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The

# Kingdom of God

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and

# Discipleship

Timothy Lin, Ph.D.

Foreword by Eugene Merrill, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament,  
Dallas Theological Seminary

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**Eugene H. Merrill** “Timothy Lin’s conviction is that the Kingdom of God is the central theme of biblical theology, a conviction clearly established and defended in this important work. But his approach is not just a matter of theoretical theological reflection with no real relevance to the contemporary believer and his world. Rather, he shows how the believer is even now in the Kingdom and how he must discharge his responsibilities and privileges as a citizen of that realm. This book, then, is nothing short of a manual for Kingdom living.”

Eugene H. Merrill, Distinguished Professor of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

**Leslie M. Frazier** “This very difficult issue of the Kingdom in Scripture is made both relevant and practical to the believer today. Dr. Lin distinguishes the Kingdom in Preparation and the Kingdom as the Future Inheritance. Therefore, the theme of the Kingdom brings continuity to all Scripture. With great skill, Dr. Lin brings the issues of the present Christian life and its development into meaningful goal orientation in the future Kingdom. Theological insight into the nature of man is displayed in the discussions of *nous* (mind) and self, etc. This work will prove useful to teach the Kingdom and its importance to the Christian today.”

Leslie M. Frazier, Ph.D., Far East Director, Baptist International Missions, Inc.

**Eugene Kimble** “Perhaps the best book available dealing with the Kingdom of God. It has the potential to bring a desperately needed renewal, revival and commitment to the body of Christ.”

Eugene Kimble, Ph.D., is one of several pastor/elders at College Park Church, Indianapolis. Dr. Lin asked him to edit and rewrite this and other works for the benefit of the English-speaking church.

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### Revised Edition, January 2003

This is a reprint of Dr. Lin's book, *The Kingdom and What It Means to the Life of the Believer*, with minor changes and correction of errata. The new title better reflects the book's main emphasis. Also, the author has emphasized some words in bold type.

### Other books by Dr. Lin

*Genesis A Biblical Theology*  
*How the Holy Spirit Works in Believers' Lives Today*  
*The Secret of Church Growth*

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## A Brief Biography of Dr. Timothy Lin

Dr. Timothy Lin was born to a minister's family in Chekiang, China. He was taught to read the Bible when he was six, began to preach when he was fifteen, but was not born again until age nineteen. Having left Central Theological Seminary of Nanking in 1934 due to its modernistic teaching, he served as the pastor of Jubilee Church in Shanghai until 1937. In 1938-39 he was principal of the Christian and Missionary Alliance Bible Institute of Kwangsi. In 1940 he came to the United States for the first time to study Hebrew and Greek at Concordia Theological Seminary and Washington University.

During World War II, Dr. Lin was in charge of Bethel Orphanage and was the principal of Bethel High School. He was also the dean of Shanghai Bible College. After the war, Dr. Lin was invited to be the president of the East China Theological College of Hangchow, which was cosponsored by the China Inland Mission. Then in 1948 he came again to the United States for advanced study, receiving a B.D. and S.T.M. from Faith Theological Seminary, then in Wilmington, Delaware, and a Ph.D. from the College of Hebrew and Cognate Learnings of Dropsie University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In addition, he holds several other earned and honorary degrees.

Dr. Lin was a member of one of the Old Testament Translation Committees for the New American Standard Bible. He was also a professor in the Graduate School of Bob Jones University, in South Carolina, where he taught Systematic Theology, Biblical Theology, Old Testament Hebrew, Biblical Aramaic, Classic Arabic, and Peshitta Syriac. Moreover, he was a professor at Talbot Seminary, Los Angeles, and Trinity Evangelical Seminary, Chicago, and was the President of China Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan.

In 1961 the Lord led him to become interim pastor of the small struggling First Chinese Baptist Church of Los Angeles, and in 1962 the permanent pastor. When he retired as Senior Pastor a few years ago, the church had eight pastors, more than 2,200 in regular Lord's Day attendance, and in addition had started several mission churches with more than 300 in regular attendance.

Dr. Lin has also been a popular teacher and Bible conference speaker, being in great demand by ministers, teachers, and church leaders for training in biblical interpretation and church growth in the Orient as well as in North America.

## **Foreword**

In this book, Dr. Lin speaks with the voice of a prophet and the heart of a pastor. His prophetic voice accurately proclaims God's Word, showing us what God's truth is and also laying before our eyes how far the church as a whole has strayed from it. His pastor's heart calls us to repent and shows us how to achieve God's will and to become the overcomers that He desires us to be. Dr. Lin's main thrust is: Our Father in love has prepared an Eternal Kingdom for us; therefore, we should fulfill our present joy and future glory, and His desire for us, by dedicating ourselves daily to do His will in order that we may be trained to be the personnel of the Coming Kingdom of God. What is more, Dr. Lin tells us how, by God's grace, we can both understand God's desire for us in this matter and also how to accomplish it.

The material in this book was taught in the Chinese language in special seminars and the Church Training Program at the First Chinese Baptist Church in Los Angeles. It was also preached on various occasions at the branch churches, at church camps and conferences. Because it was taught and preached to the Chinese, Dr. Lin naturally quotes oriental sayings and authors appropriate to his audience (without implying that he agrees with them in toto or that the authors themselves are Christians), in much the same way that an American speaker or writer might use English sayings and authors. In 1988 the previously preached and taught material was brought together and published in book form in the Chinese language. In 1992, Mr. George Shen, of the San Gabriel branch church, translated the Chinese edition into English in order to teach the contents to English-speaking Chinese. Dr. Lin has given his kind permission for the copyright of this English version of his work which has utilized Mr. Shen's translation.

Because the material was taught and preached in many sessions over a period of years, several of the truths about God's Kingdom recur throughout the book. These repetitions come with interesting variation and additional information and application. The book is scholarly and truthful, but its having been first preached and taught means that the contents are more than just a sterile academic exercise. The results seen in the ministry of Dr. Lin prove that these truths edify and build up the believer, as well as provide a spiritual blessing. Thus the unfolding of God's Word that Dr. Lin gives here has immense value for the spiritual life of not only the Chinese Christians but for God's people everywhere.

Dr. Lin's prefatory statement in his other books says: "Since this book is designed for laymen as well as theological students, technical terms are avoided, simplified or explained, and references to other authors are reduced. It is my prayer that the Lord of self-revelation may grant each reader progressive illumination in the reading of this book, 'that you might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God' (Col. 1:10)."

Eugene Kimble, Ph.D.  
March, 1999

## Introduction

In recent years, by God's grace, I was invited to minister to many Chinese churches in both the Far East and the West. During these interactions, a nagging feeling developed within me that the Chinese churches as a whole are either spiritually juvenile and immature or have grown decrepit and aged. That is, they lack either substance in their messages or strength in their endeavors. With the exception of a few admirable young churches, most churches lack either pre-natal care or after-birth nutrition for newborn Christians. Some churches are so ill spiritually that their case is terminal. They live in a dream world wistfully thinking that "although there was no progress this year, neither did we lose ground." What they do not know is that spiritual progress is like a salmon swimming up the river; if it is not advancing, it is being swept backward.

Consequently, about 1980, I started to observe, interview and research in order to find out what was blocking spiritual progress in Chinese churches. Some indirect causes were uncovered and at least three prominent direct causes, namely: a superficial understanding of God's truth; a present salvation without the hope of future glory; and a failure to practice the presence of God. I wrote *The Secret of Church Growth* to help churches and individuals know how to practice God's presence. This book concerning the Kingdom of God is written to enable believers to understand that God has a glorious future for those willing to live up to His conditions.

It is recorded in the Scriptures, "But now abide faith, hope, love." Observe the order: first there is faith, second there is hope, and finally there is love. (Once the order of events is known, one is not too far from the truth.) As I look at Christianity today, some churches do not even have faith, let alone hope or love. Such churches think that to believe in Jesus is to get baptized, go to church on Sundays, do good deeds, strive to live a good life and hope to go to heaven. This is not the Scriptural teaching of "to believe in Jesus." May those believers who truly belong to the Lord be imitators of the Bereans and exert a renewed effort in "examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things [are] so" (Acts 17:11).

In spite of the problems, God, because of His abundant grace, has opened many hearts to receive Jesus into their lives. They have God's life because they came to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent, "And this is eternal life" (John 17:3). Unfortunately, very few believers really understand what this means. Some say that now they hope to go to heaven. If this is the case, then their hope is no different from that of Buddhists who desire to go to nirvana or Moslems who want to go to paradise. The fundamental reason to believe in Jesus is not merely to go to heaven, but rather, praise God, it is to instantly receive God's life. When you believed in Jesus you received God's life and a position as God's child. His home became your home. You can go home anytime and no one can turn you away. Therefore, the main reason to believe in Jesus is not to gain admission into heaven. God's desire for us is far greater and grander.

What should our hope be? This book suggests the answer. Pray as you read that you may discover what His hope is for you. Now, "May the God of hope . . . [grant through these words] . . . that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom.

15:13). Amen.

Timothy Lin, Ph.D.

It is our prayer that the Lord may use this volume on the Kingdom of God to His own glory by assisting many believers to a fuller and deeper understanding of His precious Word. Further, may He use this book to move many readers to respond to the Word of God today, and may He be pleased even more to use all our books and writings to that same high and holy end.

Eugene Kimble, Ph.D.

## **Chapter I. What the Kingdom Is**

In the 1980s, the church at large began to talk much about the Kingdom. For instance the 1980 World Council of Churches meeting in Melbourne used the term “Kingdom of Heaven” as their theme. This could have been a happy development, but a careful reading of the lecture notes and reports revealed that the meeting was centered mainly on social issues. Yet a social gospel has never produced Utopia and to attempt such a reformation is like seeking the living among the dead. How sad that mankind seems incapable of learning from history. Some have suggested that Christians need to vigorously support social reforms that are in accordance with the truth, and thereby, to create a society that would be a better place for all mankind to inhabit. Although the church must show mercy to all mankind, those who make such statements are extremely naive, in effect looking for blossoms on dead sticks. Others incongruously feel that the Kingdom is already here but that we still need to hope and wait for it. The Scriptures correctly say, “but hope that is seen is not hope.” There is no further need to hope for what is already here. Still others imagine that the Kingdom of God is an after-death affair in which the spirit returns to the Kingdom. This colorful garden of suppositions reveals either total ignorance or an inability to understand the Lord’s revelation concerning His Kingdom. To examine the Kingdom by the light of the Scriptures, the focus of this chapter will be on the name of the Kingdom, the two time periods of the Kingdom, the coexistent kingdoms of God and Satan, and the present purpose of the Kingdom.

### **A. The Name of the Kingdom**

The New Testament word “kingdom” is taken from the Greek Septuagint and is a translation of the Hebrew word *malkuth*. Originally, *malkuth* had the meaning of “royal authority,” “kingship” and “kingdom.” This same word is translated in Psalm 103:19 as “sovereign rule” where David says, “His sovereignty rules over all.” It is translated as Kingdom in a verse written by David and probably sung by the sons of Korah, “and the glory of the majesty of Thy Kingdom” (Ps. 145:12). In First Chronicles 29:30, *malkuth* is translated as “reign.” In the Greek New Testament kingdom (*basileia*) is often used in association with either heaven or God. It is also used to describe the “Kingdom of His beloved Son” (Col. 1:13), “a Kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb. 12:28), “the Kingdom which He promised to those who love Him” (James 2:5) and “the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 1:11). Broadly speaking, no matter when or where God’s ruling power is found, the Kingdom already exists there (See Matt. 12:28).

The term “kingdom” is used in the New Testament 162 times. It is used with God 52 times: 4 times in Matthew, 14 times in Mark, 32 times in Luke and 2 times in John. It also occurs with heaven 37 times, all found in Matthew. These two terms, “Kingdom of Heaven” and “Kingdom of God,” are in fact identical and no difference should be made between them. But for some unknown reason, Scofield, and those who follow him, have divided them into two realms, saying that the Kingdom of Heaven is earthly, material and temporary whereas the Kingdom of God is heavenly, spiritual and eternal. However,

when one compares Matthew, Mark and Luke's use of the term, it is certain that both phrases refer to the same Kingdom. For example, in Matthew 13:11 Jesus said, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the **Kingdom of Heaven**," but in Luke 8:10 the same conversation regarding the Kingdom says, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the **Kingdom of God**." In Matthew 11:11 regarding John the Baptist, Jesus said, "yet he who is least in the **Kingdom of Heaven** is greater than he," but in Luke 7:28 He said, "in the **Kingdom of God**" (Also compare Matt. 13:31, 33 with Luke 13:18-21; and Matt. 19:23 with Luke 18:24 and Mark 10:24.). Also Matthew 19:23 indicates the difficulty of a rich man entering into the **Kingdom of Heaven** whereas in the following verse the **Kingdom of God** is used interchangeably with it. So those who regard the Kingdom of Heaven as the Kingdom in this present world and the Kingdom of God as the eternal one have not understood that the time element of the one Kingdom consists of two well-defined periods, which we will examine more fully in the next section.

But first, why did Matthew, as a general rule, call it the Kingdom of Heaven while Mark and Luke call it the Kingdom of God? Primarily, because the gospels were addressed to different audiences. In the period between the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish people had replaced the use of God's name with the word "heaven." For example, when the prodigal son repented, he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight" (Luke 15:18). His use of the word "heaven" certainly does not refer to the blue sky but is a substitute word for God, for according to the Old Testament law, whosoever sins against others also sins against the LORD (Lev. 6:2). Even our Lord Jesus used such parallel phrases to question the chief priests and the elders of the people. He asked, "Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" They dared not answer truthfully, so they said, "We do not know" (Matt. 21:25-27). Since his book was written for the Jews who used heaven as a substitute for God, Matthew generally used the phrase Kingdom of Heaven. Mark was written for the Romans; Luke was written for the Greeks. If Mark and Luke had used the word "heaven," it could have misled the Romans and Greeks into thinking that the Kingdom is a materialistic one, so they used the phrase Kingdom of God. It seems that the Holy Spirit knew that in the future there would be those who would not understand His exact meaning. So He purposely used Kingdom of God four times among all the Kingdom of Heaven phrases in Matthew, showing that the two phrases are synonymous. (In fact, in some ancient manuscripts, "His Kingdom" in Matthew 6:33 is the "Kingdom of God." The current Greek New Testament published by the American Bible Society still has the words "of God" in parentheses.) If it should be suggested that the term, Kingdom of Heaven, was meant exclusively for the Israelites, the phrase Kingdom of God would really have been more appropriate; because when Jesus rebuked the chief priests, Matthew reported that He said, "tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31). Therefore, we must conclude that the terms Kingdom of Heaven and Kingdom of God mean the same thing.

The term "kingdom" in its broad biblical usage commonly refers to God's desire for man when He created Adam. "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen. 1:26). This verse tells us how God made man and why God made man—to rule over all that He had created. Like Chinese, Hebrew is a descriptive

language. Thus the phrase “fish of the sea and the birds of the sky” is merely Hebraic descriptive language to show that man was to rule over everything that God had made (See Heb. 2:7-8).

That man is to reign over everything which God has made concerns mainly the future Kingdom that will be realized when our gracious Lord comes again with power and great glory. But if the Kingdom is future, then why did Jesus say, “The Kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21)?

### **B. The Two Time Periods of the Kingdom**

When Jesus spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people saying, “Truly I say to you, that the tax-gatherers and harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you” (Matt. 21:31), how could the tax-gatherers and harlots get in if the Kingdom was not then in existence? Furthermore, the Kingdom had been given to the Israelites to prepare, but since they wasted their opportunity and were irresponsible, this special privilege was taken away from them, as Jesus said, “Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Israel] and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43), confirming that early in New Testament times the Kingdom had long been in existence. Yet with the Kingdom in our midst, the Lord still instructs the church to pray “Thy Kingdom come.” It seems absurd to pray for the coming of the Kingdom that is already in our midst. Yet, the Scriptures clearly tell us that the Kingdom is still to come because in the future when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, he says, “the kingdom of the world has become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). So, does the Kingdom exist here and now or are we to look for it in the future?

What does Jesus say that can resolve our dilemma regarding whether the Kingdom is present now or is still to come? Jesus taught that when the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, “Then the king will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’” (Matt. 25:34). This simple proclamation reveals the time frame of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God has **two** time periods: the **present Kingdom** is for our **preparation**, and the **future Kingdom** will be our **inheritance when Christ returns**. In other words, **God’s Kingdom** has a **preparation time** and a **realization time**. When Jesus said, “The Kingdom of Heaven is in your midst” (Luke 17:21), He spoke of the present Kingdom of Preparation which presently exists to give all Christians an opportunity to be trained to be personnel of the Kingdom which Christ went away to prepare for us (John 14:3). But when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet to herald the coming Kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, this refers to the coming Kingdom of Inheritance in which all the saved who have been good and faithful over a few things in this life will be put in charge of many things and share their Lord’s joy (Matt. 25:23). “The Kingdom of Heaven is like . . .” verses in Matthew 13 all refer to the present Kingdom of Preparation. When our Lord said, “When you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God . . . And they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the Kingdom of God,” He spoke of the future Kingdom of Inheritance (Luke 3:28-29). In John’s words, “in the tribulation and Kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus,” the Kingdom refers to the

Kingdom of Preparation that is in existence right now (Rev. 1:9). But Peter's words "for in this way the entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you" refer to the Inherited Kingdom which will be established after Christ returns (2 Pet.1:11).

So God's Kingdom is here now, both in time and space, and is a time of preparation for those who are to be personnel of the Kingdom that Jesus will establish at His coming. But the future Kingdom of God is the one that Jesus told His disciples He was going away to prepare (John 14:3) and that He will establish at His return (Matt. 25:31-34; Rev. 11:15; 19:11-21).<sup>1</sup> Daniel seems to have alluded to both chronological aspects of the Kingdom when he prophesied, "In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed [the present]. . . . It will crush and put to an end all those kingdoms [the future]" (Dan. 2:44. See Rev. 18:1-19:21). The prophet Daniel also foretold that the saints will possess the Kingdom and that the kingdoms of the world will be handed over to them (Dan. 7:22, 27). Jesus revealed that the coming eternal Kingdom is not now of this world (John 18:33-36; Rev. 11:15), and the church has been praying for almost 2,000 years for the eternal Kingdom to come (Matt. 6:10). Surely the time for that glorious event is drawing ever closer.

### **C. Two Kingdoms Presently Exist Side by Side: God's and Satan's**

Describing the king of Babylon, Isaiah by the Spirit of God said:

How you have fallen from heaven,  
O star of the morning, son of the dawn! . . .  
But you said in your heart,  
"I will ascend to heaven;  
I will raise my throne above the stars of God . . .  
I will make myself like the Most High."  
Nevertheless you will be thrust down to Sheol  
(Is. 14:12-15).

Clearly Isaiah is comparing the proud Babylonian monarch to someone. Other Scriptures bring to light the real subject of this inspired comparison—the fall of Satan (Luke 10:18; Rev. 9:1, 11; 12:9).

Satan's name means "adversary," primarily to God and secondarily to the church. What God considers wickedness, Satan considers good. Scripture—that voice of the Holy Spirit—warns us that we should not be ignorant of Satan's schemes and should take care lest he take advantage of us (2 Cor. 2:11), as he deceived Eve by his cunning (2 Cor. 11:3). In fact, his false prophets would "lead astray, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24; compare Rev. 13:11-15). His name is also Devil which means a "slanderer, false accuser." He slandered God Almighty to our first parents (Gen. 3:1-5) and then slandered Job to God, implying that Job served God only for the advantages it brought (Job 1:8-11).

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<sup>1</sup> W.A. Allen writes, "The truth is that there are two aspects of religion which are present throughout the whole New Testament side by side, the thought of eternal life or the kingdom as present, and the conception of it as future...." *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, Oxford Church Biblical Dictionary (London, 1915), 165

However, Satan does not work alone. He has other morally fallen angels who work under him as is shown by the verse, “Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Satan is both the ruler and god of this world (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4) and all its dominion and glory have been temporarily given into his hand (Luke 4:6). In New Testament days he established his throne (chair of state) at Rome in the west (Rev. 13:2; 16:10) and at Pergamum in the east (Rev. 2:13) in order to adequately rule his earthly kingdom. His hierarchy is described in Ephesians 6:12, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This is the description of an organized kingdom. We should not underestimate the power of the spiritual forces arrayed against us.

