by it. Some discount faith as only a psychological or emotional crutch for the simple-minded or gullible. In reality, it is a reasonable response by a rational person to the most compelling of testimonies, which have been left for us by God. Some make the claim that they are too scientific or too "thinking" to have faith. The truth is that these same people believe many things on the basis of the testimony of others (who are far less trustworthy than God). There is a sense of believing that is an everyday fact of life for humanity. Most of what we have come to believe and accept was presented to us simply as something to be believed - often beyond our power to subject to any kind of scientific testing.

The great body of knowledge and learning that we accumulate as children is largely told by parents or others and then believed. We absorb the values of our peers, our culture, and our educators almost unconsciously into a belief structure that we live and die by. To pretend things are only accepted after the individual has subjected them to supposed scientific tests is simply untrue and unworkable. There are many areas of life that are simply outside of human ability to determine the right approach to without outside help.

All men have a spiritual side and all men depend on some kind of revelation from outside themselves for knowledge of spiritual matters. How else can one know the nature of God, the origin of the universe, what happens after death, and many more questions that are so important. This dependence is evident by the human experience religiously all over the world. Consider all the holy books, oracles, and prophets that offer special knowledge in countless religions.

The early pagan cultures that Christian preachers first brought the Christian message to did not have the same problem with the concept of a divine revelation and of chosen holy prophets that must be believed. They had their own gods, albeit false, with their own spokesmen and priests. They simply had to be convinced to give up their idols for the One True God. And they did, which was the greatest single factor impacting our Western civilization.

Today, Bible Christianity has gradually been replaced with the religion of secular humanism, though often still cloaked in the robes of Christianity. Many who have embraced its ideas would probably deny its religious character, but the facts speak for themselves. It depends too on acceptance by faith of certain tenets delivered to be believed, accepted by faith. A close examination of its fundamental pillars reveals that what is often accepted as "scientific fact", is in fact something that can be traced back finally to the oracular statements of some "expert". He can neither prove nor demonstrate his teachings, but they must be accepted by faith. Secular humanism has its prophet figures such as the authorities that insist on the theory of evolution, from Charles Darwin to its modern representatives. Real proof evaporates when you get close. Many, many thinkers from Sigmund Freud to the countless contemporary spokesmen for the "post-Christian" world are in fact the priests and prophets of the world's current religion of secular humanism.

So the issue is not IF we believe, so much as WHAT we believe (or rather WHO we believe). The Gospel of Jesus Christ when believed is far reaching in its significance and consequences. It confronts the belief structure that we were born and bred in. The Bible invites the serious soul to

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read about this person who claimed to be The Son of God in sinless human flesh. Learn of His perspective of this world and its present order. Learn of how comprehensive and far reaching the problem of sin is for mankind. Learn of the love of God that gave His only begotten Son to die as a sacrifice for our sins so that all who trust Him as personal Lord and Saviour have the gift of eternal life.

Chapter 37 : Historic Christianity

“That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15b).

It has been well said that the world is a stage. We live amid acting, pretense, props, facades, and make-believe. We can be deceived by what appears to be worth living our life for. This passage is about money. Money and financial success are very highly esteemed by men. But God looks neither at status symbols nor bank accounts. He looks at the heart. So while money has a certain legitimate place and use in this life, the love of it instead of God is an abomination to Him.

Jesus puts his warning in context at the end of the chapter. He pulls back the veil to give us a glimpse of the next world for a man that had wealth but not God in his life. “The rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments” (Luke 16:22b-23a). He goes on to describe him as craving a drop of water on his tongue to ease the torment of the flames. No wonder God warns us of being caught up in the thinking and value system of this materialistic world.

Interestingly, the very ones He was rebuking here were the religious leaders. This reveals that even that which is highly esteemed by spiritual leaders in this world may pose a great threat to souls. With a matter as important as heaven and hell we must be sure to be right. If we cannot trust societal “norms”, and if even religion can lead us astray, we must pay close attention to the Word of God. Only the Bible reveals things as God sees them with 100% accuracy.

The very Messiah Himself was out of favour with this world. “He is despised and rejected of men” (Isaiah 53:3a). The Apostle Paul was misunderstood, impoverished, jailed, and persecuted for being a spokesman of true Christianity in this world. “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace” (1 Corinthians 4:11).

The conception of Christianity popular with men today needs to be measured and verified by the standard of God's Word by all who are concerned about their own souls and about eternity.

Chapter 38 : Christian Foundations - Truth

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“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11).

We live in an age of information and information technology, but of absence of truth. Kevin Trudeau in his book, *Natural Cures “They” Don't Want You To Know About* claims that truth in the area of human health has become a great casualty for the sake of money. I cannot agree with everything he writes, but his warnings about suppression of the truth should alarm us all. Governments also frequently broadcast information which time proves to be false.

Bill Cooper in his book *After the Flood* shows how facts of ancient history are suppressed simply because they corroborate Biblical explanations of the origin of the earth. Marvin Lubenow exposes distortions and falsehoods popularized in anthropology in the book *Bones of Contention*. He shows that once the lies and propaganda are removed, the human fossil record agrees wonderfully with the Bible account of human history. Other areas of science (such as genetics) have been shown to be corrupted by blatant lies in an effort to promote the theory of evolution at any cost. There are good creation science sources available today with competent, reputable scientists who are willing to expose lies in science. We live in a day when truth is omitted, distorted, denied and outlawed.