Some verses of Scripture call Satan’s angels “prince”—as in “prince of the kingdom of Persia” and “the prince of Greece” (Dan. 10:13, 20). In due course of time demonic powers gained influence over the governments of the nations of the world, as was demonstrated by the controlling positions these evil angels held in the Persian and Grecian courts. In fact, today they still seek to hamper God’s work and plans and to defeat the people of God by exerting a controlling power in government.

Scripture further suggests that the organization of Satan’s kingdom reaches to areas smaller than major countries. When Jesus was ministering in the country of the Gerasenes, He expelled thousands of demons from a man who easily broke any shackles that bound him and lived as a wild creature among the tombs. The demons within the man “began to entreat [Jesus] earnestly not to send them out of the country” (Mark 5:10). The original word for country, *chora*, means a district or region. This district of the Gerasenes was probably the area assigned to them by their master, Satan. They entreated Jesus earnestly not to send them away so they would not get into trouble with “the ruler of the demons” (Matt. 12:24). If the organization of Satan’s kingdom is as detailed as the neighborhood structure of communist governments, it is probable that demons are assigned to areas as small as a city block.

Not only does Satan’s kingdom permeate government, it also affects religion. Under the influence of his agents, idolatry became an accepted form of worship in order that the participants might enter into fellowship with devils (1 Cor. 10:20-22). Some people might be shocked to discover that Satan goes to church. Jesus cast demons out of people within the synagogue walls and Paul warned believers to be aware of Satan’s schemes. But Satan especially likes to have his man in the pulpit disguised as one of the “servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:15). Just because a man of the cloth professes moral and spiritual values and has a degree in religion does not mean that he has been born again or that he is truly a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before his conversion, even Saul of Tarsus was a minister who actively opposed God and worked for Satan. Not only can pastors serve Satan but other members of the church can do likewise. Jesus taught that Satan has children whom he sows as tares among God’s wheat (Matt. 13:24-30, 39). Scripture elsewhere calls them “false apostles, deceitful workers” and “false brethren” (2 Cor. 11:13, 26). They have membership status and baptismal certificates but have never been regenerated. They are so proud of themselves for being good that they expect God to automatically open heaven’s gate for them when they die.

Not only “professed” believers but genuine believers can be used by Satan. David’s numbering of Israel was prompted by Satan. It was the arch tempter who inspired Peter to take Jesus aside and reprove Him for welcoming His coming death and resurrection. Jesus’ sharp response to His chief apostle shows that all who oppose the will and plan of God are for that moment envoys of Satan (Matt. 16:22-23). Ananias and Sapphira’s greed and desire for honor were whispered to them by the one named “adversary.”

Government and the church are not the only areas of Satan’s activity. If God permits, Satan has the ability to stir people up to commit murder, to send fire to burn down forests and towns, to direct tornadoes to blow houses from their foundations and to create human suffering through cancer, plane crashes and war. Usually these events are thought of as acts of God, but in reality, God is permitting Satan to manipulate and control events to test mankind (Job 1:13-19; 2:7). Therefore, we believers are presently sojourners in enemy territory. We need not fear the assaults of the enemy, however, because our gracious Lord has already told us, “he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). As long as we are in His hand, no one can snatch us out of it. Praise the Lord!

Although mankind’s reigning authority has been usurped by Satan and we cannot retrieve it on our own, we can rest on God’s assurance that He plans to subject the world to come to man. Christ came into the world to save sinners but He also came for the sake of “the world to come.” The gracious Lord will grant rulership—the crown of honor and glory—to all who overcome (Rev. 3:21). For the present, Satan’s kingdom will continue to exist along side God’s, although through His death Christ rendered the devil powerless and took back everything we had lost, including our reigning authority. In the future, He will bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). “The Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). Praise the Lord!

#### **D. The Present Kingdom of Preparation**

In order to establish a strong kingdom, a time of preparation is always needed. In all Chinese history, what dynasty ever came into being without any preparation? God, likewise, took several years to prepare and establish David’s kingdom. God’s Kingdom is no different. When God created us, He desired for us to rule over everything He had created. Unfortunately, our first parents were deceived by Satan and lost their reigning authority. But God was not defeated and continued to prepare us to reign over His coming Kingdom, which, as Jesus said, was “prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34). We have as our examples Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who during their sojourn in the Kingdom of Preparation were first trained and then chosen by God to be the personnel of His Kingdom. We also may have the hope that one day we will recline at the table in the Kingdom of God with them (See Matt. 8:11).

So, all believers make up the Kingdom of God, but presently it is the Kingdom of Preparation. During the preparation time nothing is ever perfect. Before a building is completely finished, a mess is unavoidable with a pile of cement blocks here, a stack of reinforcing steel rods there, and piles of dirt and trash everywhere. Not until the workers complete the building and clean up the rubbish will the full glory of the edifice be revealed. In like manner, before the Lord returns it is impossible for the church to be perfect, because she is still in the process of preparation.

“What must be accomplished during the Kingdom of Preparation?” someone might ask.

Three ingredients are required to establish a kingdom: land (Gen. 15:7, 18-21; Rev. 5:9-10), authority (Gen. 17:6; Rev. 11:15), and people (Gen. 17:1-8; Rev. 3:21; 5:9-10). For example, during the days of the English viceroys India had people and land but lacked the authority to be a full-fledged, self-governing nation. In the same way, the Kingdom of Heaven also must be prepared in all three areas: people, land, and authority. Now, which of these three areas should the church be preparing? Is it authority? Before our gracious Lord ascended, He told us, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. 28:18). So the church need not prepare authority. Is it land? The Scriptures clearly state that “The heavens are Thine, the earth also is Thine” and again “The heavens are the heavens of the Lord; But the earth He has given to the sons of men” (Ps. 89:11; 115:16). One day, He will create “new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Is. 65:17). The earth is His. He will prepare it. (Frankly speaking, it is beyond the ability of the church to prepare the land.) Then what is left for the church to prepare? It is **people**, the **Kingdom personnel**, the **overcomers** who are qualified to reign with Christ. As the Scriptures say, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with me on My throne” (Rev. 3:21).

In these last days, believers do not have a clear concept of what either the Kingdom or the church is. This is a particular problem for the Chinese Christians who often regard the church as similar to a Buddhist temple, whose adherents go to the temple to offer incense and worship the idols twice a month at the new and full moon. Similarly, believers go to church on the first day of every week and feel that should be counted as enough for the Lord. God’s goal for the church, the urgent task of training Kingdom personnel, is either completely forgotten or totally unknown. No wonder the church today is like Israel of old, wandering around in circles in the wilderness, unable to enter into Canaan. Please remember: the church is God’s school and as such is the training center for preparing the Kingdom’s personnel. If the church had understood and operated on this principle through the years, the brothers and sisters would already be trained and tested and the Kingdom of Inheritance would have arrived long ago.

Now that we have established what the Kingdom of God is, next we shall find out why the Kingdom is so important in God’s eyes.

## **Chapter II. Why the Kingdom Is Important**

Churches do not thrive and grow primarily because the believers today lack hope for future glorification. Because they have no hope, many brothers' and sisters' love for the Lord is shallow and their service to Him is indifferent and unenthusiastic. Hope, the expectation of a bright future, encourages people to press on. It also enables believers to strive toward their goal with endurance and joy, while disregarding difficulties, hardships and burdens. A poet once said, "Hope can make you young because hope and youth are twin brothers." Another writer said, "Hope is a good thing—maybe the best thing." Hope enables a mother to endure hardship, avoid bitterness, and even sacrifice herself to raise her children. Hope enables a teacher to willingly live on a low salary and work long hours to teach students so that they can become worthwhile individuals. Hope enables a missionary to look beyond pain and suffering to save lost souls. (Certainly those "missionaries" who go to a field of service because of mere curiosity or the thrill of traveling to foreign countries are excluded.) A strong faith and hope for their future glorification will move believers to "no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" (2 Cor. 5:15). Because hope imparts such values, it enables believers to sacrifice everything and press on toward God's goal for their lives. This is exactly what our gracious Lord did: "who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Joy is linked with suffering here because it was through His passion that Christ gained access to the throne. The parallel is in First Peter 1:11 where the Spirit of Christ in the Old Testament prophecies "predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow." Again, Jesus said, "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Luke 24:26). Likewise, hope for future glory gained through the pain and suffering we experience for God's sake in this present life should motivate us to forsake all for Christ.

Just what should our hope be? God says through Paul that we should "know what is the hope of His calling" (Eph. 1:18a), which is for believers to be fully aware of their future glorious inheritance as personnel of the Coming Kingdom of God. That is why Scripture goes on to define the hope of His calling to be "the riches of the glory of His inheritance [among] the saints" (Eph. 1:18b). In order to strengthen this hope, God gives us the Spirit now as a foretaste and pledge of what is to be ours when we come into full possession of our God-given inheritance (Eph. 1:14): an "inheritance in the Kingdom of God and of Christ" (Eph. 5:5); an inheritance which we will share as joint-heirs with the Father's Son, Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:16, 17); and an inheritance which the Father conferred upon "His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2; See Luke 22:30; Heb. 2:5-9). God intends that our desire for this divine inheritance will motivate us to live obedient, sacrificial lives now, in order to possess the future reality. As Scripture says, "He who overcomes, I will grant to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21). Without knowledge of and a strong desire for this hope, our tendency as Christians is to follow our old nature and become "lovers of self" rather than lovers of God and thereby fail to inherit the Kingdom prepared for us from the foundation on the world.

As an example, an overseas Chinese pastor, now in the United States, married a woman from a non-Christian family. After their marriage, however, she did come to believe in the Lord. This pastor, filled with love for the Lord, served God day and night even when he was a student at the seminary. His duties frequently took him away from home. At first, his wife was understanding, but finally the situation became burdensome to her. One day, she asked him,

“Honey, didn’t we believe in Jesus?”

“Yes! By God’s grace, we have accepted Him as our Savior,” the husband responded.

“Then, will we go to heaven?” she asked.

“Certainly! We became His children by faith and grace and heaven is sure to be our home whenever God gets ready for us to leave these bodies.”

Losing her temper, she demanded, “Why then do you serve day and night? Serve! Serve! If you serve, all you get is to go to heaven. The other believers who do not serve also go to heaven. Why are you so stupid?”

Shocked and distressed this brother went to the senior pastor in tears. The senior pastor told him, “Brother, it’s good that your wife can verbalize her feelings. As a matter of fact, most people in the Chinese churches today think just like she does. They often think that since they have accepted Jesus and have a born-again experience, they have already obtained their ticket to go to heaven, and there is nothing else left for them to do. Since they believe that Christians go to heaven whether they serve the Lord or not, they think that to live in this world like the rich man and in the next world like Lazarus is smart.”

Such an arrangement would certainly be convenient; but it does not conform to biblical reality. This is exactly why the Lord said, “You cannot serve two masters.” The younger pastor, better understanding the situation, was able to provide counsel and guidance to improve his wife’s spiritual perception of the need to diligently serve God. An emphasis upon the significance of the Kingdom is needed today to enlighten believers regarding the tremendous importance for Christians to live their daily lives to the glory of God—not to obtain salvation but for the sake of God’s Kingdom and their future inheritance in it.

#### **A. *The Kingdom Is God’s Purpose for Creating Man***

After God had created the earth with all its creatures, Scripture tells us that He said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule” (Gen. 1:26). This verse tells us two things: first, **how** God created man and second, **why** He created man. It also clearly tells us that there is a difference between how God created man and how He created everything else. When God created everything else, “He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9); and “He commanded and they were created” (Ps. 148:5). His creation of man, however, was much more complex. The Triune God thought about the issue carefully before selecting an image and likeness for man, then He declared that He had created man according to His deliberation, that is, in His own image. Since man was to be the summit of His creation, destined to rule over

His Kingdom, God planned the creation of man meticulously and executed His plan painstakingly. Then having created them, God blessed our first parents, sent them forth to be fruitful and to multiply, to subdue the earth and to rule over it (Gen. 1:28). Thus Adam became God's administrative deputy, having dominion over the whole world.

**1. The Triune God's Deliberation: "Let Us Make Man."** In the phrase, "Let Us make man," the verbs "let" and "make" confirm that God has a will. In fact, the Chinese Bible translates "let" as "want," that is, "We want to make man." This entire verse, therefore, tells us that because of His own desire, the Triune God held a conference to discuss among themselves the procedure they would use and the purpose they would have in creating man. Although it does not specifically indicate a number, the pronoun "Us" clearly refers to the Triune God, even though many scholars have fretted over this and have raised arguments against it. Because of the progressive nature of revelation, initially a seed form is always disclosed before the full revelation of a truth is given at a later time. Thus the New Testament's fully developed revelation of the Trinity has its roots in Genesis 1:26. Without the New Testament we may not be certain of the number of persons in the Godhead, but, of course, we do have the New Testament.

Nevertheless, some declare that "Us" refers to other gods and that this part of the text is a remnant of mythological pagan elements. It is true that the antecedent subject of "Us" is God (Elohim) which has a plural form, but the meaning is singular as is seen by its taking the singular form of the verbs: "create," "bless," "said," and so on. Others interpret "Us" as indicating a heavenly court in which God is speaking to the angelic host. The Scriptures do record conversations between God and the attending angels, but the Bible never indicates that the angelic "sons of God" took part in creation. Any supposition that either gods or angels had a hand in our creation is completely foreign to the thought in this verse and to the question posed in Isaiah 40:14, "With whom did He consult?" Others have chosen to believe that this is an example of what they call a plural of majesty since the word "God" (Elohim) is also plural. This, they say, would be comparable to a king who used "we" to give his royal proclamations and decrees and that there is no need for "Us" to mean more than one person. This, however, Martin Luther scoffed at as being nonsense. They can propose these interpretations (for what they are worth) and we could accept them (with a grain of salt). However, knowing that God's revelation is progressive, we are sure that "Us" is the perfect seed form of the doctrine of the Trinity which was fully revealed in the New Testament after many suggestions of it had been given in the Old.

**2. The Triune God's Decision: "Let Us Make Man in Our Image, According to Our Likeness."** Like the Old Testament, the New Testament clearly states that man "is the image and glory of God" and was "made in the **likeness** of God" (1 Cor. 11:7; James 3:9, emphasis added). "Image" and "likeness" in these verses are both singular in number in the original language. Therefore, the Bible bears witness that man is created in the image and likeness of One Person in the Trinity. To fully understand what this means we must determine two things: what are the definitions of "image" and "likeness" and to which Person of the Trinity do they refer?

To explain the meaning of God's likeness in man, some Bible scholars cite the verse, "the new self, which in the *likeness* of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth" (Eph. 4:24). They hold that "image" and "likeness" in Genesis have the

same meaning as does “righteousness and holiness of the truth” in Ephesians. This interpretation, however, creates certain theological problems.

The first problem is that the word *likeness* in Ephesians 4:24 should be in italics because it is not in the original text but was inserted by the translator. We certainly should refrain from basing conclusions on a word not found in the original text of the Bible. The translation of the phrase should be, “The new self which is made like God.” To go further, “Righteousness and holiness of the truth” are God’s nature that the believer partakes of at his new birth when he is made a new creation in Christ Jesus (Eph. 4:24; 2 Pet. 1:4). When Adam was created, he was perfect as far as his human nature was concerned. He did not, however, have “righteousness and holiness” internally, because he had not eaten from the tree of life that symbolized God’s life. So, since Adam had not received God’s life, how could he have God’s nature?

Second, their explanation would lead to the logical conclusion that when Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he lost God’s life. This would mean that if we do something that God forbids after we receive His life at the time of our new birth then we would lose our salvation. This would impair the security of our salvation, which makes the above explanation extremely difficult to accept.

What then do “image” and “likeness” mean? The former was used in the Old Testament 17 times, always referring to external resemblance. The Chinese Bible reflects that “image” means an external likeness by translating it as “shape,” “likeness,” and “idol.” In the Old Testament the term “likeness” is used 25 times, with about 75 percent referring to the external features and with somewhat less than 25 percent meaning an internal likeness. The manner in which these two words are used in the original language of the Bible leads us to the conclusion that when God made the first man after His image, Adam’s external features were like those of God’s Son Jesus before He became flesh. It was in this same form that He appeared to Hagar (Gen. 16:7-14), Abraham (Gen. 18:1-33), Moses (Ex. 34:5-8), Joshua (Jos. 5:13-15), Isaiah (Is. 6:1-13), Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:25-28), Daniel (Dan. 7:13-14) and many others (See John 12:37-41; compare Is. 6:1-5).

“What?!” some may say, “Don’t the Scriptures tell us ‘God is Spirit?’ How can a spirit have shape and form?”

It is quite correct that God is Spirit, but at the same time He is the Triune God. Let us consider what three Persons in One means. While we cannot accept Karl Barth’s attitude toward the Scriptures and many other doctrines, this explanation concerning the Trinity is acceptable. He said that God the Father is the Revealer; the Lord Jesus Christ is the Revelation; and the Holy Spirit is the Revealed One who makes the objective revelation in Jesus Christ personal in our own knowledge and understanding. So, since Christ is the Revelation, He must have had an external form from the days of old, even from eternity. Otherwise, how can He be the eternal Revelation? It was in this external form that the Son manifested Himself to many of God’s saints through the ages. Thus, Adam and Eve were made according to the Son’s outward revealing form.

Following this line of reasoning, some might ask, “Then is the original likeness of the Son like us, so ugly?” No! I firmly believe that when Adam and Eve were made, they were quite handsome because the Scriptures say, “God saw that it was good.” In the original language the word for good can mean beautiful as in the description of Rebekah

(Gen. 24:16) and the baby Moses (Ex. 2:2). In fact, the entire earth at that time was so beautiful, that when the morning stars saw it, they sang together and the sons of God shouted for joy (Job 38:4-7). Today, mankind and the earth have become ugly in appearance and revolting in behavior because they are damaged goods, having been corrupted by sin. Man's weak and sin-scarred body will be restored when the gracious Lord comes again at the climax of salvation, when “[He] will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory” (Phil. 3:21). (Man's internal likeness to God is not fully treated here. See *Genesis, A Biblical Theology*.)

**3. The Triune God's Declaration: “Let Them Rule Over the Fish of the Sea and Over the Birds of the Sky.”** God's Word concerning mankind tells us that He intended for mankind to rule over everything He had created. Since these words were spoken to the people in ancient times, God described His desire for them in a way which they could understand, using concrete words such as fish, birds, and sky. When it comes to the New Testament, however, Scripture plainly states that God wants us to rule over all that His hand has created, saying, “[God] put everything under [man's] feet. In putting everything under [man], God left nothing that is not subject to [man]”(Heb. 2:8, retranslated). Thank God! Mankind was created because God wanted man to rule over His creation. Unfortunately, the church in these last days has failed to see this glorious hope, thinking instead that God only created mankind so they can go to heaven after they die, and do nothing but continually sing, “Hallelujah!”

Some might not understand how God's declaration that man is to rule over all His creation can truly become a reality. They feel that it is too mysterious or even doubt its possibility. Such doubt displays a lack of understanding of the power of Almighty God. Remember that our God is “the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God.” What He has said will be so. No one can negate Him or else He is not God. Although some foretold events have not yet come to pass, they have merely been postponed because of the foolishness and unbelief of evil hearts. These events will assuredly be realized at some future time when all that He has spoken will definitely and completely come to pass. This includes the coming Kingdom of God when His desire for mankind to rule over all His creation will be achieved—His redeemed and chosen ones will reign with Christ. We should be eagerly looking forward to that day saying, “Oh come, Lord Jesus, come!”

### ***B. David's Prophecy in Psalm 8 Emphasizes Anew that God's Purpose for Creating Man Is Still in Force***

Because God made us for the purpose of governing His creation, some presume that mankind need only take a stand to assume control of the world. If so, why are we so powerless? Not only do thunder, lightning, clouds, lions and tigers fail to obey us, but even flies, gnats and mosquitoes take advantage of us. Sometimes, I rebuke the pesky mosquitoes saying, “How dare you suck the blood of a son of God?” But they just ignore me and drink their fill. Their lack of respect, however, does not mean that God has forgotten His promise. Quite the opposite. He has affirmed His promise again and again, and most cogently through David in Psalm 8, where to “crown [man] with glory and majesty” in verse 5 is the same thing as “Thou hast put all things under [man's] feet” in verse 6 (See Heb. 2:5-9).

**1. God Did Not Forget His Promise to Give Man a “Crown of Glory.”** Ever since our ancestor Adam fell into his trap, Satan has usurped our rightful ruling power. In fact, even now “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Satan uses sin and the law of death to control mankind and put man into the land of the living dead. In other words, the current king of this world is not the Lord Jesus, but Satan. When he came to tempt our Savior, Satan said that all the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof had been handed over to him (Luke 4:6). At that time, our Lord silently agreed and later clarified the situation by saying that Satan is the ruler of this world (John 14:30). Satan also is the ruler of the dominion of darkness (Acts 26:18; Col. 1:13). Thus, when Adam fell, he lost not only the privilege to eat fruit from the tree of life, but also his reigning authority—the authority to rule over everything and Satan now rules the world because he took Adam’s rule away from him. From his perspective at that time, Satan thought that all was settled and he did not have to worry anymore about losing control of the world. Little did he realize that whatever God has said about giving man rulership will surely come to pass to the most minute detail.

For example, consider the miracle that occurred on May 14, 1948, when, after nearly 1900 years without a country, almost overnight Israel became a nation again. This is a living testimony of God’s faithfulness. Because the Israelis often suffered bitterly during the long years when they had no country, they finally organized a movement to reestablish their nation. Their plan was to buy a piece of land somewhere for a homeland. They reasoned that since Palestine had been occupied by the Arabs for all those years, it would be impossible to forcibly take it back from their hands. They forgot (in fact they just could not believe) that God had specifically promised their ancestors the land of Palestine as their homeland. Yet when God’s time was ripe, His promise to Abraham and David instantly became a historical fact. Praise the Lord! In like manner, God’s promise of reigning authority which He gave to man at his creation, (even though it has been temporarily usurped by Satan) will be given back to him at the judgment seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Cor. 5:10; Matt. 25:14-30). Unfortunately, most believers are ignorant of this promise. Tragically, some who do know about it are unwilling to really believe it.

As the last days approach wicked unbelief is becoming ever more obvious. Even though God’s promise and desire for man to rule are plainly recorded in the Scriptures (Rev. 2:26, 3:21), many believers know little of the Bible and of that they do know ignore what does not suit their own notions. As a result, time that should be spent in training to prepare themselves to participate in God’s Kingdom is wasted on the greedy pursuit of their own desires for all forms of impurity. But God has never forgotten a single one of His promises (Is. 49:15). To strengthen faith and to kindle hope in His own children, God reiterated through David in Psalm 8 His desire for man to have ruling authority over His creation.

**2. Through David God Prophesied the Restoration of Man’s “Crown of Glory” (His Ruling Authority).** Most Bible scholars only look upon Psalm 8 as one of five Psalms concerning nature; but, more than that, it is a discourse on the Kingdom. To give a great hope to otherwise hopeless mankind, God through David declared once again His desire for man to rule over all things. As the Scriptures say, “Now may the **God of hope . . .**

[grant] that **you may abound in hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13, emphasis added).

We see that Psalm 8 is a psalm of rejoicing because the meaning of the musical title *Gittith* is "Grape Treaders' melody."<sup>2</sup> As the Israelites would tread the grapes in the wine press, they always sang melodious songs of joy (Is. 16:10; Jer. 48:33). The melody of these joyous songs would be familiar and popular with the Israelite farmers. Therefore, the preferred meaning of "on the *Gittith*" is that it refers to the melody of the grape treaders' song connected with the joy of the new vintage. David, rejoicing in God's promise concerning His Kingdom, under God's inspiration designated that Psalm 8 be sung to this melody. The close relationship between the joy inherent in the melody, the words of Psalm 8, and the happiness associated with God's Kingdom are obvious. When David considered the majesty of God's name, the splendor and power of the work of His fingers, the heavens and all that they displayed, he rejoiced saying, "how majestic is Thy name" to express his worship to God (8:1, 9).

When man is compared to God, his pitiful sinful condition immediately becomes apparent. In the two phrases "what is man" and "the son of man" (8:4), David used two different words for man. The first word for man is *'enosh* which is identical to the name of Enosh, the son of Seth (Gen. 5:6). Enosh is derived from a root word meaning "mortal, weak, sickly, incurable" and is translated as "incurable" in Jeremiah 15:18, "desperately sick" in Jeremiah 17:9 and "very sick" in Second Samuel 12:15. It speaks of the pitiful, tragic, regrettable life of man ever since he fell into sin. Even in the time of Seth, mankind had begun to encounter degradation as a result of sin. This was indicated by Seth's naming his child Enosh, following the custom of that day to select a name for a male child which would reflect certain current events. Once the destructive power of sin has been released, as is implied in Enosh's name, it is totally unmanageable as is seen by the earth's being destroyed in the flood. The second phrase "son of man" used in Psalm 8:4 literally reads "son of Adam," and the root of the word Adam is the same as that for "ground," as found in the phrase "return to the ground" in Genesis 3:19 and "cultivate the ground" in Genesis 3:23. Thus the name Adam refers to man's physical substance, that is, man is called man because he was made from the ground and as such he is just soil, or fill material. Man's body consists of many common elements such as oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, phosphorus, and so on. But because the amount of each element is so small, the total physical value of man on the open market is negligible. What is more, his body gets sick quite easily, and his psyche is perpetually weak. As for his morality, it is totally incurable. Hence Scripture rightly says, "All flesh is grass" (Is. 40:6) and "In the balance they go up; they [men] are together lighter than breath" (Ps. 62:9). Although man is made from the dust of the earth and worthless, amazingly he is still being "take[n] thought of" and "care[d] for" by the majestic God (Ps. 8:4). "Oh the love that sought me, oh the blood that bought me, oh the grace that brought me to the fold. Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold." Hallelujah!

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<sup>2</sup>The Chinese Bible inaccurately translates it as "Gittite musical instrument." They may have done this because the letters and pronunciation of the term *Gittite* is quite close to the original word *Gittith*. Or, the Chinese translators may have thought that the *Gittith* was a Philistine lyre played at the festival of their gods. It is unlikely, however, that David would have used a Gentile musical instrument to play his psalms, since the Jews regarded such instruments as unclean. In reality, *Gittith* is closely related to the Hebrew word *gath*, "wine press," and not to a musical instrument.

“Take thought” in Psalm 8:4 can be translated as “remember” (Job 7:7; 21:6; Ps. 105:8). God’s taking thought of man can also be seen where the Scriptures say, “What is man [enosh] that Thou dost magnify him, and that Thou are concerned about him” (Job 7:17). Moreover, “care for” in Psalm 8:4 can be translated as “sought” (Is. 26:16), or “visit” (Job 5:24). Thus these words help us understand the reality of how much God is really concerned about our worthless selves. He remembers our weaknesses and our needs and examines our situation. He takes thought of us and prepares our final destination in order that we might enjoy the “crown with glory and majesty,” that is, to rule and reign over what His hands have made. Again, “Crown [man] with glory and majesty” in Psalm 8:5 is the technical term for reigning with Christ (See Heb. 2:5-9). Therefore, the Scriptures clearly reveal that “crown [man] with glory and majesty” is equal to “all things in subjection under [man’s] feet.” God’s love and concern for weak sinful man is so strong that He intends to make this worthless one the rightful ruler of all He has. This is the true love that proceeds from God—love for the utterly unworthy. Oh LORD our God, great is Thy faithfulness. Praise the Lord!

### **C. The Ultimate Goal of the Salvation Wrought by Christ Is To Produce Personnel for the Coming Kingdom**

At meetings I often ask the audience, “What is God?” The most common answer besides “God is Spirit” is “God is love.” Yes, God is love, but what is His love like? To reveal the exceptional character of God’s love, the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament used a special word—*khehsed*. The noun form of this special word was used 247 times in the Old Testament, 31 times more than the verb “love.” Psalm 136 gives a detailed narrative of the eternal nature of *khehsed* with examples of its accomplishments. First, the relationship between its eternal nature and creation is given in verses 1-9. Then in verses 10-22 its eternal nature toward the salvation experience of the Israelites coming out of Egypt is described in some detail. Finally, its eternal nature with its concern for all nations is expressed in verses 23-26. This word is truly amazing.

About half of the uses of *khehsed* occur in the Psalms. Moreover, the Psalms repeatedly declare that it is “wondrous” (17:7, NIV), “better than life” (63:3), “good” (69:16), “great above the heavens” (108:4), “the earth is full of [it]” (119:64), and that it is “everlasting” (136:1). Therefore, the importance of this word to describe the nature of God is clear to see. Unfortunately, there is no equivalent word in either English or Chinese. In the King James Version, it is translated into ten different words with “mercy,” “kindness” and “lovingkindness” being the most common ones. In the Chinese translation, this word is translated into eighteen different words with the most common ones being “gracious love,” “grace,” “gracious pledge” and “gracious favor.” Consequently, it is hard to understand the true meaning of *khehsed* when only translations of the Old Testament are consulted.

When we go to the original language, we find that *khehsed* has the basic meaning of “love,” but not a common variety of love. It is love plus “faithfulness,” “firmness,” and “unchangeableness.” Thus, it often occurs with the words “faithfulness” and “truth” (Ps. 89:2, 14, 24, 33, 49). Since it is frequently used in connection with God’s preserving or keeping His covenant with man (Deut. 7:9,12; Neh. 1:5; 9:32), some have translated it simply as “covenant love,” because the original meaning of *khehsed* is truly the kind of

love that is firm, patient, immovable and rooted in a covenant. Because of His *khehsed*, God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt (Ps. 136:10-15) and in 1948 fulfilled His ancient promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:18-20). In the same miraculous manner that Israel was restored overnight as a nation, God will extend this kind of love to us to restore our lost reigning authority. Although the whole world is currently under the rule of demonically-influenced governments (Dan. 10:13-21), God will eventually fulfill what He prophesied through David to complete His purpose for creating us. But how will He restore the reigning authority to us that Adam lost?

**1. God Has Always Planned for Man to Rule Over His Kingdom (Heb. 2:5-8).** Scripture tells us “He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking” (Heb. 2:5). In this verse God tells us two tremendously important truths. First, there is a world to come, that is, a future world. Second, the rulers of this future world will not be angels but unworthy man—after being redeemed, nurtured, and groomed for the job by the majestic God of the universe. In order to rule God’s Kingdom, man must be both redeemed and an overcomer, thereby becoming worthy to undertake the task for which his divine training is preparing him. Praise the Lord!

At creation God made an ideal world for man to rule. Because Adam was deceived and Satan usurped man’s ruling authority, man’s ruling position in the Kingdom has not yet been realized. Some have suggested that God simply changed His mind about having man rule over His creation. Never! The Scriptures say, “God is not a man . . . Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?” (Num. 23:19) and “He has made a decree which will not pass away” (Ps. 148:6). Nothing that God has planned will be left unfulfilled. We, and all God’s creation, have been made subject to futility as a temporary measure. But we who are called the first fruits of the Spirit can watch in eager anticipation for the coming world where righteousness will dwell, secure in the promise of God (See Rom. 8:20-25). Even now Christ is in heaven where “[He] is at the right hand of God . . . angels and authorities and powers [have] been subjected to Him” (1 Pet. 3:22). But God the Father has not yet “put all things in subjection under His feet” (1 Cor. 15:27). One day, when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, there will arise loud voices in heaven saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever” (Rev. 11:15). At that time, the faithful, the called and chosen overcomers who have been changed to the likeness of His glorious body shall reign with Him as co-heirs over all God’s creation.

Hebrews 2:5 truly causes us to sing, “Hallelujah!” because God “did not subject to angels the world to come.” Angels are great, powerful, energetic beings who have years and years of experience and training in serving God. Michael the Prince of Israel is a prime example (Dan. 10:21). Angels could do a much better job than man in ruling God’s creation, but God long ago set His eyes upon us who in ourselves are utterly worthless. This is truly amazing grace—amazing because our gracious Lord plainly told us that God the Father loves us even as He loves Christ (See John 17:23). Therefore, Christ wants to confer on us the Kingdom just as the Father granted the Kingdom to Him (See Luke 22:29; Rom. 8:17, NIV). Truly His grace is both amazing and abundant, causing us to bow down and worship Him.

**2. Jesus Won Back for Us the Ruling Authority Lost by Adam (Heb. 2:6-10).** When mankind fell into Satan's deceitful trap, not only did we lose our reigning authority, but we also became Satan's compliant dupes—sons of wrath and enemies of God. Continually mankind has withdrawn from God (Eph. 2:13): we are rebels against God's word (Ps. 107:11), rebels against God Himself (Ps. 2:2), blasphemers (1 Tim. 1:13), and enemies of God (Rom. 8:7). As a result, each individual has turned to his own way (Is. 53:6) and has become accustomed to doing evil (Jer. 13:23). With a mind blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:4), we have become desperately sick (Jer. 17:9) and without hope (Eph. 2:12). No wonder David said, "What is Enosh [man] . . . And the son of Adam [man]" (Ps. 8:4, retranslated). Our hearts are exceedingly deceitful and cannot be cured by human medicine. Even though we are personally inadequate and incapable of doing good, God's *khehsed* still wants to accomplish His desire and purpose for creating us. **Truly, great is His love and wonderful is His grace!**

God's concern for weak, wicked mankind has been plainly recorded in Scripture and repeatedly proven by historical events. For example, in Noah's time the "wickedness of man was great" and "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Such wickedness grieved God so much that His Spirit would not strive with man forever. Nevertheless, He still allowed wicked, worthless man a 120-year grace period in which to repent. Although the outcry from Sodom and Gomorrah was exceedingly great and their sin equally grave, God was willing to spare the population from destruction if only ten righteous men were found in the two cities. Although the Israelites did not listen to God's word in the wilderness but tested Him ten times (Num. 14:22), He allowed them after a 40-year sojourn in the wilderness to enter Canaan to establish a kingdom. Although the Jews followed their hardened hearts, stiffened their necks, and wickedly killed the prophets, stoned His messengers and finally dragged the Son of God out of the city of Jerusalem to crucify Him on a Roman cross; God patiently waited until 70 AD before finally dispersing them among the various nations. Even so in 1948 God restored their nation to them. In like manner, even though we are exceedingly wicked, God still takes thought of us and cares for us. God still desires that His chosen ones should rule over His entire creation, thereby bringing to completion His original plan for creating man.

Since Satan, the god-king of this present world, usurped man's reigning authority and has held it for such a long time, how are we to regain our lost authority? Plainly the only way it can be done is as our gracious Lord told us, "How can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (Matt. 12:29). This is exactly why Christ came to suffer death, "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). As a Chinese idiom says, "If you want a tiger cub, you must go into the tiger's den," so Christ did battle with sin and Satan in order to win back our lost reigning authority so that later we might enter into glory with Him (Heb. 2:10). Another Scripture says, "when He appears, we shall be like Him" (1 John 3:2). "We shall be like Him" is to be like His glorious body (Phil. 3:21), like Him sitting on the throne (Rev. 3:21) and like Him "reign[ing] forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5). All these promises refer to the glory of the coming Kingdom and are the ultimate goal of the gracious Lord's salvation. Praise the Lord!

#### **D. The Kingdom Is the Main Theme of the Preaching of Both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ**

Without any biblical authority whatsoever, one precept commonly taught in churches is that the purpose of believing in Jesus is to go to heaven. While this idea is widely accepted in today's churches, nowhere does the Bible make such a claim. Can you show me even one Scripture verse that states that the purpose for believing in Jesus is to go to heaven? You will not find a single one. This does not mean that there is no heaven or that believers will not go there. Certainly heaven exists or else the angels would have no place to call home. To believe in Jesus allows one to go home to heaven, but the main purpose for believing Jesus is not to acquire a heavenly home.

The first step is the most important one in whatever we do. As the saying goes, "A good start is halfway there." However, if the first step is headed in the wrong direction, then we will end up at the wrong destination. The Chinese churches headed in the wrong way when they vigorously proclaimed the message, "Sinners should believe in Jesus in order to go to heaven." Such a message enhances believers' natural selfishness. Since, the first step of such teaching is made to benefit self, subsequent steps will be self-centered as well. Such Christians live only for themselves rather than for the Lord who died and rose again from the dead for them.

"The Bible says that by believing in Jesus, one shall have eternal life. And eternal life is heaven," is another idea that heads in the wrong direction. This kind of misinterpretation of the Bible is enough to make one weep. Eternal life as referred to here is clearly life that is forever, but it certainly is talking about God's life, not a place. All life on earth is temporal and only God's life is eternal. The Scriptures explain that the unbelievers can obtain this eternal life instantly. The moment a sinner believes in Jesus, he instantly receives God's eternal life. He does not have to wait until his coffin lid is nailed shut to go to heaven to get life. It is sad but true that this kind of misinterpretation has done serious damage to multitudes of people. May the Lord have mercy upon us.

**What then IS the ultimate purpose of believing in Jesus?** Let us see how God revealed this to us through the teachings of both John the Baptist and Christ.

**1. John the Baptist: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand."** The New Testament opens with the genealogy and birth of Jesus Christ, in fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, "I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you" (Gen. 17:6). Jesus Christ is also the One whom God promised to David, "I will establish the throne of His Kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:13). Following this same theme the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, "He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:33). But before Jesus, the One who is to receive the throne of David and "reign over the house of Jacob forever," began His public ministry, His precursor, John the Baptist, came preaching, "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2).

The Greek word for "at hand" is often translated as "approached" and can refer to time-nearness as in "when the harvest time approached" (Matt. 21:34) or to distance-closeness as in "when they had approached Jerusalem" (Matt. 21:1). So the phrase "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" points out not only that the time of the coming of the Kingdom is near, it also points out that the location of the Kingdom is very close.

Since the Kingdom is near in time and close in location, it is important to understand the Holy Spirit's insistence upon repentance if we are to enter in. Repentance is not regret. Regret is a kind of self-correction and self-blaming when one discovers after the fact that he should not have done this or that. A good example of regret is David's action after he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe, and his conscience began to bother him (1 Sam. 24:5-6). Neither should repentance be confused with remorse which is an encounter with failure leading to a loss of self-confidence, as when Judas felt remorse "and he went away and hanged himself" (Matt. 27:5). Repentance is an inner change accomplished by an operation of the Spirit of God, just as the Scriptures say: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you" (Ezek. 36:26). So true repentance can never be generated by either man's actions or his thought processes. It is a masterpiece wrought by God to create a change within man's heart. John the Baptist understood that repentance, an internal change, was required to admit man into God's Kingdom. He did not seem, however, to know what could produce such a change. So he recommended that the crowd make certain modifications in their behavior (See Luke 3:7-14). Since mere behavioral alterations do not bring about an internal change of heart, John's mission included "telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus" (Acts 19:4). So in order to be complete, the Kingdom message preached by John required Jesus' word to perfect it.

**2. Jesus: "The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the gospel."** The Scriptures tell us that Jesus came to Galilee to preach the gospel of God. Besides saying "The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent" Jesus also added, "and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). The last part was not included in John's message, but Jesus knew that a genuine modification in behavior must be preceded by a change of heart. One cannot bring about a change of heart by his own effort. It requires external assistance—belief in the gospel which is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). The death and resurrection of Christ give the gospel its great power (1 Cor. 15:1-4). He suffered death, was resurrected, ascended into heaven, and was exalted as a Prince and Savior in order to grant mankind a repentant heart and the grace of forgiveness (See Acts 5:30-31). Thus the gospel is that which the almighty One alone has accomplished for us so that we can have life through believing in Him. To believe the gospel is not just getting baptized and joining a church nor is it merely participating in church activities. Rather it is the attitude manifested when we receive an honored guest—respectfully inviting Jesus to come into our hearts to live. Only when Jesus is received to live inside our lives are we counted as having believed in the gospel and as having fulfilled the requirement to enter into the Kingdom of Preparation—the people of His body, the Church.

From the very beginning of His ministry, the Savior Himself proclaimed the message of the Kingdom. He continued to spread the truth about it by instructing the twelve disciples to preach that "the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 10:7). When He sent the seventy disciples out in pairs, He also told them to preach t, "the Kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:9). One night, a Jewish official named Nicodemus came to visit Him, and Jesus used the opportunity to tell him how to enter into the present Kingdom of God (John 3:1-8). Another time, an aunt of Jesus brought her two sons and asked if He would allow them to be the Kingdom's personnel. Jesus used that occasion to teach that those who desire such an honor must be trained even as He was trained

(Matt. 20:20-28). Alone with the disciples on the Mount of Olives, He clearly told them that the end would come only after the good news of the Kingdom had been proclaimed to the whole world (Matt. 24:3, 14). When the thief on the cross asked Him if he could enter the Kingdom, He only promised him that he could enter paradise (Luke 23:43). Every time He appeared to the disciples after His resurrection, in the 40 days before His ascension, He spoke of the “things concerning the Kingdom” (Acts 1:3). Thus the importance of the Kingdom in Jesus’ thinking and preaching is obvious.