We are being bombarded by new ideas in morality, lifestyle, divinity, and happiness. We receive so much information, but what can be trusted as truth? John wrote, “Thy word is truth” in John 17:17. The Bible call itself the Word of Truth. Its prime focus is the One who personified truth, God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). When He came into the world He told the truth about mankind by showing what a terrible penalty must be paid for our sins. This sacrifice He made also declared the truth of God's great love in offering us salvation at such a cost.

Chapter 39 : Christian Foundations - New Birth

“Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again” (John 3:7). Jesus taught a man named Nicodemus that the miraculous was a necessity. Nicodemus was not to be turned aside by the difficulty he had in understanding the new birth but to focus on its absolute requirement. Several facts are brought to light in the text which highlight the word “must”

Number one, it is the only preparation for God's eternal kingdom. “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3b). Humanity is in a sinful and fallen estate and our beginning by the first birth provides us nothing which is acceptable in God's kingdom. All that would go to that place **MUST** be born again.

Number two, being religious cannot take the place of being born again. Nicodemus was a member of the most religious body of the most religious nation on earth. He was “a master of Israel” (cp. John 3:10), yet he needed to be born again. He was evidently also honest and sincere, unlike his fellow religious leaders, but Jesus said “ye must be born again”.

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Number three, nominal Christianity will not do either. John 3 was written to demonstrate the need for one to become a new person in Jesus Christ, not to be content with accepting certain facts about Him. In John 2:23, we read, “many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did.” Verses 24 and 25 indicate this was, however, not a life changing experience of Jesus Christ. The new birth does come by believing, but it is the faith which trusts Jesus Christ personally for salvation from sin.

This faith believes not only that He is a miracle worker but that He is God's Son and that His death on the cross was payment for my sin. This is the faith that accepts Him personally as Lord and Saviour because He alone provided redemption from sin. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus taught us that this everlasting life that comes to us by the new birth is an absolute must.

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Chapter 40 : Eternity

“And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:46). The Bible makes it clear that God is eternal and has also created man to live somewhere for all eternity. It is plain that the present life is only temporary, but we are assured that we will go to eternity after. Though it is brief, the present life is profoundly significant. We need to think about it Biblically.

This life is a pilgrimage, a journey as saints of the Bible confessed. Yet it is uncommon to find people today who think seriously about this fact. What is more important, the eternal destination or the short trip going there? It is like a man who is more concerned that he travel in style and comfort than whether he is going to a celebration or his execution. We can see that life is only a journey by a moment's reflection. There are many coming and going in this world, but nobody is staying.

The Bible also teaches that our life is an opportunity. It comes before eternity, and it is the time when the eternal destination is determined. The challenge we face as human beings is that we all start life on the wrong road, what Jesus calls the broad road that leads to destruction. Because our father Adam fell into sin, we were born into a sinful, fallen, lost estate. And sin is so serious in God's eyes the consequence is “everlasting punishment”. Jesus warned about being “cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mark 9:45b)

The Gospel (“good news”) of Jesus Christ is that He came into the world to make a way to a different eternity. He speaks of Himself as being the narrow gate that opens to a road whose destination is eternal life. However the opportunity to change course and have a new and wonderful destination for eternity is in this life only. Now is the time that one can receive the gift

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of eternal life by calling upon the Lord in faith.

Thirdly, we have to keep reminding ourselves that eternity is for ever, but life is brief and uncertain. “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14).

Chapter 41 : Sunday Go To Meetin

Sunday Go To Meetin'

“Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD” (Ezekiel 33:30).

This is one of those “so far so good” passages in the Bible. There is an appearance of concern about going to hear God's Word preached. The counterpart today would be people who seem all in a stir to go to church - a church where the Bible is preached. So far so good.

“And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness” (Ezekiel 33:31).

Lots of religious forms, lots of church going, lots of pious talk, but no life being lived for God. Something is wrong. The Bible is studied, but not heeded. Religion captures interest, but not the heart. Hearts are still filled with wrong desires and lusts. (“Covetousness” is the Bible word for lust, the hottest item on the Internet and the entertainment industry.). So in reality, neither lives nor hearts have changed

God tells Ezekiel the whole religious exercise he sees is unreal, a show, an entertainment to the people rather than a meeting with God. “And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not” (Ezekiel 33:32).

When Jesus came He found the very same conditions in the Holy Land itself. Witness His woes to the religious leaders. The Bible tells us that in this present church age mankind will repeat the same patterns of religious ungodliness. This is prophecy being fulfilled before our eyes. “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (II Timothy 3:5). “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (II Timothy 3:7). It behooves each of us to examine ourselves with the Bible in hand.

Chapter 42 : Christian Foundations - 2nd Coming Of Christ

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"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints" Jude 14.

The great message of the Bible centers around the fact of the Coming of the Messiah into a sin-troubled world. According to Jude, this message goes back even to the earliest days of human life (shortly after the first man Adam was created).