Of the 162 times the word “Kingdom” is used in the New Testament, approximately 75 percent of the time it was spoken by our Lord, demonstrating what was constantly on His mind. In these last days, however, the church has almost completely forgotten about the Kingdom and Jesus’ emphasis upon it. As a result believers lack an ultimate objective and hope for their present service and the church has no power to motivate God’s people. The majority of Christians reason, “I am going to heaven no matter what. It does not matter whether or not I am faithful to either God’s work or to His command. So why should I rise early, go to bed late, and spend all my waking hours doing God’s pleasure rather than my own thing?” It is not too late for the Chinese churches (and all others too) to see the truth about the Kingdom and to recognize that being born again is not an end in itself but only the means to accomplish God’s purpose for believers from the beginning, that is, to rule over His Kingdom (Gen. 1:26). May God grant that we not only be called to salvation from sin, but that we be chosen by Him to be Kingdom personnel. May we not rest content to possess eternal life, but also present ourselves to be trained to be personnel of the coming Kingdom of God. Then we can fulfill our heavenly Father’s expectation and love for us and pray in utmost sincerity and expectancy, “Thy Kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10).

### **E. God Created the Eternal Kingdom for Us Because of His Love**

Whenever I proclaim God’s Word concerning His Kingdom, some in the audience always think that this message is either too hard to understand or too good to be true. Perhaps they exaggerate because they feel that fallen man is not worthy to enjoy such a wonderful blessing. “How can the glorious Almighty Lord allow insignificant man to take part in His reign?” they reason.

Some elderly sisters once said to their pastor’s wife, “What the Pastor preaches is too good! We are not worthy. If we could just sweep the floor in heaven that would be good enough.” In reality, if heaven needs to be swept, there are angels who could do a better job than we can. But God has designated us, not the angels, to run His coming Kingdom. Unfortunately, these eternal truths never become reality for the majority of believers because they either disregard or drastically misinterpret the Scriptures.

God created the Eternal Kingdom for us because He loves us. Genuine love is characterized by three things: extension, an object and an action. Extension means that love cannot be enjoyed solely for one’s own personal gratification or pleasure, but must be shared with an object. The object of one’s love can be a person, a thing, an object, an ideology, a faith, or something similar. In short, love generates an action toward its object. We might say that love is an expression or activity of grace toward the beloved object. God’s love needs to be extended beyond Himself. Who then is the object of God’s extended love? The most common answer is man because the Scriptures say,

“God so loved [the people of] the world.” God’s love, however, is as eternal as God; so before man was made, whom did God love? Thanks be to our gracious Lord for saying to the heavenly Father, “Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24). Thus from Christ’s Own words, we understand that in eternity there is love between the Father and the Son. Now, since genuine love must have action, what is the action of the Father to the Son? The Scriptures tell us, “The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand” (John 3:35). No wonder the Scriptures say again, “All things have been created by Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16) and yet again, “His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). Clearly, God had created all things for His Son’s inheritance: the earth, the universe, and especially the world to come, that is, the coming Kingdom of God (See Heb. 2:6-10). Moreover, all believers who consistently remain faithful to God’s will for their lives should have the hope that they too will eat and drink in the Kingdom of God as co-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Praise God!

The Father loves the Son. The Son does not monopolize His Father’s love but extends it to us, saying “Just as the Father has loved me, I have also loved you” (John 15:9). We often think that the gracious Lord loves us only because He pities us. Amazingly, however, the love the Son extends to us is the same as the Father’s love toward Him. Since His love is the Father’s love, the action of His love toward us is the same as that of His Father toward Him. Therefore He said, “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as My Father conferred one on me” (Luke 22:29, NIV). These two words “just as” really cause us to bow down and worship God over and over again. Christ’s exceedingly abundant love toward us is the reason God grants us the Kingdom. It is neither mysterious nor an exaggeration. Thank God, the universe was created for Him, but also for us. The Father desired that He inherit all things and that we should also inherit all things with and through Him (See Rom. 8:16-17). Since Christ has such a high regard for us, how can we disappoint Him by failing to get ready for the Kingdom that He has prepared for us? To get ready for the coming Kingdom of God, we must first be converted through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Chapter III. Entrance Requirements for the Present Kingdom of Preparation**

The present Kingdom of Preparation began at creation when God created Adam for a definite purpose. Genesis, however, tells a story of man's repeated failures to meet the conditions God set for participation in His Kingdom. Adam's was the first failure, followed by Cain's when he murdered Abel, and the descendants of Seth failed so miserably that God destroyed them in the flood. God found Noah righteous but his descendants proved to be hopeless in the performance of the business of the Kingdom of Preparation. Then God chose Abraham and his descendants, the Israelites. The rest of the Old Testament recounts their unhappy history that reached its lowest point in the New Testament when they threw Him who had inherited the Kingdom "out of the vineyard and killed Him." For this reason, the Kingdom of God was taken away from them and given "to a nation producing the fruit of it" (Matt. 21:37-43), that is, the church (See Rom. 9:25-26, 11:17-24)<sup>3</sup>.

Someone might ask, "Can I become a member of the church? And, if so, how?"

Our Lord gave two conditions to become a member of the church—Christ's body, the people of the present Kingdom of Preparation—when He said, "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Therefore, our reply is, "Repentance and faith are the only conditions required for you to become the personnel of the present Kingdom of Preparation."

### **A. Repentance: From the Viewpoint of the Old and New Testaments**

Earlier we established that repentance is neither regret nor remorse, but an internal change wrought by God in a man's heart. In the Old Testament our understanding of the meaning of repentance is expanded by the frequent use of the expression to "turn back." As Ephraim said, "For after I turned back, I repented" (Jer. 31:19). This kind of "turning back" was not only used by God to call the Israelites to repentance, as in "Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 33:11). It was also used by the Israelites themselves to express their own repentance, as in "Bring me back that I may be restored" (Jer. 31:18). This kind of "turning back" certainly includes a change of heart and a new arrangement of life and character, that is, forsaking sin and returning to righteousness. Even though this kind of change is God's command to us, in reality, it still requires God's compassion and intervention just like Elijah's prayer on Mount Carmel, "That this people may know that . . . Thou hast turned their hearts back" (1 Kin. 18:37). The fact that sinners must forsake their sins although God is the One who really turns them back by giving them a clean and new heart is clearly set

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<sup>3</sup> G. E. Ladd notes, "The Kingdom was offered to Israel (Matt. 10:5-6), who because of their previous covenantal relationship to God were 'sons of the Kingdom' (Matt. 8:12)—its natural heirs. However, the offer of the Kingdom in Christ was made on an individual basis in terms of personal acceptance (Mark 3:31-35; Matt. 10:35-37) rather than in terms of the family of nation. Because Israel rejected the Kingdom, it was taken away and given to a different people (Matt. 21:43), the church." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1984), 611.

forth also in Ezekiel's message to Israel. From a negative standpoint, God wanted to cleanse them from all their filthiness, saying "I will sprinkle clean water in you, and you will be clean" (Ezek. 36:25). From a positive standpoint, He wanted to **grant them a new heart** and put a new spirit within them. This was God's intention when He said, "I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). This positive change is what the Lord Jesus spoke of as repentance. Thus repentence not only reaches God-ward but is also God-given.

In the New Testament, repentance (*metanoia*) is a combination of two words: the preposition *meta* meaning "change or alter," as used in metamorphosis (change in shape) and the noun *nous*, a feminine form of the word *nous* meaning "mind." There is no appropriate Chinese word for *nous* and English has no exact equivalent either. The word *nous* appears 24 times in the New Testament. Although it is translated four times as the mental understanding of our minds (1 Cor. 14:14-15, 19); in most instances, the *nous* (mind) refers directly or indirectly to the function of our spiritual nature as in the following verses: "[Jesus] opened their minds [*nous*] to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 24:45); "But I see a different law in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind [*nous*]"; "I myself with my mind [*nous*] am serving the law of God" (Rom 7: 23, 25); and "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind [*nous*]'" (Rom. 12:2). So the word repentance is formed from two words meaning "change" and "mind" (or heart). To enter the Kingdom of Preparation requires changed hearts and minds. The thoughts and desires of the person who has truly believed in Jesus have been changed—turned back from evil and turned toward God. External ceremonies such as baptism, confirmation, the Lord's Supper or church membership alone cannot produce any spiritual fruit or results. Unless the individual is changed internally the external ceremonies are only a form of misleading self-gratification..

"But we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves. It is the gift of God and not of any works whatsoever. So why do we need to repent in order to enter the Kingdom?" bursts from the lips of some good church-goers.

It is true that our gracious Lord does not expect us to be born again by our own efforts. The word "repent" in the original language is in the present tense, active voice and imperative mood, which at first glance might seem to contradict the truth that salvation is solely by faith. This is an example of how His truth is often expressed, as those who are well versed in the Bible and God's heart know. Often in Scripture God demands that we do what we cannot possibly accomplish on our own. On the one hand He commands that we do, and on the other He prepares the grace that enables us to do what He commands. When we discover our helplessness and humbly approach His throne of grace, He gives us the objective grace that He has prepared for us, which then empowers us to appropriate His promises as our subjective possession and enjoyment. Praise the Lord!

Have you noticed that all sorts of religions have in common the idea that their followers need to have their hearts and minds changed? Buddhism demands self-denial and discipline. Islam requires good works in order to gain merit. Confucianism investigates and studies things in order to gain knowledge, to create sincerity in thought, to rectify the heart, to cultivate the person, to regulate the family, to govern the states and then to rule the world. However, all these gigantic human efforts cannot produce the

slightest spiritual change. We know that our hearts are not right and are fully aware of how important it is to change the heart, but we simply are unable to do so. Thank God, He came to our rescue! Repentance is a gift fitted to meet our need. He demands a change of heart, but He also knows that we are unable to accomplish this by our own efforts. Therefore, through His death, resurrection, and ascension, our Prince and Savior freely provided access to the repentance that we must have (Acts 5:31) in order to change our hearts and thereby qualify us for entrance into the Kingdom of Preparation.

“But HOW can I acquire a changed heart?” cries the longing soul, to which Jesus answers, “Believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).

### ***B. Faith: Personally Receiving the Biblical Christ into Our Hearts***

The gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” because it is what the almighty God has done for us (Rom. 1:16). For instance, through Christ’s death our sins have been forgiven, and Satan, who once held the power of death, has been defeated. Then through Christ’s resurrection we can have resurrected life, which is God’s life, and authority to become God’s children. In a word, all that He Himself accomplished on our behalf is the gospel (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Christ Himself is the gospel. Therefore, when we believe on and receive the Lord Jesus Christ, we partake of the gospel which is the power of God for salvation. Praise the Lord!

Since the verb “to believe” is rather abstract, some think that to believe in Jesus is to marvel at Him, to agree with Him or to respect Him. But they are just using methods borrowed from other religions to “believe” in Jesus. To believe in Christ is far more than such superficial actions. The Scriptures clearly define believe: to receive Him is to believe in His name (John 1:12). To “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved” (Acts 16:31) gives the same results as believing “the gospel . . . which also you received . . . by which also you are saved” (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

Therefore, to believe in Christ is to invite Jesus into our hearts which brings us gospel salvation. This is the only way. Any other kind of “believe” only leads to a dead end and self-deception. Believing faith is receiving Jesus into our hearts. To understand what is meant by “receiving Jesus” consider this example. When we expect to entertain friends or family as guests in our homes, we vacuum the floor, sweep the patio, wash the windows, and tidy the guest room. We clean the house to make our guests feel welcome. To neglect these preparations would be inhospitable. In like manner we need to make preparations before we invite Jesus to come into our hearts. We must tell Jesus about all the garbage in our hearts: all unclean and unrighteous thoughts and actions, our mistreatment of people and actually all the sins we can remember in as much detail as possible. He willingly bears them for us, removing all the sins we give Him to “a solitary land” in order to set us free from the power of sin (Lev. 16:15, 21-22). When our hearts have been cleansed by confession of sins (1 John 1:9), we must say to Him sincerely, “Jesus, please come into my heart and be my Lord.” The gracious Lord has never rejected any who sincerely invite Him in. He immediately enters into anyone who so opens his heart, changing the very desires of his inmost being. Praise the Lord for the wonderful salvation He gives when He changes our hearts and thereby fulfills the requirements for us to enter the Kingdom of Preparation. Hallelujah!

Many years ago, a revival meeting was held in the central part of China. A Wheaton College graduate was the local high school English teacher there. He came to the meetings every night and was deeply touched by the message. However, one thing puzzled him very much—every evening the speaker always invited people to receive Jesus as Savior. The speaker would say,

“Friends, Jesus is knocking at the door of your heart. Please open the door to your heart and invite Him in.”

Finally, one night, the teacher decided to ask the speaker, “What do you mean ‘to open the door of your heart?’”

“That is a very simple thing,” the speaker said when he understood the question. Learning that the teacher had no roommate, the speaker continued, “Excellent. After you go home tonight, close your door, kneel down and say sincerely to God: ‘God, I am very willing to open the door of my heart so that you can come in. Only I do not know how to open my heart’s door. Please help me.’ Are you willing?”

Agreeing, the teacher returned home and prayed as instructed. Later, he gave this testimony to describe the wonderful things that happened to him, saying,

“When I knelt down to pray, I did not understand why there was a very heavy load pressing upon my heart. Suddenly, I started to confess my sins one by one, which was not what I anticipated. As I continued to confess my sins, a bright light shone into my heart and began to disperse all the darkness gathered there. The more I confessed, the brighter my heart became. After I had finished confessing my sins, I invited Jesus to come into my heart. By this one action, all my burdens, darkness and emptiness vanished. God’s love filled my heart and I experienced a peace and joy that I have never known before.”

Thus he experienced firsthand that God’s promise, even the promise of salvation, cannot be possessed and enjoyed until God’s conditions (repentance and faith) are met. Before he repented and believed, God’s promise of salvation remained just a promise, heard about but not possessed. But as soon as he met His demands, God’s promise of salvation became the teacher’s immediate possession.

Have you experienced such a change in your life? If not, hand over to Jesus all that you have done wrong against both God and man. Jesus will remove it all. Then invite Jesus into your heart. He will illuminate and renew your mind (*nous*), that part of your spiritual nature that enables you to know and understand the things of God. Such renewal brought about by repentance and faith will change your thoughts and give you new desires and will answer your deepest questions about life.

### **C. A Changed Mind: The Result of Repentance and Faith**

A changed mind is brought about by conversion and regeneration. Conversion (turning) involves: **repentance**, a turning from self and sin and **faith**, a turning to God. This results in regeneration, God’s renewing and transforming the sinner’s darkened mind (heart) by the Spirit of God (Titus 3:5) and the Word of God (1 Pet. 1:23). The Spirit of God is at work constantly during both processes drawing the unsaved to Himself (John 6:44).

As previously explained, mind (*nous*) refers to spiritual understanding, as in Luke 24:45, “Then He opened their minds [*nous*] to understand the Scriptures.” Therefore, *nous* usually refers to that part of our spiritual nature that enables us to understand the things of God. It was given at man’s creation and is a part of every individual.

**1. The Darkening of Our Mind (*Nous*), That Is, of Our Spiritual Understanding.** When Adam was first created, the function of his *nous* was normal, active and sharp. He could continually fellowship face to face with God. But after Adam’s sin, mankind intentionally refused to acknowledge and do the things that were commanded by God as right conduct. Their spiritual nature (*nous*) “was darkened” (Rom. 1:21) and God “gave them over to a depraved mind [*nous*] to do those things which are not proper” (Rom. 1:28). When God allowed mankind to follow their depraved minds, Satan then stepped in and assumed control, by “blind[ing] the minds of the unbelieving” with the result “that they [could] not see the light [imparted by] the gospel” (2 Cor. 4:4). Because Satan robbed mankind of its spiritual understanding, the whole world of mankind now lies under his authority and control (1 John 5:19).

Hence, it is not that mankind does not have a *nous*, but that both “their mind [*nous*] and conscience are defiled” (Titus 1:15). That is, the *nous* has lost its normal function and as a result the Scriptures declare “There is none righteous [meeting God’s standard], not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God” (Rom. 3:10-11). Therefore, with his *nous* and conscience defiled and darkened by sin, Satan and the world, what hope does man have that he can know God and possess His life and presence?

**2. Salvation Restores the Function of Our *Nous*, Which Then Enables Us to Understand the Things of God.** All religions recognize that man’s heart (mind or *nous*) needs to be cured. But not one of them has found the appropriate medicine to treat, let alone cure, this sickness. Therefore, they treat only the symptoms, but treating symptoms can never cure the illness. For this reason the Son of God came to save the people of the world. He is the only One who has the correct medication to cure their fatal illness. Salvation is the only way to restore the damaged function of man’s *nous*. Scripture tells us, “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding [*dianoia*], in order that we might know Him who is true” (1 John 5:20). *Dianoia* (*nous* with the prefix *dia*) refers to the function of our *nous* or spiritual nature. Jesus Christ was born not only that He might solve our sin problem, but far more important, that He might cause us to know both the only true God and Him whom God has sent (John 17:3), by giving us spiritual understanding, that is, a renewed mind.

While false religions know that man’s heart (*nous*) is degenerate, they do not know why. Only Christ understands that this problem of the heart’s degeneration results from a failure in the function of spiritual understanding (*dianoia*) caused by sin. When people allow Him to enter into their hearts, or in other words “receive Him,” He at that time restores the spiritual function of their *nous*, as the Scriptures teach, “To open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18). This renewed function not only lets man know God but also makes him willing to obey God’s laws joyfully, as the gracious Lord told us, “I will put My laws into their minds [*dianoia*]” (Heb. 8:10). The lives of many people have changed by 180 degrees when they believed in the Lord. After they have come to know the Lord, their knowledge

of God and their discernment of what is right and wrong are so different than they were before that one would think they were two different people. This is the effect that the newly restored function of the *nous* has on an individual. Praise the Lord!

At the end of 1977, the following event occurred as I was speaking at a winter conference in the southern United States. There were not enough counselors available, so the conference speakers were drafted for this duty, and several students from the Far East were sent to my cabin for counseling. One was a graduate student in chemistry from Hong Kong. He entered my cabin and immediately asked,

“Did you say that if any person is willing to invite Jesus into his heart, Jesus can change his heart’s desire?”

“Yes, I certainly did say that,” was my reply. He shook his head and said,

“It’s impossible. It is too mysterious, too profound.”

“The gospel is profound and wonderful; if it were not, it would have perished long ago.” Silence prevailed for about ten seconds before he asked,

“You did say that if I am willing to accept Jesus into my heart, Jesus can change my heart’s desire and thoughts?”

“Yes, that is what I said and I can guarantee it,” was my confident statement. After a few more seconds of quiet thought; he asked me the same question; and I answered him in the same manner, but added a challenge,

“Would you dare take a chance?”

He thought about it before courageously replying, “Yes, I will take a chance.”

“Excellent,” I said, “then pray after me. As I pray a sentence, you repeat it.” In this manner, I led him in prayer to repent of his sins and invite Jesus into his heart. After we prayed, I felt that it would be better if he would invite Jesus into his heart without prompting. So I said,

“The way we invited Jesus into your heart was not very courteous, would you personally invite Him in?”

“Do you want me to pray?” he asked, and then added, “I don’t know how.”

“Oh, just close your eyes and open your mouth to pray and see if the Holy Spirit will lead you to pray or not.” After consideration he agreed to pray. His prayer was like that of a believer of many years. It was excellent! He was not bashful but admitted his sins to God, even in my presence. In conclusion, he invited Jesus into his heart. Afterwards, I asked him,

“Where is Jesus now?” Most people would have answered, “In my heart.” But he did not say that. Instead he raised his head and said,

“This is really wonderful, for even the color of the lights in the room has changed.” The color of the lights had not changed, but his *nous* (mind) had been changed.

At salvation our *nous* is changed by repentance and faith. Afterwards, however, we believers must maintain a renewed mind (*nous*) by keeping our spiritual understanding pure and clean through prayer, righteous conduct, and obedience to God’s Word.

Otherwise, we will find ourselves falling into the sins of Second Timothy 3 by becoming lovers of self.

**3. Christians Need to “Pray That the Eyes of [Our] Heart May Be Enlightened, So That [We] May Know” (Eph. 1:18).** We have seen that the main function of our *nous* is toward God, the Word of God and everything that belongs to God and is equivalent to the “understanding” mentioned in Psalm 119. The psalmist prayed, “**Give me understanding** that I may observe Thy law,” and “**Give me understanding** that I may know Thy testimonies” (Ps. 119: 34, 125, emphasis added). When functioning normally our *nous* (spiritual nature) allows us to think about the amazing things of God, know God’s law, hear and be able to receive a sermon, and then to bear fruit for the glory of God. So most of the time *nous* refers to our spiritual understanding. But if our *nous* is darkened by sin, our communication with God is hindered which leads to frequent hearing without understanding and frequent seeing with no knowledge gained.

As an example, before Jesus opened the *nous* of His disciples, they were quite ignorant spiritually and exceedingly stubborn, not even able to understand the miracle of the five loaves and two fishes at the feeding of the 5,000 (Mark 6:52). When Jesus prophesied that He would be killed and on the third day rise again, they did not comprehend His plain words. His chief lieutenant, Peter, did not believe that He should go to Jerusalem and die for the sins of the world (Matt. 16:21-23). As a group the apostles did not understand who Elijah was as he was foretold in the Old Testament (Matt. 17:10-13). It was only when Jesus had been resurrected and opened their minds (*nous*) that they could understand the Scriptures (Luke 24:44-45).

When the *dianoia* (function of the *nous*) is darkened, it turns from communion with God and begins to walk in futility. It causes the Christian to wander aimlessly without spiritual desire or goals, muddling through life without understanding much about the things of God. This condition leads to spiritual ignorance and hardness of heart so that the conscience is imprisoned and lust is liberated to greedily practice all kinds of impurity. A darkened *nous* leads a believer to ask about a certain need or goal “Do I want it?” and not “Is it right?” This state of spirituality is exactly what we see and hear today both in society and in much of the church. As believers, God admonishes us to live no longer as unbelievers live “in the futility of their mind [*nous*], being darkened in their understanding [*dianoia*]” (Eph. 4:17-18).

How can we as Christians avoid being darkened in our understanding and have the eyes of our heart enlightened so that we can know, practice and enjoy the things of God? The next chapter will show that we accomplish this by entering the narrow gate (dedication) and by walking the narrow road (living according to God’s will for us daily).

## **Chapter IV. How Believers Become the Personnel of the Coming Kingdom of God**

Once the spiritual function of our *nous* has been restored, “we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Gradually, our lifestyle will become like that of Christ. But at the same time, wars will begin to rise within us. The “law in the members of the body” (old

authority) will fight for dominance with the “law of the mind” (new authority of the *nous*) (Rom. 7:23). On many occasions, the old authority will win; but this is the road to spiritual maturity. As long as we rely on the Lord who is the author and perfecter of our faith and believe in Him who began a good work in us, He will carry that good work on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ (Phil. 1:6). Those of us who experience this truth will eventually bear the fruit of peace, which is righteousness or reaching God’s standard. However, in the event we become enamored with the world instead of Christ and our mind again becomes set on the flesh (Rom. 8:6), it is still possible for us to be taken captive by the old authority. This is why the Scriptures said, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free” (Rom. 7:24). Also, quite often some become “inflated without cause by his **fleshy mind**,” which is the *nous* controlled by the flesh (Col. 2:18, emphasis added). In the end, these are the ones who are “always learning and never able to come to full knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7, retranslated). To gain the advantage over our old authority, our *nous* must daily be transformed and renewed by fulfilling the basic requirement which enables believers to become Kingdom personnel: entering by the narrow gate (dedication) and walking the narrow way (God’s will).

#### **A. How to Identify the Personnel of the Eternal Kingdom**

The majority of commentators and expositors view Matthew 7:13 and 14 as statements of the gospel message given exclusively for the salvation of sinners. Years ago in Shanghai, a poster entitled “Broad and Narrow Ways” was widely used by missionaries in China. It showed a narrow way leading up to a beautiful golden city and a broad way leading down to a horrible lake of fire. This poster was based on careless biblical interpretation, however, which ignored the context and concentrated on the phrases “narrow gate” and “narrow way.” An often ignored principle in Bible study is: Whenever reading the Bible, one must ignore all traditional interpretations and any previous mind set which tends to influence one’s thinking. Regard the passage as brand new, as if never seen before. Then new enlightenment from the Lord can be received and the reality of God’s Word be seen. In these verses the subject of the verb “enter” is “you” (second person, plural number) but to identify “you” requires a careful reading of the entire passage of Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Reading the passage as a whole one readily discovers that Christ’s sermon on the mount is really the constitution of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, proclamations to the citizens of the Kingdom. Every “you” refers to people who are addressed in the verse “for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 5:3, 10). They are also the salt of the earth and light of the world. God is their “Father who art in heaven” (Matt. 6:9). In addition, they are to be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect. They also need to know how to pray, how to fast, and why they are to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness. The Lord has also promised them that if they ask (often), it will be given to them and if they seek (again and again), they shall find. Moreover, the beginning of this constitution clearly states, “His disciples came to Him. And opening His mouth, He began to teach them” (Matt. 5:1-2). So, “you” in Matthew 7:13-14 refers to all those who follow the Master, that is, those who desire to be His disciples and to train themselves to be Kingdom personnel.

At the end of the constitution, His disciples are warned about some who can prophesy, cast out demons and perform many miracles. They are believers who also practice lawlessness (commit iniquity), and therefore, they are not qualified to become Kingdom personnel nor will the Lord acknowledge them as such. They will have no part in the coming Kingdom of Inheritance (Matt. 7:22-23). They “shall suffer loss; but [they themselves] shall be saved, yet so as through fire” (1 Cor 3:15).

Some may ask how it is possible that someone who can prophesy, cast out demons and perform many miracles would not be qualified to be Kingdom personnel or would not be acknowledged by the Lord. This certainly is a good question about an obvious problem. The immoral lives exhibited by some preachers in their mature years of ministry may result from their failure to realize that just because God blesses their work does not necessarily mean that they have met His standard to be personnel in His Kingdom. The preacher should have heavenly abilities (gifts) and should be both called and sent by God to occupy a position granted to him by the Lord. Since God is faithful to His Word and plans, His gifts and calling are irrevocable (See Rom. 11:29). He does not take back the position He grants to those He calls even when they develop a flawed character. He honors the gift He has given, and in spite of the poor spiritual lives of some preachers, for the sake of His name and of His church, frequently He will still make His work bear fruit. Unfortunately, some preachers observe that their work is blessed even though they sin (are greedy for money, fleshly desires and fame); so they presume that God must be very generous and will allow them to commit some sins. “If not,” they think, “why are God’s blessings upon us so abundantly?” Once this happens, however, Satan will enter into their hearts, as in Judas’ case, shaping religious workers to suit his purposes according to their weaknesses. Some consumed by lust pride themselves in captivating weak women. Other pastors, though personally not given to such immorality themselves, nevertheless will not rebuke well-known members of their congregations who publicly captivate weak women. In fact, they often go out of their way to make excuses for such flagrant adulterers, not caring that such an attitude both cheapens the grace and lowers the biblical standard of repentance given by the great God who calls us to salvation and who also calls us to be pure and godly. Some are so greedy for money that they rob their own members under the guise of various church projects<sup>4</sup>. There are others who desire fame so much that they will do anything to achieve it. Still others want academic degrees so badly that they stoop so low as to buy them. Such workers do not know that their works and their character are independent entities. Neither do they know that the LORD is Lord and that He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. It is frightening to see pastors play with fire by acting this way. May God in mercy open their eyes to their danger. In summary, the fact that God blesses one’s ministry in spite of personal lawlessness is not a sign of God’s approval; for when Christ returns, such a worker will hear His words, “I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23).

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<sup>4</sup> A historical illustration by F. F. Bruce notes how “A public scandal within the Jewish community in A.D. 19 brought about its expulsion from Rome by decree of the Emperor Tiberius. Four Jews persuaded a wealthy Roman proselyte, Fulvia by name, to make a munificent gift to the Jerusalem Temple but they misappropriated it.” *Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), 380.

“Knew” is one of those words that has multiple meanings in the original language. Here in Matthew 7:23 it signifies “acknowledge, recognize.”<sup>5</sup> Jesus is telling those to whom He has given gifts to preach, to cast out demons, and even to perform miracles that they must exercise their gifts according to the will of God. When they perform His ministry in their own way or for their own benefit, they will be described as ones who practice lawlessness. God may make their ministry fruitful to honor His gift; but when such lawless ones appear before the judgment seat of Christ they will receive not praise but His condemnation, “I neither acknowledge nor recognize your works. They are hay, wood and stubble which will be burned as they are tried by fire because they will be found wanting. In this burning, you ‘shall suffer loss; but [you yourself] shall be saved.’” (1 Cor. 3:15). Why should God allow Christians who refuse to accept His training and guidelines now to rule over His eternal Kingdom? He will not. They shall be excluded from the eternal Kingdom of God with the words, “Depart from Me, I never acknowledged or recognized your works.”

If we find ourselves in this condition, let us repent at once while there is still opportunity. These words of our Lord, however, should be an encouragement to faithful workers to continue to be steadfast. Those who become Kingdom personnel are those believers who do not practice lawlessness but through steadfast dedication devote themselves to follow the will of God.

### **B. The Basic Requirement for Believers to Become Kingdom Personnel**

Our Lord revealed that as believers we are faced with two gates: one narrow and the other wide (Matt. 7:13-14). We are also faced with two ways: narrow and broad. We must enter by one gate or the other and walk on one road or the other. Our Lord desires that we enter by the narrow gate and walk on the narrow way. If we do not, we will by default enter by the wide gate into the broad way, with the result that, failing to do the will of God for our lives, we will not be qualified to become Kingdom personnel (Matt. 7:21). To provide direction for those who desire to be chosen as Kingdom personnel, let us consider the negative and positive aspects of the basic requirement.

**1. The Negative Aspect: Failure to Fulfill the Basic Requirement for Kingdom Personnel Leads to Wasted Lives.** Clearly the Lord Jesus wants us to enter by the narrow gate and to walk on the narrow road that leads to life because “broad is the way that leads to destruction and many are those who enter by it” (Matt. 7:13-14). At first glance Jesus’ words seem to tell us that the only reason for us to enter the narrow gate is to avoid eternal destruction. This presents a difficult theological problem: Is salvation obtained by faith in Christ alone or is it also necessary to enter the narrow gate and walk the narrow way? To solve this problem many expositors and commentaries disregard the context and interpret Matthew 7:13-14 as applying to non-believers.

However, a better way to solve the problem is to use the principle of biblical interpretation that words in the original language frequently have more than one meaning. This principle clears up a number of so-called discrepancies or contradictions. In ancient times words had more than one meaning because the people had fewer words to use. As

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<sup>5</sup>W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, “*Ginosko*,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago and Cambridge, 1957), 160 (7)

a result, each word took on several meanings. As civilization grew and aged, more words were added to the vocabulary and the meanings of words became more specific. Because the Bible was written in ancient languages, it is common to find biblical words having more than 10 meanings and some words and phrases even have as many as 70 translations. Therefore, the meaning of each biblical word must be determined from its context and not simply by looking the translated word up in Webster's dictionary. The application of this principle of interpretation avoids much confusion and solves many problems. Now let us examine the original word for destruction and then study its context.

The word "destruction" in Matthew 7:13 is a translation of the noun *apoleia*, which means "waste, destruction, ruin," with the verbal form *apollumi* meaning "to ruin, destroy, lose." The noun *apoleia* occurs one other time in Matthew and denotes the idea of waste or lostness. While Jesus was eating in the house of Simon the Leper, a woman entered and poured a vial of very expensive perfume over His head. His disciples' indignant response to her action was "why this waste [*apoleia*]" (Matt. 26:6-8). Likewise, *apoleia* in Matthew 7:13 should mean "waste" rather than "eternal destruction."

Therefore, those believers who live their Christian lives by entering the broad gate (of little commitment) and walking on the broad way (of disobedience) will waste their lives now and ruin their opportunity to be personnel in God's Coming Kingdom. Even though they will be eternally saved, they shall suffer loss of reward (1 Cor. 3:15). They will shed tears of regret when they see God's good and faithful servants enter into His Kingdom to reign as co-heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ over everything that God has created, while they themselves are excluded (Matt. 25:14-30).

Therefore, the explanation that destruction in Matthew 7:13 means wasted lives of believers must be correct, not only because of the narrow context of this one verse but also because the broad context of Matthew 5, 6, and 7 demands that we interpret the whole passage as applying to Jesus' disciples and not to sinners (Matt. 5:1). If we say that believers may be lost because they are not dedicated, what becomes of the security of our salvation? Uncommitted disciples are like young people who do not apply themselves in school and, as a result, are not trained for a vocation, thus wasting their parents' money and efforts. In the same manner, if we become stiff-necked believers who fail to enter the narrow gate and walk the narrow way, we will waste God's daily grace and His providential involvement in our lives, thereby breaking His heart because we are unwilling to accept what He in love has prepared for us—the Coming Kingdom of God.

Now, what are the wide gate and broad way? We can understand their meaning by looking at the past history of the Jews. God was gracious to them, cared for every aspect of their lives, and wept over them. He delivered them out of the land of Egypt and led them into Canaan, where He subsequently gave them a majestic Holy City, the glorious Temple and a functional priestly system. However, they **did not strive to do God's will**, that is, they **did not walk the narrow way**. Instead, they **stiffened their necks** and did according to their hardened hearts' desires, that is, they **walked the broad way**. They forsook God the source of living water (narrow gate) and carved their own cisterns

(walked the broad way). But those cisterns were cracked and could not hold water. In the end, destruction came upon them (See Jer. 2:11-19).

An individual who walked the broad way with little dedication to Christ might have been Fyodor Dostoyevsky, one of the literary giants of the world, surpassed in Russia only by Leo Tolstoy. At age 25 he wrote his first novel, *Poor Folk*, portraying the contradiction between the inner dignity of Russia's downtrodden masses and their outer wretchedness. He was lionized by the literary critics of his day as a major new literary talent.

A year later, motivated mainly by his strong disapproval of serfdom, he began to meet with a group of dissidents to study French socialist theories. Two years later, on orders from the Tsar, he and other socialist friends were imprisoned. Subsequently a faked death sentence was read to them and they were led to the place of execution. When they thought they had only minutes to live, the Tsar's actual sentence was read—ten years of hard labor. So real was the moment that one of the prisoners went permanently insane on the spot and Dostoyevsky suffered an epileptic seizure.

During his years in a Siberian prison, Dostoyevsky read and reread the only book he had, the New Testament. Many feel that in prison he really met Christ and had his heart changed. Upon leaving prison he wrote to a friend:

I believe that nothing is more beautiful, profound, sympathetic, reasonable, brave, and perfect than Christ. With a jealous love, I say to myself, not only that his equal cannot be found, but that it does not exist. And more, if someone should bring me proof that Christ is outside the truth, then I should prefer to remain with Christ than with the truth.<sup>6</sup>

Of his prison life Dostoyevsky later said, "It was there that I came to see myself clearly and there that I came to understand Christ."<sup>7</sup>

Following his return to civilian life, Dostoyevsky wrote of his prison experience in *The House of the Dead*, followed by *Crime and Punishment* and many other major works, including *The Brothers Karamazov*, which examined minutely with rare philosophical and psychological insight the effect of inherited and manifested sensuality on a father and his three sons and on all with whom they came into contact. Some literary critics have called it the greatest novel ever written. Yet he failed to grow spiritually, largely neglecting the activities that bring commitment and spiritual growth: regular worship, Bible study, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. He married but he also had affairs with numerous mistresses. Compulsive gambling at roulette and excessive drinking wasted his health, destroyed his family life and depleted his finances. He died a pauper at the age of 59.

Dostoyevsky's failure to fulfill God's basic requirement for believers to become Kingdom personnel, daily dedication to practice the will of God, led to a wasted life here and the likelihood of loss at the judgment seat of Christ. He failed to heed God's admonition given through Paul, "I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Cor. 9:27, NIV).

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<sup>6</sup>Geir Kjetsaa, *Fyodor Dostoyevsky, A Writer's Life* (New York, New York: Ballantine Books, 1987), 107.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*,127.

Paul did not fear losing his salvation but feared losing his crown through a lack of discipline, which would lead to his failure to serve God fully and faithfully (See 1 Cor. 3:15). Let him who has ears to hear, hear.

**2. The Positive Aspect: Believers Fulfilling the Basic Requirement to Become Kingdom Personnel Will Be Co-heirs with Christ, Reigning with Him Over Everything God Has Created (Rom. 8:17).** The gracious Lord wants us to enter by the narrow gate in order to lead us to the final stage of eternal life. He said, “For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life<sup>8</sup>, and few are those who find it” (Matt. 7:14). Thus dedication to the will of God, exhibited by entering the narrow gate and walking the narrow way, leads us to life in the Coming Kingdom of God. Moreover, the phrase “few are those who find it [the small gate]” is the key to the whole issue of becoming co-heir with Christ. Many of us have heard these verses or have read them for ourselves. We even acknowledge the importance of entering the small gate of dedication and walking the narrow way of God’s will for our lives, yet relatively few of us upon finding the gate actually enter it. As the Lord said, “Many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt. 22:14). Once again we must consider the question: Is eternal life obtained by believing in Jesus or by entering through the narrow gate and walking on the narrow way? In other words, are there conditions to receiving eternal life? Some might say, “Salvation is by grace through faith but we also need to pay a price!” While this statement seems to be a logical explanation, in reality it is contradictory. “Being freely justified” is necessarily without any conditions, that is, no works are involved, although all must repent and believe. If, however, the performance of works is required, then eternal life is not free. Eternal life is a “free gift of God” (Rom. 6:23) and no price can be set upon it. Thank God, eternal life **is** a gift and anyone who is willing to accept it can enjoy it. We are not called upon to make even a token payment for this priceless gift.

Therefore, how do we resolve this apparent conflict between Matthew 7:14 that we enter into eternal life by dedication and Romans 6:23 which clearly states that eternal life is a free gift? According to the principle we learned earlier, perhaps the term “eternal life” has more than one meaning. Indeed, it does have! It has at least four meanings, although we shall look at only two. The first meaning is **God’s free gift** (Rom. 6:23). As previously mentioned, it is God’s life that He freely gives to us as a present. The second meaning is the **Kingdom of God**, the Coming Kingdom that God prepared for us from the foundation of the world. How do we know that? The Scriptures tell us, “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matt. 25:46). “Eternal punishment” refers to the future “eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Since “eternal life” here requires the action of going or entering into, obviously, it is not a gift. Moreover, the time of punishment for

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<sup>8</sup> That Matthew 7:14 (“the way is narrow that leads to life”) does not refer to the beginning of a believers spiritual life (regeneration) but the end of his life when he enters into the Kingdom of God, so that “Kingdom” and “life” are often synonymous terms, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 188-189; R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 148, who says, “The criterion for entry to the *Kingdom of heaven* (cf. ‘entering into life’ in vv. 13-14 is, as vv. 16ff have shown, practical obedience, not an appeal to Jesus as *Lord*, however, urgent”); Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), notes, “The saying is primarily eschatological,” (p. 67) and “only those who do what God desires will enter the Kingdom of heaven” (p. 69).

the devil and his angels and of entering into eternal life by believers in Matthew chapter 25 is after the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth and judges the nations (Matt. 25:31-32, 46). Now it is theologically certain that we do not receive eternal life into our hearts after Jesus returns, but it is acquired right now by all who repent and receive Him (John 5:24). So entering into eternal life in Matthew 25:46 must refer to something other than the Christian's present possession of God's free gift. From the context of the verse, we know that it is the Kingdom prepared by God from the foundation of the world (Compare Matt. 25:34 with 25:46b). Matthew 19:28-29 teaches the same truth. "You who have followed Me" in verse 28 is identical to "Every one who has left houses" in verse 29. "In the regeneration . . . you also shall sit upon twelve thrones" in verse 28 is indistinguishable from those who "shall receive many times as much, and shall inherit eternal life" in verse 29. Note that inheriting eternal life in verse 29 also occurs after Jesus returns. Therefore, "inherit eternal life" in verse 29 is the same as "sit upon twelve thrones" in verse 28. So the two terms "Kingdom of God" and "life" or "eternal life" are used interchangeably here and in other places. For instance, Jesus in Mark 9:43-45 speaks of "**enter[ing into] life**," but in 9:47 the same event is called "**enter[ing] the Kingdom of God**." Moreover, Jesus is asked in Mark 10:17, "What shall I do to **inherit eternal life?**" And upon the rejection of His instructions, He says in 10:23, "How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to **enter the Kingdom of God.**"<sup>9</sup> Why then is the eternal life that believers get

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<sup>9</sup>Owing to its context, the New Testament term "eternal life" often means the very same thing as the phrase "Kingdom of God." In Matthew, Mark, and Luke this is almost always the case. Although we disagree with his view of Scripture, T. W. Manson (*Teachings of Jesus*, 276) correctly says regarding this point:

They [the *parousia* and judgment] usher in what is described as the Kingdom of God or as "life." The two terms appear to be used interchangeably. Thus, in Mark 9:43-5 Jesus speaks of 'entering into life' and in v. 47 of entering 'the Kingdom of God.' In Mark 10:17 Jesus is asked: 'What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life.' And on the rejection of His counsel He remarks, 'how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God.' These two names we may regard as names for the same thing looked at from two different point of view.