Later, the prophets of Israel confidently heralded the same message, God's Anointed was coming. Sometimes the Messiah was spoken of as humbling Himself and suffering to provide salvation from sins. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). At other times He was spoken of as a consuming fire destroying all His enemies. "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap" (Malachi 3:2)

The two kind of prophecies relate to two different comings. One of these prophecies of the Coming One has been fulfilled. He is spoken of both as God and as a sinless man who would nevertheless be put to death as a sacrifice for sin. This has been fulfilled in the historical Jesus Christ who came when God's own Son was born to a virgin and as God Incarnate shed His blood for man's sins on the cross. He then rose from the dead, commissioned a message to be preached offering forgiveness of sins to all who would believe in Him, and returned to heaven.

This same Jesus promised to come back to take His rightful throne over the earth and judge all who reject Him. The Second Coming is the next great event on God's calendar. The contexts of its announcement would make us think it is near. Current events in Israel are significant. The godless conditions in the present world are too. Note the next verse in Jude. "To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 15).

Chapter 43 : Christian Foundations - Truth

"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). There is no knowledge of God apart from truth. The human race was separated from the true God in the Garden of Eden when Adam believed Satan's lie. The way back to God for all of us is through the truth.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). This Truth is made known unto us by the Holy Scriptures given by God. "Thy word is truth" (John 17:17b). There are many messages bombarding us every day, but only God's Word is absolute truth.

The world we live in tells us how to live, what are worthwhile goals, what are acceptable moral

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values, and what is success. We are impacted by many philosophies and religions with their message to promote. Despite all these conflicting and confusing messages we encounter, God holds us responsible to respond to His truth. "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51:6a). Many think that any belief is acceptable to God as long as it has a large following. But God is not a pollster, or a politician, or a PR man. He is God.

The truth has wonderful power. "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged" (Proverbs 16:6a). It is not that souls will go to hell because of this sin or that but "because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thessalonians 2:10b). God can and will forgive sins but His salvation plan works through belief of the truth which is in Jesus Christ.

It is not so much that one cannot tell what is true. People believe lies because of what they have chosen to love. "That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (II Thessalonians 2:12). God calls us to believe on His Son who died for our sins and rose again, and to receive a new heart of love for Him.

Chapter 44 : Christian Foundations - Redemption

"With the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption" (Psalm 130:7b). Redemption is a word that is key to understanding true Bible Christianity. The theme goes all through the Scriptures. God's people are revealed there to be those whom He has redeemed. "Now these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand" (Nehemiah 1:10).

To redeem is to buy back, to purchase. This teaching helps us to understand God's work of salvation from sin. The Bible teaches us that mankind's sin is a slave master, a prison house, a bondage. The sinner is sold under sin, in the slave market of sin. He is unable to free himself. Sin has robbed the human race and left each one without the means to pay his own debt or to save himself.

Man needs God. He is the only one that can solve the great problem of bondage to sin. His Word teaches that God has paid the required price and that this price was the death of His own dear Son Who died on the cross and rose again. That is why so many Scriptures refer to the Christ as redeemer. Zacharias rejoiced in the knowledge that the time for His birth had arrived. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:68-69)

So much which professes to be Christianity today starts off with people as though redemption is unnecessary and calls for good living. The Bible, however, starts with the problem of a sin-debt we cannot pay and spiritual slavery. It does not tell us be a good boy and you'll go to heaven. It tells us the blood Jesus shed on the cross was the payment needed to purchase forgiveness and freedom from the slave market of sin. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). The real beginning as a Christian comes when a person respond to the offer of Salvation through Jesus Christ and accepts by faith the payment he made

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for us.

Chapter 45 : Parable of the Sower And The Seed P1

"Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow" (Mark 4:3).

The Lord used parables to teach. The events and scenes of everyday life served to highlight His messages about heavenly things. Our opening text begins the parable here by telling of a man sowing seed. This would not be like planting in fields today but by the time-honoured method of casting seed all about by hand (broadcasting). The parable goes on to relate the results in terms of four different kinds of soil the seed happens upon.

The lesson is that God's Word, like the seed, is sent out to all. It has the capacity to bring eternal life and blessing to any who will hear. However, not all hearts give the same reception to the seed. The four different soils in the parable are a challenge for us to take care for the condition of our own hearts. Notice the first soil.

"Some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up" (Mark 4:4b). As the seed was cast by the sower, some would fall by the pathway made hard by the feet of countless travelers. The seed would lie on the surface until the birds swooped down and devoured it.

The Lord also interprets this parable, explaining the way side seed first. "But when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts" (Mark 4:15b). There are some whose hearts have no place for the Word of God or the offer of salvation through Jesus Christ it tells of. The love of God and His provision of salvation should be of the greatest interest to every man. Satan has a part in this distraction.

We are being warned of having traffic-hardened hearts. There is a real threat of being too busy and caught up with matters that have no eternal consequences to care for the salvation of our own souls. We need to exercise our hearts unto sorrow and brokenness over our sin as another prophet challenged Israel. "break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD..." (Hosea 10:12b).