Geerhardus Vos (*The Pauline Eschatology*, 307) likewise notes, "when the disciples feel perplexed about the hardness of the task, Jesus gives an answer in which 'eternal life' is equated to 'the kingdom of heaven.' The latter is meant in precisely the same sense in which the inquirer [the rich young ruler] spoke of entering eternal life." F. F. Bruce (*Romans*, 252) writes, "For Paul, 'the kingdom of God' (as distinct from the present kingdom of Christ) is the future inheritance of the people of God (cf. 1 Cor. 6:9f, 15:50; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; 1 Thes. 2:12; 2 Thes. 1:5); but 'in the Holy Ghost' its blessings can be enjoyed already." In his article "Kingdom of God," (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 111, 1807) James Stalker states, "Again and again, where He [Jesus] might be expected to employ the term 'kingdom of God,' He substituted 'life' or 'eternal life.'" In their article on life (*zoe*), Arndt and Gingrich (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 341, 2BAB) remark that the term "eternal life" is found in John and First John and "is also found in Mt, Mk, Lk, Ac, Ro, Gal, 1 Ti, Tit, Jd, . . . often with unmistakable eschatological [last days] connotation." Also, the terms "life" and "eternal life" are "used of life in the blessed final consummation in the following passages . . . Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30; cf. Mt 19:29; Mk 10:17; cf. Lk 18:18; 10:25; Mt 19:16f; Mt 25:46; see also Ro 2:7. Cf. also Mt 7:14; 18:8f; Mk 9:43, 45; Ro 5:17f, 21; 6:22f." Daniel B. Wallace, "New Testament Eschatology in the Light of Progressive Revelation: Special Focus on the Coming Kingdom ([www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/nteschat](http://www.bible.org/docs/soapbox/nteschat), 3) says, "note that Matthew 25:34 ('inherit the Kingdom') and 25:46 ('The righteous [will enter] into eternal life') are, most naturally, speaking about the same event." George Eldon Ladd (*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 610) writes, "In the Gospels the eschatological salvation is described as entrance into the Kingdom of God (Mark 9:47; 10:24), into the age to come (Mark 10:30), and into eternal life (Mark 9:45; 10:17,30; Matt. 25:46). These three idioms are interchangeable." Bernard Ramm (*Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 132) states that "A study of the entire four Gospels from the standpoint of synonymous expression is also very rewarding. Out of dozens of possible examples we indicate two. Matthew 20:21 speaks of Christ being seated "in His

immediately upon receiving Jesus Christ given the same name as life in the future Kingdom? It must be that God's life that Christians presently enjoy is a foretaste of that future life that is life indeed. Or as God's revelation through Paul puts it, "Command them [believers] to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may **take hold of life that is truly life**" (1 Tim. 6:18-19, NIV). (Emphasis has been added to the verses quoted in this paragraph.)

To summarize, whenever any individual repents of sin and receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, God's life immediately enters him (Rom. 6:23; 10:9-10). This eternal life is received by faith and grace (Eph. 2:8-9), is a present possession (1 John 5:11-12), justifies the guilty (Rom. 5:1, 15-17), regenerates the spiritual life (Titus 3:5), is absolutely devoid of works (Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 2:15-16), was paid for by the substitutionary vicarious atonement of Christ's death on the cross (Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-8, 17-19) and is brought about by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God when the sinner repents and receives Jesus as Savior and Lord (John 3:5-8; 1 Pet. 1:23). This new birth qualifies every believer to be a citizen of the present Kingdom of Preparation. However, according to its context, the term "eternal life" often means life in the future Kingdom of Inheritance gained by each believer **doing his best daily** to obey God's will for him (Matt. 25:14-30), **inherited after** Jesus returns to earth (Matt. 19:25-29), **entered into after** the judgment of the nations (Matt. 25:46), **is taken hold of in the coming age** (1 Tim. 6:18-19) and is something **to attract our hope after salvation** (Titus 3:7). So, contextually, "eternal life" refers either to God's free gift or to the Kingdom He prepared for us from the foundation of the world. Therefore, according to the context, in Matthew 7:14 "eternal life" in the phrase "that leads to life" refers to the Kingdom.

Now that the meaning of eternal life in Matthew 7:14 has been established, there is still an urgent question that needs to be answered. What exactly are the "small gate" and "the narrow way?" For convenience sake, the narrow way will be explained first. The narrow way is what leads people into eternal life; in other words, it is the road into the Kingdom of Inheritance (with eternal life here, as we have just explained, being synonymous with the Kingdom of God). Those taking this road are those "who [do] the will of My Father who is in heaven." This is because the gracious Lord said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). So those believers who walk the narrow way that leads into the Kingdom of God in Matthew 7:14 are identified in 7:21 as those who enter the Kingdom of God because they do "the will of My Father who is in heaven." On that future day, no matter how exalted their status, if they do not walk the narrow path by doing the Father's will in this life, it matters not how excellent is their work; the gracious Lord will not acknowledge them. This would include all who do not walk the narrow way—even preachers, those who can cast out demons, and workers of miracles. The Lord will not allow them, these lawless people, to enter into His Kingdom.

Since **walking the narrow way is doing the Father's will**, we must find the "small gate," or else we will not know where to begin our walk. In other words, we must first

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kingdom," and Mark 10:37 of His being seated "in His glory." "In His kingdom" and "in His glory" are then identical concepts. Matthew 18:9 uses the expression "enter into life" but Mark 9:47 uses the expression "to enter into the kingdom of God." Again the phrases must mean the same thing."

enter by the small gate before we can walk the narrow way, which is doing the will of the Father who is in heaven. What is the small gate? I was unable to understand this for quite a while. Suddenly one day, a voice said to me, “The small gate—the small gate is in Romans, chapter 12!” At first, I was puzzled. Chapter 12 of Romans does not have the phrase “small gate.” After turning it over in my mind again and again, I came to understand that verses one and two define the small gate. Why is that? Paul’s epistles have a certain style; usually the first half of his epistle talks about spiritual life while the second half tells how to live out this life by walking the narrow way. Indeed, the first eight chapters of Romans are about salvation, justification, and sanctification. Chapters 9 through 11 parenthetically emphasize future happenings to both the Jews and the church. Chapter 12 starts to discuss living out what the Holy Spirit emphasized in chapters 1 through 8. Verses one and two in chapter 12 are concerned with living the Christian life, that is, dedication or how to begin walking on the narrow way. This is equivalent to saying: **In order to live a spiritual life, one must begin with personal dedication. THIS IS ENTERING BY THE SMALL GATE.**

In Romans 12:1 we believers are urged by the Holy Spirit through Paul to present ourselves in dedication to God as a living and holy sacrifice. Here the word “present” means “to put ourselves at God’s disposal.” The same word is translated in Acts 23:24 as “provide” (“They were also to provide mounts to put Paul on”), referring to riding animals that were placed at Paul’s disposal for his transportation. When we present ourselves in dedication to God for His service we are “transformed by the renewing of [our] mind” (Rom. 12:2a). Thus dedication renews our spiritual nature (mind or *nous*) which enables us to prove or discover (“to prove” is a translation of *dokimazein*—“to discover, discern”) God’s will, “that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2b).

Unfortunately, few find the small gate of dedication and few of those who find the gate actually go through it permanently. Even fewer are those who, having entered the gate, consistently walk the narrow way by practicing God’s will for their lives. In a word, few believers give themselves daily to serve Jesus Christ in order that they might be trained for the position of personnel in God’s Coming Kingdom! God has saved us and has given us grace upon grace. He did so much for us and now He has only one request. He wants us to enter in by the small gate, that is, to present or dedicate ourselves to Him daily (Rom. 12:1). He knows that if we do not enter in by the small gate, we cannot be transformed by the renewing of our mind (*nous*) (Rom. 12:2a). Also we will not be able to discover what is the will of God, that which is good and acceptable and perfect in order that we might walk the narrow way (Rom. 2:2b). Thus without dedication to the Lord, we cannot even begin the training process to become Kingdom personnel.

In the past, to present oneself as a living sacrifice (dedication) has been misunderstood by Chinese churches. They thought that only the pastors had to present themselves as living sacrifices. They did not understand that to present oneself to the Lord and to be a pastor are two entirely different things. To put ourselves at God’s disposal is the basic daily duty of every believer, in response to Christ’s request that we present ourselves to Him. Just what does it signify “to present ourselves?” Second Corinthians 5:15 says, **“They who live should no longer live for themselves, but for**

**Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” This is presenting ourselves to the Lord and it is the meaning of “dedication!”** To be a full-time preacher, one must be called by God, and also sent by God. If a Christian is unclear about either God’s calling or sending, he should not do anything rash. Otherwise, not only will God not be responsible for his message and actions, He will even object to them, saying “I did not send them or command them, nor do they furnish this people the slightest benefit” (Jer. 23:32).

After you have put yourself at God’s disposal for His use, you need to seek enlightenment again and again from the Holy Spirit. Pray daily in the morning and evening to the Heavenly Father that He give you a spirit of wisdom through His revelation, so that you might have a full knowledge of God and know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches and glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe (Eph. 1:17-19). In this manner, after the basic requirement of dedication to God’s will is fulfilled, then your training to become Kingdom personnel can proceed.

A shining example of an entire life lived in dedication to Christ is that of Mrs. Patterson, a smallish country woman with sparkling blue eyes set in a kindly smiling face. She was about sixty years old when I first met her in 1945.

She was born in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, completed three years of school then married while still in her teens, becoming the mother of several children. She had been saved early in life and regularly took her large family to all of the services in a nearby country church. One night as the family was walking home from church services, a local clan of aggrieved mountain people ambushed them. Her husband and one son were shot to death. The following week her older remaining sons happened to meet the killers in a small mountain town and the resulting exchange of gunfire left two of the opposing family dead. Since her sons had acted in self defense, they were not charged.

In order to take her children away from such violence and bloodshed the determined little lady sold her mountain farm and purchased one in south central Kentucky, about 15 miles from my home. She continued to take her family to church regularly. Her older sons became farmers and were church members. Her youngest son, Ralph, grew up to become a Baptist pastor and her youngest daughter, Dora, became a teacher and married my maternal uncle, Ed, who also became a pastor.

Mrs. Patterson lived her whole life for God, her church and her family. But God always came first. She was a staunch Baptist but being a Christian was even more important. She was a spiritual woman who loved to converse about God, read the Bible and pray. She took great delight in praying with sinners and leading them to Christ. I first met her through my uncle and later as a young man going to college I would frequently drive out of my way to visit with her. We would talk about the Bible and then she would ask me to pray. Afterward I would ask her to pray for me while I was away in school. She always did. I had great confidence in her prayers and God’s grace has been upon me because of them.

Mrs. Patterson was about 90 the last time I saw her and she did not live long after that. She, a simple countrywoman, had faithfully lived her whole life for God in the spot He had placed her and displayed more spiritual understanding than many a seminary

professor. She knew God and His Word and practiced it daily all her life. To such a believer who lived for God and not for herself, one could confidently expect her Lord to say to Mrs. Patterson at the judgment seat of Christ, “You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matt. 25:23). May all honor, power, praise and thanksgiving be to the Lamb who sits on the throne for ever and ever. Amen!

If commitment to the will of God trains us to be Kingdom personnel, what hinders us from entering into living daily for God? We are going to discover that the primary hindrance to our training is our “own self.”

## **Chapter V. The Primary Hindrance to the Training of the Personnel of God's Kingdom: Self**

The gracious Lord saved us not only to free us from the power of sin and the bondage of Satan, but He also saved us in order that we might live no longer for ourselves. He died for us and rose again to empower us to live for Him. If we do not put ourselves at His disposal to live for Him, we will only be babes in Christ, and babes will not be permitted to reign with Christ. In other words, to be trained as Kingdom personnel we must make a commitment to stop living for ourselves. Whether it is daily living, eating, education or career—all should be manifestations of the reality “I have been crucified with Christ.” To be crucified with Christ, we must be willing to die to self. Before we can willingly die to self, however, we must understand clearly what self is.

While most believers can definitely see the degradation of the world, recognize the temptation of sin, and understand the treachery of Satan, they have never clearly understood the deceitfulness and sly techniques of their “own self.” Even those who claim to be spiritual are frequently affected by this blindness. An outside observer, however, can easily see the activity of their “own self” at work. An outburst of low self-esteem is justified as “zeal for the Lord.” An attempt to build an empire to captivate weak people is called “striving for the Kingdom.” Plain greed is disguised by saying, “By faith we trust God!” In today’s world of drugs, sex and money, all these acts are played out by the “own self” in those individuals who depart from the Scriptures and God’s Way.

“Self” says “**I** want to have fame and it does not matter how I get it. **I** want to have the power and prestige that comes from having a church office or position but it does not matter whether I fulfill my responsibilities or not. **I** want to have a doctoral degree and it does not matter if it comes from a paper mill. When you and **I** lie and steal together, we are blood brothers; but when you are unwilling to scheme with me, you are my enemy!” Thus self vaunts itself by self-utilization, self-interest, a selfish attitude, self-fancy, a superiority complex, self-deceit, bragging, self-satisfaction, and by being a self-proclaimed deacon, or a self-made person.

When God’s holy church demonstrates such self-centered attitudes, it truly grieves the Lord. No wonder the Lord says, “I will spit you out of My mouth!” One’s “own self” is the basic component and source of sin. Believers who do not correct their wayward nature and purify this polluted source of sin that the Bible calls “lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23) cannot inherit the Kingdom of the Lord.

In Revelation 2:25 and 3:11 the gracious Lord commanded the churches in Asia Minor to “Hold fast” to what you have, that is, faith in Christ and obedience to His word which results in deeds of righteousness done in love. In the end, they did not hold fast and as a result the seven churches vanished from the scene. It is not easy to hold fast. The experience of believers today is usually something like this: When they first believe, they are willing to lay down everything for the Lord; but, because of the weak spiritual environment in the average church and the power of self, they gradually become cold and eventually are deluded by sin. Then their hardened hearts cause them to become

spiritually weak. It is a lack of understanding concerning sin that produces weak Christians who have no reference point for being alert and defending themselves against the flesh, the world and Satan. We all know that God is not present where sin is, but Satan moves right in. But if we do not know what sin is, how can we possibly subdue self and evict Satan?

To learn to identify sin, we must understand its basic nature. When we want to find out the elementary substance of a certain material, we analyze it. When we analyze water, for instance, we find out that it is composed of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen. Common salt is composed of sodium and chlorine. In the same manner, we must analyze sin to determine its basic nature. By examining Old Testament history, New Testament theology and the life of Christ, our analysis will show that the basic component of sin is one's "own self."

**A. *In the Old Testament the Basic Nature of Sin Is "Each of Us Has Turned to His Own Way [Self]" (Is. 53:6)***

Isaiah 14:13-14 recorded the first sin ever committed. These two verses consist of five short statements, with each having a subject (I), a helping verb (will), verbs (ascend, raise, sit, make) and infinitive clauses. Even though the verbs and clauses vary, each statement begins with "**I will.**" Without doubt, this grammatical structure tells us that the subject's "I," or "own self," is responsible for the fall of the one who is the "star of the morning [and] son of the dawn," that is, Satan. He was unwilling to be under the heavens but wanted to go up to heaven. He considered equality with the stars as trivial and instead wanted to be above them. He did not enjoy presenting himself to (standing before) God but wanted to sit on the mount of assembly with God. He was unwilling to dwell under the clouds but wanted to magnify his name above the clouds. He was unwilling to obey God but instead wanted to be God's equal. The pride of his "own self" was so great that judgment prompted by God's holiness was inevitable. Thus, the basic nature of the first sin in the universe was nothing other than "self."

The second sin is recorded in Genesis 3. After reading this passage, it is natural to ask the question, "Why did God punish Adam and Eve so severely? All they did was to eat some fruit." Yes, but what concerned God was not the magnitude or frequency of the action but the principle of the matter. The principle involved in eating the fruit of good and evil is clearly stated in Genesis 3:22, "The Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil.'" This verse tells us that here man had become like God, not in omnipotence or omniscience, but in "knowing good and evil" (which can also be translated as "choosing good and evil"). By such behavior, they no longer agreed wholeheartedly with God on what was right and what was wrong. **Instead they wanted to use their own judgment to decide what was good and what was evil.** In other words, they were unwilling to obey God. They, their "own self," wanted to be a god and thus be equal to God. Quite simply, eating the fruit of good and evil was a demonstration of our first parents' rebellious heart condition. Thus both Satan's desire to be like the Most High and Adam's sin in deciding what is good and evil for himself are just different paths leading to the same destination—rebellion against the Almighty. So Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden because he followed the urging of his "own self." Right now in the church today there are many who are eating fruit from the tree of

the choice of good and evil. Ed, a capable pastor of a Bible-preaching church, related in a note to me that his twenty years in the pastorate had conclusively proved to him that many, if not most, Christians do according to their own desires, no matter what the Scriptures say about the subject. Not only do such believers disregard God's repeated commands to His church in the Bible, they intentionally substitute their own "right and good" in place of God's will. Thus they have become like the Laodicean church of the last days and have locked Christ out of their assembly.

It is not only from God's revelation in Isaiah 14 and Genesis 3 that we see that sin has its source in "self." If we analyze sin throughout the entire Scriptures, we will discover that every single sin originated from "self," demonstrating that where there is the "own self," there is sin. Scripture not only tells us that Adam's sin was provoked by his "own self," it also tells us that the various sins of the Israelites were nothing but the same tune played in a different key. Although the Jews committed countless sins, God summarized them as two evils: passively forsaking God and actively hewing cisterns **for themselves** (See Jer. 2:13). Since they were unwilling to obey God's word, each did according to the desires of his own stubborn evil heart. Sin completely deluded them. Their hearts became hardened with evil unbelief and they forsook the living God. The Israelites were not an isolated example, but the entire world—all of mankind—is equally guilty. "All of us like sheep have gone astray, **each of us has turned to his own way**; but the LORD has caused the **iniquity** of us all to fall on Him" (Is. 53:6.). This verse clearly tells us that "**turned to their own ways**" is equal to "**iniquity**." **Mankind's turning "to our own way" is also the reason why we "like sheep have gone astray."** In short, mankind's sins, in all the various shapes and forms, are none other than people's turning "**to their own way**." No wonder Martin Luther said that he feared his own self more than he feared the pope. Any believer who desires to become personnel of the Kingdom must break "self's" hold upon himself, or he will find it impossible to mature to the fullness of Christ, and thus develop into an overcomer. Since no man can serve two masters, when one's "self" is firmly planted on the throne of his heart, the gracious Lord cannot rule there.

A twentieth-century example of someone who went his own way and paid the cost is Edward VIII, the only British sovereign who ever voluntarily abdicated the throne. In 1930 while his father, George V, was king, Edward struck up a friendship with Mrs. Wallace Warfield Simpson and her husband Ernest. In 1927 she had been divorced from a U. S. Navy lieutenant before marrying Mr. Simpson in 1928. The Simpsons were frequent guests of Prince Edward who by 1934 was deeply in love with Mrs. Simpson. In 1936 George V died and Edward was proclaimed king.

On October 27, 1936, Mrs. Simpson obtained a preliminary decree of divorce from her husband. Before the divorce became final King Edward attempted to gain the royal family's acceptance of her as his wife, but he met steadfast resistance from the Church of England and most politicians in England and the Commonwealth, as well as from his family.

Edward's problem was that he wanted to marry Mrs. Simpson and also remain King of England. Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin attempted to impress upon the young sovereign that he could have either the lady or the throne, but not both. So, on December

10, 1936, King Edward VIII renounced the throne of England and of the British Commonwealth.

As the oldest son, Edward had been expected to reign after his father and was continually trained from childhood to be king. However, he wanted to go his own way and forfeited an empire in order to do just that. Refusing to meet the requirements of his country that would allow him to remain king, he rejected the position for which his father had trained him. Edward made a personal choice to give up the throne that did not entail moral consequences; but going his own way did cost him his rulership. Likewise, believers who stubbornly go their own way will forfeit the honor and privilege of reigning with Christ. Moreover, it is sin for the believer to live such a self-centered life.

Most of the kings of Israel, from Saul the first to Zedekiah the last, lost their throne because of repeated disobedience to God's moral and spiritual standards. As believers, we can choose either Christ or self to sit upon the throne of our heart, but not both. If we do our best daily to live our lives for God, we will be well trained in God's school to be personnel in His Coming Kingdom. However, if as Christians we choose to let self be in charge of our lives, we will be excluded from the Kingdom of God because we will not be qualified to carry out its duties, and in the process we will break our heavenly Father's heart by rejecting His desire for us. Let us heed God's Word to the church, "If we endure, we will also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12). That is, if we fulfill our duty to Christ by remaining steadfast in His service, then actively participating with Him in His coming Kingdom will be our great reward and delight. But our reigning will be conditioned by our enduring. If we do not carry the cross, we cannot wear the crown.

***B. In the New Testament the Basic Nature of Sin Is "the Old Self, Which Is Being Corrupted in Accordance with the Lusts of Deceit" (Eph. 4:22)***

Those familiar with New Testament theology know that what God most hates beside Satan is our sinful nature—the “old man.” For this reason, He has asked us through Christ to crucify our “own self” with Christ on the cross. By so doing we will no longer be slaves of sin. Once the activator of our sinning (our “own self”) is dead, and we can apply the reality of being crucified with Christ, then our flesh, which so easily falls prey to sinning, will be out of a job. In other words, our flesh will no longer be able to entice us to sin (See Rom. 6:6). As Scripture says elsewhere, “If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Praise the Lord!

Let us continue our analysis by examining some examples of sins and virtues found in the New Testament: judging one another, idol worship, love and self-control. We will consider how each of these is, or is not, related to one's “own self.”

**1. The Role of Our “Own Self” in Judging Others (Matt. 7:1).** The constitution of the Kingdom, recorded in Matthew 5, 6, and 7, begins by describing the character of the children of the Kingdom in the eight Beatitudes (5:1-12). Then the function (5:13-16), promises (5:17-18), and warnings (5:19-20) of various character traits are mentioned. This is followed by three groups of commands from the King of the Kingdom regarding the believer's actions and attitudes.

Group 1		
Toward oneself:	How to deal with anger, adultery, divorce and speaking the truth	(5:21-37)
Toward others:	Passively—be willing to forgo personal rights and to accept unjust abuse	(5:38-42)
	Actively—love enemies Do charity in secret	(5:43-48) (6:1-4)
Toward the Heavenly Father	Asking His Kingdom to come	(6:5-15)
Group 2		
Toward oneself:	How to deal with fasting, money and worries	(6:16-34)
Toward others:	Do not be deceived about either “self” or others	(7:1-6)
Toward the Heavenly Father:	Need to ask in prayer	(7:7-12)
Group 3		
Toward oneself:	Need to enter the narrow gate	(7:13-14)
Toward others:	Beware of that which is false	(7:15-20)
Toward the Heavenly Father:	Need to do the Father’s will	(7:21-23)

The conclusion (7:24-29) stresses the importance of each believer’s living according to the constitution of the Kingdom and Jesus’ authority to compel such service.

Concerning dealing with others in Group 2, the Lord has commanded us: “Do not judge!” Why was our gracious Lord so emphatic that we not judge others? Well, it just so happens that judging others is the “self’s” area of expertise. Judging others gives a booster shot to one’s “self.” As long as an individual maintains a judging attitude and is unwilling to repent, he will undoubtedly be deluded by “self” and his heart will be hardened. Judging others is also a smoke screen for hypocrisy; for by ridiculing another’s minute speck, “self” hopes to camouflage the log in his own eye. Consequently, “self” becomes puffed up and expands until the believer lives in daily sin, often without even realizing it.

Jesus did not mean, however, that Christians should not distinguish between good and evil. Quite the contrary, for God told us, “So then do not be foolish [evil], but understand what the will of the Lord is [good]” (Eph. 5:17). Unfortunately, some think that “Do not judge” is a command for us to appease others and to refrain from rebuking evil. Such thinking has made the church in the last days a haven for all sorts of despicable shamelessness. One finds people in churches using deception for personal gain and dissension for personal fame. Jealous of the gifted and able, they conspire to hinder any good work. Being hardened in heart and unwilling to repent, they depart from the way God has revealed in the Scriptures. Their dirt and filth constantly appear on the evening news. All this can be attributed to a lack of preachers in the twentieth century who dare to be prophets to admonish good and to condemn evil.

Today there are few courageous souls willing to correct mistakes, because so many regard the status quo as wisdom. Under the guise of the slogan “loving one another,” “self” is allowed to be lazy and irresponsible. Self comforts itself with Cain’s statement

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” Self substitutes appeasement instead of really loving one another, failing to recognize the great difference between the two. As Christians, we must love one another but we cannot appease anyone. We cannot avoid our responsibility by neglecting to rebuke what should be rebuked (See Matt. 18:15-17; James 5:19-20). We should “bear all things” but not by silently going along with sin, and certainly not by joining in the sin. If we do not rebuke sin, “self” will continue to grow and will become more outrageous with every passing day.

Believers must train their judgment. “Do you not judge those who are within the church?” and “Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (1 Cor. 5:12; 6:3) indicate why we need to become skillful in the ability to judge. As believers we are to love righteousness and hate evil, just as Paul prayed for the Philippian church, “So that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ” (Phil. 1:10). Thus, we must train our discernment to learn to make right decisions in order to fulfill our future responsibility to judge angels, which may mean that we will preside over them.

Nevertheless, any judging of others that grows out of low self-esteem or encourages the growth of “self” by criticizing others is justly condemned by the Lord as evil. To be Kingdom personnel, guard against all manifestations of self generated by the deceitfulness of a low self-esteem.

**2. The Role of One’s “Own Self” in Idolatry and Sorcery (Gal 5:20).** In Galatians 5:19-21, the Holy Spirit gives a list of fifteen deeds of the flesh that can be classified into five groups:

Group 1:Loose sexual behavior	immorality, impurity, sensuality
Group 2:Wrong means and methods	idolatry, sorcery
Group 3:Exaltation of “self”	enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger
Group 4:Divisive deeds	disputes, dissension, factions, envying
Group 5:Lack of self-control	drunkenness and carousing

All these sins are stirred up, orchestrated, agitated and directed by one’s “own self” (Gal. 5:20).

Idolatry and sorcery are employed by self as the means to seek blessings and escape disasters, to evade calamities and obtain success, or to look into the spiritual realm trying to know the future. Thinking that it is God’s will for people to escape trouble, obtain success, and to have spiritual understanding, many fail to see any problem with self’s methodology, not discerning that it opposes God’s established principles and procedures. God does desire for man to receive grace, accept His blessings, and understand spiritual matters; however, He has given the procedures He wants us to follow in order to obtain His grace and blessings. We sin when we try to use our own methods to obtain God’s blessings. As it is recorded in the Scriptures: “For they **exchanged the truth of God for a lie**, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25, emphasis added). This was the reason “they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:21-23). Everything that God requires of His people must be sought with both the correct goal and the proper methods. This means that the way we do God’s work must be according to

His truth. Those who desire to exalt themselves are usually people who are striving for their own goal by whatever means they can, and as a result they cannot receive God's approval. This type of "self" tactic is a strategy Satan often uses to distract and derail Christians. When he tempted Jesus, he utilized the same course of action: "I (Satan) will give to you (Jesus) what you desire and you will one day rule the kingdoms of the world. All you have to do in order to obtain them is to worship me" (See Matt. 4:8-10). Was not Jesus' desire, and God's will for Him, to rule the world's kingdoms? Without doubt it was. However, to have worshipped Satan as the means to reach the goal would have been sin. Thus if we desire to be trained as Kingdom personnel, we must not seek to satisfy our desires and strive to reach goals by whatever means or methods that are available. We must always use God's established means and procedures to accomplish God's work.

**3. The Total Absence of "Own Self" in the Fruit Produced by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23a).** As Christians we should not be living for "self" as is done in the world around us. Leaders often engineer loyalty or obedience from their followers for their own personal benefit. Officials in many countries labor long hours to line their own pockets at the expense of those they are supposed to be serving. The primary concern of businessmen is not the lifestyle or comfort of their customers except as it increases the profitability of their company. This is legitimate capitalism. We who have been saved by a "selfless" Lord, however, should no longer live just for ourselves like the world does. We should diligently labor to give the gospel to the lost and to practice mercy upon the distressed, because our Lord said, "freely you received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). Repeatedly in the gospels we see examples of the selfless life of our gracious Lord. To produce such selflessness in our lives is the work of the Holy Spirit who cultivates a variety of fruit within us. The list of His fruit, which begins with "love" and concludes with "self-control," can be sorted into three groups of spiritual traits.

Group 1: Virtues in our spirit	love, joy, peace
Group 2: Virtues toward others	patience, kindness, goodness
Group 3: Virtues toward God	faithfulness
Virtues toward others	gentleness
Virtues toward self	self-control

The difference between the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 and the deeds of the flesh in 5:19-21 is "self," which is absent in the former and totally dominant in the latter. For example, the definition of love (*agape*), a fruit of the Spirit, is given in First John 3:16, "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." We can all agree that love is defined by the fact that Christ lay down His life for us. But the necessity of laying down our lives in order to manifest love for the brothers and sisters produces a quandary because we have only one life to lay down. We might think, "If laying down my physical life for the brethren is counted as love, then I can love just once. This certainly does not seem sensible." It does make sense, however, when we resolve a translation problem. The word translated "life" is actually *psuche*, "soul," which often means one's "self" (See Luke 9:24-25 where in verse 24 *psuche* is translated as life and is defined in verse 25 as "himself" or "his very self"). Moreover, "sons" are often called "souls" (See Gen. 46:18, 22, 25, 26 where "person" is a translation of the original word "soul"). So "to lay down our life" really means to "lay down our soul which is ourselves." Love is therefore a willingness

to lay down our own emotions, thoughts and opinions (but not truths) in order to serve our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Therefore, the basic nature of love is opposite to sin's nature. Sin originates from self whereas genuine love comes from our new creation that has no room for self. Praise the Lord! Not only is love (the first-named fruit of the Spirit) selfless, but self-control (the last-named fruit of the Spirit) is also selfless, because it exercises restraint self-ward. The fullness of the Spirit in a believer's life generates both love and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23) which are virtues opposite to the fifteen sinful deeds of the flesh mentioned in Galatians 5:19-21. There is a total absence of self in the fruit produced by the Spirit; whereas self thrives on the lusts of the flesh because our sinful nature does not generate either love or self-control. Kingdom personnel must bear the fruit of the Spirit. In order to do that, however, "self" must be removed from the throne. The only way to dethrone self is to see and acknowledge that our sinful nature with its passions and lusts has been crucified with Christ (Gal. 5:24). It is only by understanding, and then by faith acknowledging, our crucifixion with Christ that we can put off the sins of our old nature (Gal. 5:19-21) and thereby bring forth the rich spiritual harvest promised in Galatians 5:22-23. When we by faith accept the death of our old nature on the cross, our new nature can then act in a selfless manner to serve God and one another.

### **C. *In the Sinless Jesus There Is a Complete Absence of Selfishness.***

The Lord Jesus, although God, had a completely human nature that experienced hunger, thirst and fatigue. But unlike the rest of mankind, He never sinned. The Scriptures plainly state, "[He] has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). How did He live without sin? Examine what Jesus said:

"The Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19).

"I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge . . . because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30).

"For I have come . . . not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 6:38).

"My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me" (John 7:16).

"I do nothing on My own initiative" (John 8:28).

No wonder He could boldly challenge the Jews by saying, "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (John 8:46). Before His incarnation, Christ emptied Himself, giving up all that was rightly His. He took the form of a slave, humbled Himself by obedience and in all things looked to God as His only reference point. Thus, by giving "self" no place in His life, He was able to be our gracious Savior and our caring Shepherd. May we all praise our selfless Lord with this chorus: "He's the Lily of the Valley, the Bright and Morning Star, He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul." Hallelujah!

Christ's selflessness is not solely revealed in His own words and deeds but the Father also bore witness to His selflessness ("I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. . . . There is another who bears witness of Me, and I know that the

testimony which He bears of Me it true” John 5:30-32). Moreover, the Holy Spirit revealed through John that, “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us” (1 John 3:16). As previously mentioned, to lay down one’s life also means to lay down one’s soul or “self” with its feelings, thoughts, and will. After the feast of the Passover when His parents finally found the 12-year-old Jesus, He was in the temple sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. Although He was in the midst of learning, out of consideration for His parents’ anxiety, the Scriptures tell us that “He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them” (Luke 2:51). At the well in Sychar our Lord was weary from His journey, but for the sake of the Samaritan woman’s lost soul, He ignored His hunger and thirst to preach the gospel to her. When His enemies crucified Him, on the cross He was in extreme torment, yet He prayed for them saying, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). His emotions are so selfless. Another time He was praying on the mountain, but when He thought of His disciples on the storm-tossed Sea of Galilee, He went walking on the water to save them. His thoughts are so selfless. Once He withdrew to the wilderness to rest, but when He saw the multitude who had followed Him from their towns, He ignored His own weariness. He not only healed their sick but with five loaves and two fish He satisfied the hunger of the whole crowd. Although His mission was only to the lost sheep of Israel, when a Canaanite woman came to Him crying for help, He made an exception to His mission and healed her daughter, although His principle was that dogs should not enjoy the children’s bread. His will is so selfless. The entire function of His psyche is doing for God and for others. Not a bit is saved for Himself. This is the Lord and God whom we serve. May His selflessness becomes ours!

To serve the Lord in a selfless manner is a most excellent calling. But to serve ourselves is sin. Theological education is necessary because to be born possessing such knowledge is rare indeed. It is pitiful that there are so many today attempting to serve the Lord who claim to be “born with knowledge” when in reality they are by nature lazy and are unwilling to exert themselves to learn. They do not know that the Holy Spirit never helps the lazy; so they continually cite the beautiful slogan, “As the Spirit leads,” as a disclaimer for their lack of fruit. Even so, if we receive education solely for our personal benefit, and not for the needs of the Kingdom, that too, will be worthless to the Lord. Even prayer said solely for one’s own benefit and not for His Kingdom is sinful (See Ex. 30:37-38 where the incense representing the prayers of the saints was not to be used for oneself). No wonder so many prayers reach no higher than the ceiling and so many ministries are without spiritual results. The losses keep on mounting in so many spiritual battles, because “self” is “hostile toward God,” and where it is dominant rebellion follows (“Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so” Rom. 8:7).

May we be willing to live for the Lord and die for the Lord. Then we can all graduate quickly from our training and the Lord’s Kingdom will soon come. In the meantime let us have a clear understanding concerning our “own self” and not allow it to deceive us and thereby destroy our hope and prospect to be personnel of the Coming Kingdom of God. The deception and destruction caused by their “own self” in the lives of many believers has already made for difficult times in the present Kingdom of God. (For more discussion on what it means to die to self, see *How the Holy Spirit Works in the Lives of Believers Today*.)



## **Chapter VI. The Sad Condition of the Kingdom of Preparation**

When the Kingdom of Preparation was entrusted to the Israelites, only a few among them were chosen, “and the rest were hardened” (Rom. 11:7). Later on, these hardened ones killed the only “Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to [them]” (Acts 3:14). In the end, their “house [was] left . . . desolate” (house is singular and refers to the temple) and the Roman army did “not leave . . . one stone upon another” (Luke 13:35; 19:44). It was then that what God had said in Hosea (“I will call those who were not My people, ‘My people,’ and her who was not beloved, ‘beloved’”) was fulfilled (Rom. 9:25). God’s vineyard from that point on was to be “rent out . . . to other vine-growers, who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons,” that is, “given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:41, 43). Thus God’s Word clearly states that the Kingdom was entrusted to the church. The church, however, has produced only a scanty crop of fruit worthy of the Kingdom of God. After a brief look at how the Kingdom of Preparation in the Old Testament became the people of God in the New Testament, we will look at the conditions in the church that hinder the development of the personnel of the Kingdom.

### **A. The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament**

Two words are used in the Old Testament to identify God’s people as a group: one is '*awdaw* derived from the verb “to appoint” or “to choose”; the other is *kawhawl* derived from the verb “to gather.” '*Awdaw* is often translated as “congregation” and *kawdawl* as “assembly” or sometimes as “a large assembly.” At times these two words are used interchangeably. For example, in Numbers 20:1, 2, 8 and 11, the word is congregation (*awdaw*), whereas in verses 4, 6, 10 and 12, the word is assembly (*kawhawl*).

The Old Testament '*awdaw* and *kawhawl* taken together are equivalent in principle to the New Testament term *ekklesia* which is translated “church”. The Greek word is formed by the preposition *ek* (out of) added to the verb *kaleo* (call), thus *ekklesia*, as it is used in the Bible, means congregation. So, the “assembly of the Lord” in the Old Testament is equivalent in principle to the New Testament term “Church of God.” They are both “Israels of God” (Gal. 6:16), “Abraham’s offspring” (Gal. 3:29), “God’s own possession among all the people” and a “royal priesthood, and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:5-6; 1 Pet. 2:9). Moreover, the New Testament often applied special phrases used of the congregation of Israel in the Old Testament to describe the church, such as the “temple,” “olive tree,” “the vine and the branch,” “bride and groom,” and so on. All these clearly show that the New Testament church is the successor to the Old Testament congregation and explains why in Stephen’s sermon and in the book of Hebrews, *ekklesia* (church) was used to describe the Old Testament *kawhawl* (congregation) (Acts 7:38; Heb. 2:12).

The Kingdom of Preparation for the Jews began with Abraham. The New Testament covenant with the church was inaugurated by Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, and those redeemed by Christ’s shed blood were formed into His body at Pentecost by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Luke 22:20; Acts 1:5; 1 Cor. 12:13). Both the people of the New Testament church and those of the Old Testament congregation were supposed to be

trained to become Kingdom personnel. As Jesus said, “Many [such as the centurion of great faith in the preceding verses] shall come [in the future] from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11).

The church received more grace than the Old Testament congregation, because it is the “church . . . in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:1). It is also the “church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28), and the body of Christ and Christ is her head (Eph. 1:23; 5:23). Therefore, God expected her to be “the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27). Who could have believed that she would turn out to be just like the Old Testament congregation, which was planted “with the choicest vine. . . . He expected it to produce good grapes, but it produced only rotten ones” (Is. 5:2 retranslated). How lamentable! As the gracious Lord wept over the sad condition of the Jews in Jerusalem, surely He is likewise weeping over the church in these last days.

### ***B. The Kingdom of God in the Last Days***

In years past, when someone would criticize the church, I often stated, “Sir, you are too kind. Observe how severely the Scriptures themselves criticize the church of the last days.” Opening the Bible, I would ask him to read Second Timothy 3:1-7. After doing so he would have nothing more to say.

The key portion of the passage reads, “But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self . . . holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power . . . always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Since the catalogue of vices in Second Timothy 3:1-7, “lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers” and so on, has been universal among mankind from earliest times, why should it be preceded by the phrase warning that “difficult times will come” in the last days? A careful reading reveals that the passage does not describe the wickedness of the world in the last days, but the unrighteous conditions rampant among both believers and unbelievers in the nominal church, and that is what will make “difficult times.” It is only in the church that we find those who hold “to a form of godliness” and at the same time are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” about God and His Word. We must give thanks that God never asked us to place our saving faith in the fallible church, but in Himself—the Son of God, Jesus, even the Christ.

Indeed, it is almost inconceivable to think that this institution of the Holy God could sink to such depths of wickedness that most Christians do not even recognize that the passage in Second Timothy 3 refers to the church, rather than to the world. So great will be the wickedness of the nominal church in the last days that God warns us to neither participate in nor tolerate her moral decadence, saying, “But realize this [imperative],” before giving the shocking inventory of her sins.

**1. God Warns the Church—“But Realize This”—to Help Believers Avoid Satanic Deception.** The third chapter of Second Timothy opens with the clear warning: “But realize this,” admonishing us to beware because “difficult times will come” (2 Tim. 3:1). The word “difficult” is used only twice in the New Testament, here and in Matthew 8:28,

where it describes the **violence** of the demon-possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes. According to parallel accounts by Mark and Luke, the extent of the man's violence was such that he could tear apart the chains and shackles used to bind him (Mark 5:1-5). What gave him the strength to tear apart chains? Why was no one able to bind him? The Scriptures explain that he was possessed by a legion of evil spirits. A legion was a Roman military unit usually with 6,726 men: 6,000 infantry with a detachment of 726 cavalry added during the time of the Caesars. This poor fellow was possessed by almost 7,000 demons! No wonder he was uncontrollable and able to do whatever he wanted. The Holy Spirit's use of this particular word in these two passages is a clear indication that the difficulties and violence afflicting the church in the last days are the work of the evil one. In order to hide in today's church, Satan engages in all kinds of deception. He impersonates angels or even the Holy Spirit to capture those who do not know the Lord well or whose faith is weak. He can use church-goers to commit murder, as has been documented in numerous cases. In one large North American city two young boys were arrested for murdering a prominent pastor and his wife. The couple had returned home to find the boys in the process of burglarizing their house. Because they attended the church the man pastored, the boys killed both the pastor and his wife in order to silence them. What a frightening situation!

Moreover, the presence of demons in the church is further revealed by the Holy Spirit's use of the word *diaboloi* in Second Timothy 3:3. Although translated as "malicious gossips," *diaboloi* actually has a root meaning of "devil." This strongly suggests that demonic forces will instigate and even control all the lawlessness, unrighteousness, falsehoods, and evil works that will infest the Kingdom of Preparation in the last days. Not recognizing Satan's presence in their midst, most people blindly follow his suggestions and thus waste themselves with self-delusion and degradation without realizing what they are doing or the source of their motivation.

Scripture shows us that the devil is a puppet master who often uses others to execute his treacherous and poisonous plans. When Abel was murdered, at first we thought it was Cain's doing, but the Scriptures later tell us that the world's first murder was actually instigated by the evil one (1 John 3:12). History tells us that Queen Athaliah wanted to eliminate the household of David, but in fact, Satan used Athaliah to exterminate most of the blood line from which the Messiah would come, attempting to prevent the Savior's birth. This was also what happened when Satan stirred up King Herod to try to kill the baby Jesus. Job's servants did not realize that all the calamities that befell Job were Satan's activities. For example, when fire came down from heaven, Job's servant mistakenly thought it was God's doing because he said, "The fire of God fell from heaven!" This parallels what someone exclaimed recently, "If God is love, why did He allow the Vietnamese refugees to suffer so much pain?" Both were blaming the wrong Person. What an injustice to our gracious loving Father. But since "the whole world lives in power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19), Satan often hides behind what are called natural disasters and human calamities, causing the people suffering from them to advance Satan's cause by calling them acts of God. Satan is a superb tactician. He hides behind good reputations, good deeds and variable situations in order to cause disaster, and he especially likes to hide inside churches where he uses Scripture and spiritual terms to deceive God's children. Satan's deep desire is that they would offend God, deceive themselves and others, and thus get pulled so deeply into his snare that they become

hopelessly entrapped. Consider the following situation that occurred on the island of Taiwan in a church that was pastored by a China Evangelical Seminary graduate.

On January 8, 1986, a sister was praying in the church's prayer room. Suddenly she fell down screaming for help and said,

"No, no, I don't want to go! Pastor, save me! It wants to drag me away . . . It looks so scary. . . ."

With her finger pointing toward the left side of the ceiling, she struggled with all her might, screaming without ceasing. The pastor prayed for her and also invited some young people present in the church to pray with him in order to cast out the evil spirit. In about half an hour she quieted down and looked as if she were asleep. After a little while, she roused up, saw all the people around her, and with a puzzled look on her face she asked the pastor,

"Why are they staring at me? What are they doing here?"

That was only the beginning of the spiritual battle in that church. Soon, another demon, claiming that he was the Lord Jesus Christ, came and possessed another sister. The pastor asked it to recite the Lord's Prayer, and it complied; but changed the last sentence to "For **mine** is the Kingdom, and the power and the glory!" Finally, the demon caused the sister to stare viciously with her eyes and say,

"I will delude you with my eyes and find those whom I can devour!" The pastor commanded it in the Lord's name to close her eyes, but the demon said, "You all have sin and cannot cast me out!"

The pastor responded with "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1) and sang the chorus of "In the Cross."

"Your faith is too little, you can't cast me out!" snarled the demon.

The pastor replied, "Whether I have little or much faith is none of your business, I have the authority to cast you out in Jesus' name."

"The other day you bound my brother," the demon said referring to the demon previously cast out, "but today I bring with me many more to avenge him. I want to steal God's glory!"

Thank God, they finally prevailed and cast the demon out in the Lord's name. When it was all over, one sister admitted with great regret that she desired the gift of distinguishing between spirits because she saw others with the gift of speaking in tongues. She even wondered whether or not Satan could speak through her. So, she gave Satan an opportunity. We often have the mistaken notion that the evil one cannot influence a believer, regardless of how unholy and sinful he might be. Yet Satan was obviously involved in the sin of Adam and Eve and in David's numbering of Israel (1 Chron. 21:1). This is probably one reason for the downfall of some famous evangelists and church leaders in these last days. They do not realize that if a believer leaves room for Satan, Satan can still touch him, even if he is a David or a Peter. Scriptures record that when Jesus told his disciples He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and be killed, Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matt. 16:21-23). Under other circumstances, Jesus would probably have

commended Peter, but in this instance He recognized that these sweet and caring words originated from Satan. So remember the example of the apostle Peter and be careful. If you leave room for Satan, he can use your spiritually prim and proper words and thoughts to delude you and anyone who listens to you.

At this point, some may ask, “But didn’t Jesus say, ‘No one shall snatch them out of My hand’ in John 10:28? And wasn’t He referring to those who believe in Him?”

Yes, that is true. The gracious Lord did make such a promise, and He keeps His promises. We must not forget, however, that the promises of God are qualified by conditions. Even the salvation that He freely gives is received through repentance and faith. God attached conditions to His promises in order to encourage and train His children and to prepare them to become personnel of the Inherited Kingdom. If we are faithful and willing to fulfill the conditions, we can fully appropriate His promises. If we are unwilling to meet His conditions, however, the Lord is not being unfaithful to His promise when He does not answer our prayer. It is our laziness and rebellion that stands between us and the fulfillment of God’s promises. The promise given in John 10:28 is preceded by the condition in verse 27, that is, “My sheep [continue to] hear My voice . . . they [continue to] follow Me” (both “hear” and “follow” are in the present tense which denotes ongoing action) before they can enjoy the promise of eternal security.

“Why is Satan so active in the Kingdom of Preparation in these last days?” you may ask.

There seems to be only one answer: He does not want the Kingdom of Inheritance to descend because he knows that when it does he will be imprisoned in the bottomless pit (Rev. 20:1-3). Therefore, Satan uses a two-pronged attack in an attempt to forestall this event. First, when people want to accept Jesus, he will give them all sorts of excuses so that they can the more easily refuse salvation. But, thank God, there are those who by His grace avoid Satan’s snare and accept Jesus anyway. Satan does not give up and tries a second approach: to inhibit the spiritual development of the believers by various means, he causes them to hear the Word audibly but not spiritually, distracts them when they attempt to pray, and assures them that they do not need to change their wicked lifestyle. Thus, they do not become overcomers qualified to be Kingdom personnel and the coming of the Lord Jesus is delayed. Satan is well aware that as long as the Kingdom’s personnel are not ready, the Kingdom of the Lord will not descend (unless the bride is ready, the groom cannot get married). So, Satan is still doing all he can to extend his life, just as he accused Job of doing, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life” (Job 2:4).

**2. God also Warns—“But Realize This”—To Help Believers Avoid the Prevailing Ungodliness of the Church of the Last Days.** While God’s Kingdom was residing with the Israelites, the Holy Spirit moved the prophet Isaiah to compose a vineyard song which is recorded for us in Isaiah 5:1-7. In the song, God—the owner—provided His vineyard an excellent environment, placing it on a fertile hill. He cultivated deeply, removed all the stones and planted the best vines available. In the midst of the vineyard He built a tower and a wine press in anticipation of a harvest of good grapes. Who would suspect that the true seed would turn into an alien vine with degenerate shoots (Jer. 2:21) and bear rotten grapes? After all His labor to grow wholesome grapes produced only

worthless ones, the owner gave the vineyard up to destruction. This famous song certainly refers to the Jews. With patient care God used Moses to deliver them out of slavery in Egypt (Ps. 80:8) and Joshua to drive the various heathen tribes out of Canaan in order to settle Israel into a productive land flowing with milk and honey. God desired that they should be “the head and not the tail . . . [to] be above . . . [and] not be underneath” among all the nations (Deut. 28:13). He wanted them to testify for the LORD among the nations who would regard them as wise and intelligent. Unimaginable as it seems they walked “in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward” (Jer. 7:24). While holding to a form of godliness, they denied its power; while honoring God with their lips, they removed their hearts far from Him. Finally, their “holy cities have become a wilderness . . . Jerusalem a desolation” (Is. 64:10).

Thus Jesus said, “The kingdom of God will be taken away from you [Israel], and be given to a nation producing the fruit of it” (Matt. 21:43). Jesus meant that God’s Kingdom was to be assigned to a new people of God in place of Old Testament Israel. Paul also described in Romans 11:17-20 the process whereby God took the baton of the Kingdom of Preparation from the Israelites and gave it to the church by incorporating the believing Gentiles into the people of God. It is God’s desire that the church be glorious, “having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:27). Yet in these last days the church is becoming increasingly impure, to the dishonor of her Holy God, and is turning to follow the ways of the world, often becoming part of it. Increasingly overindulgent, greedy and lustful the nominal church nourishes treachery against God. She inhibits her spiritual understanding by blocking out her conscience and reason. Have you noticed that the shocking scandals making the newspaper headlines and evening news are quite frequently committed by church people? This will continue to be a characteristic of the church of the last days. No wonder the gracious Lord has said to her, “I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16).

Why has the church fallen into such wicked ways? Look again in Second Timothy 3:1-7 at the account of the deteriorating situation in the Kingdom of Preparation in the last days.

**a. The Underlying Reason for the Ungodliness of the Church of the Last Days Is That They Have Become “Lovers of Self . . . Rather Than Lovers of God.”** The catalogue of sins in Second Timothy 3:1-7 begins with “lovers of self.” A careful reading of the Scriptures as a whole reveals that from the beginning all of man’s sins have originated directly from his own self. Adam was cast out of the Garden of Eden because he would not accept God’s goodness as good nor regard what God hates as evil. He wanted to establish his own “good and evil” to replace God’s standard. (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 41, notes that the phrase “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” “really mean[s] the tree of the choice of good and evil.”) Cain did not want to appear inferior to Abel and was unwilling to live righteously. So he chose the despicable action of fratricide to dispose of his problem. Noah, on the other hand, was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his day, because he walked with God rather than following the inclinations of his “own self.”

An individual or an entire nation sins for the same reason. God summarized all the sins of the Jews as only two evil deeds: “They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jer.

2:13). This verse declares clearly the two aspects of sin. On the one hand, they had forsaken God. On the other, they were living only for themselves. All the sins ever committed by the Jews as a people or by any individual can be summed up in one sentence: “Each of us has turned to his own way” (Is. 53:6). Thus the reason for all sin can be summed up with two small words: “own self.”

O, Self, how frightening you are! How many sins you have created. So much trouble you have started. You pit brothers against each other; you cause husbands and wives to separate and divorce; you make friends turn on each other and churches to split. No wonder the gracious Lord put you to death, O, Self.

Christ died **for** our sins (Gal. 1:4), but He also died **with** our “own self” (Gal. 2:20 and 6:14). Not only were we delivered from sin by His salvation (Titus 2:14), but our “own self” was crucified with Him on the cross. The result of our wonderful salvation is that we can be set free from “self” and the need to live for ourselves; and instead live for Him who died and rose again (See 2 Cor. 5:15). In other words, “if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord” (Rom. 14:8).

Yet, despite the wonder of having been crucified with Christ, the “own self” is engaging in more outrageous activities every day. The land is full of “self-ordained ministers” whom God did not send. Numerous pulpits are filled every Lord’s day by religious salesmen who preach, not God’s message, but their own philosophies of life. So many leadership positions in Chinese churches are taken up by self-righteous elders who have neither spiritual gifts nor Christ’s life. Many shameless ministers unblushingly flaunt pieces of paper called diplomas and fictitious degrees obtained without proper school work. (This is the height of deceiving oneself as well as others. Those selling fake degrees deceive others while those receiving such degrees deceive themselves. Those who are sincere at heart but have obtained such degrees are advised to throw them away as soon as possible. Why suffer judgment from the Lord?) With the “own self” so prevalent in the Kingdom of Preparation in the last days, will the Lord set up His throne in the church? He will not! With the Head of the church absent, demons enter to fill the vacuum, and the enemy infiltrates the Kingdom of Preparation with the assistance of the “own self.” The overall situation of the Present Kingdom is woefully depressing.

**b. The Outward Manifestations of Being “Lovers of Self.”** When I look into the mirror while shaving, I see only one image of myself. But if the mirror falls to the floor and breaks into twenty pieces, I see twenty reflections of myself. Second Timothy 3:1-7 reveals twenty sins originating from one source: “Lovers of self.” Thus, the main point of the passage is that self-love leads to all sorts of wickedness—active wrong-doing against both God and others. Let us look at them individually.

**Lovers of money.** Many people make Ecclesiastes 10:19 “Money is the answer to everything” the governing principle of their lives. They regard money as the only assurance in life whether used to bribe their god or to provide protection for themselves, or to simply live a life full of good things. It is essential, however, to consider the limitations of money as well. A gospel tract printed to resemble a twenty-dollar bill bore this message, “Money will buy: A bed but not sleep—Food but not appetite—A house but not a home—Amusement but not happiness—A cross but not a Savior—A church pew but not heaven.” Believers are inclined to forget God’s warning, “For the love of

money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang” (1 Tim. 6:10). “Wealth must be properly gained” is a familiar Chinese saying. Nevertheless, some Chinese churches have completely forgotten this ancient teaching and accept any money offered to them without question. Their total disregard for the source of money being given to them has led many churches to unknowingly become dens of thieves. How can these churches possibly expect to experience God’s presence? Or, how can individual Christians who are dishonest in their dealings with others possibly experience the power of God in their daily witness and ministry?

Wealth in itself is not wrong and can be used to do much good for God’s work, to supply our own daily needs and to help the poor. However, “if riches increase, do not set your heart upon them” (Ps. 62:10).

**Boastful.** Boastful refers to the proud speech of individuals with an elevated sense of self-worth. Puffed up with pride, they view everyone else with a scornful eye and despise less gifted brothers and sisters in the church. The boastful person does not recognize nor acknowledge that everything he possesses or has accomplished is the result of God’s grace upon him. Wise individuals, however, humbly understand that all they have or accomplish is a gift bestowed by the gracious Lord. As Scripture says, “What do you have that you did not receive [from God]” (1 Cor. 4:7)?

**Arrogant.** This word is a combination of “exceed” and “to manifest,” implying the idea of haughtiness. It may refer to people who feel deep down that they are not as good as others but try to create the impression that they are superior by acting as if they are in fact better than others, in which case it may be a camouflage for an inferiority complex. We who are believers need to let our yes be yes and our no be no and refrain from presumption and self-conceit for that is from the evil one.

**Revilers.** The reviler goes beyond feeling himself to be superior and uses abusive or contemptuous language to speak evil of others and even to find fault with God. This was the word that the Jews used to accuse Stephen, saying, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God” (Acts 6:11, emphasis added).

**Disobedient to parents.** People who are disobedient to their parents ignore both God’s first commandment that carries a promise (Eph. 6:1-2) and the toil expended and the difficulties endured by their parents to bring them up. They care only for their own enjoyment or personal gain. They may serve piously in the church, while neglecting their parents’ welfare. Consequently, they miss God’s blessing: “That it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.” Increasing teenage rebellion against parental standards and discipline will characterize the nominal Christianity of the last days.

**Ungrateful.** Ungrateful, derived from a word meaning “not bestowing grace,” is the opposite of the ancient Chinese teaching, “Show kindness without expecting repayment, but when being shown kindness, never forget.” An ungrateful person displays an uncaring attitude toward parents, everyone else, and even to God Himself (“For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks,” Rom. 1:21). Everything is centered on self with the attitude that it is the duty of others to treat me well; but I will show kindness to others at my discretion and then I will expect to be

repaid. The moral standards displayed by some of the children of the Kingdom of Heaven are lower than those of many of the children of the world. For example, some have borrowed money from others; but when the time came to repay the loan, the borrowers rather than showing gratitude berated the lenders for expecting the return of their money. What a shame!

**Unholy.** Formed by the combination of “not” and “holy,” unholy occurs only twice in the New Testament. It means unclean and ungodly. An unholy person is concerned only with the desires of his own heart and never tries to control his passions. He eagerly performs all types of immoral acts. He disdains God’s command, “You shall be holy for I am holy.” In the last days the church as a whole will exercise little moral discipline on its adherents and will be filled with unholy members who think only of self. In recent years a Protestant denomination voted worldwide among its members whether or not to ordain to its ministry practicing homosexuals. Due to the strong influence of its third-world constituents, the denomination decided against the practice. However, one of their North American administrative districts, with tens of thousands of members, voted two to one to ordain practicing homosexuals and to bless same-sex marriages. In certain instances individual churches have actually encouraged such wicked ways by saying that ungodly immoral behavior is unimportant as long as the person has other “good” qualities. How shortsighted!

**Unloving.** Unloving refers to those who fail to follow God’s repeated command to “love one another” and “be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor” (John 15:12; Rom 12:10). Consequently, the church too often becomes a temple of rituals and form rather than one of heart-felt love. It is a sorrowful thing to see brothers and sisters greet each other with false smiles rather than with sincere joy. Moreover, home life begins to break down when husbands fail to love their wives with tender affection and joy as God commands them. Wives need a great deal of affection, so Christian husbands should fulfill their spouse’s need to feel loved by giving them frequent “twenty-second hugs” every day. Also, an individual should make spending time with one’s spouse as high a priority as working on the job or serving in the church. Without gainful employment and serving God faithfully, financial and spiritual bankruptcy result. Without devoting quality time expressing godly admiration and affection for each other, a marriage can also go bankrupt. Both parents should show similar affection to the children. Church and home benefit greatly when believers generously express their love in both word and deed.

#### ALL A HUG CAN DO

A hug can say “I’ll miss you”  
or “I’ll be thinking of you.”

It can say “You’re someone special”  
or best of all, “I love you.”

It can soothe a hurt or calm a fear  
or cheer us when we’re blue—

It almost seem a miracle,  
All the things a hug can do!

Emily Matthews, Taken from an American Greetings Company 2002 Calendar.

**Irreconcilable.** An unwillingness to resolve a misunderstanding or to make any compromise to reach an agreement describes the person who is irreconcilable. The source of conflict may be trivial or substantial. An unwillingness to reconcile unfortunately refers to too many Christian couples, with divorce becoming ever more prevalent among God's people. We Christians must remember that God has made us one in Christ. When Jesus was on earth, He especially emphasized the importance of forgiving others, using both the positive and negative aspects of so doing. He put the positive emphasis this way, "For if you forgive men for their transgressions, you heavenly Father will also forgive you," and the negative by saying, "But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions" (Matt. 6:14-15). Let us give heed to our Lord's admonition and be quick to reconcile with our parents, spouse, children and fellow believers by confessing our own shortcomings to those we wrong and by completely overlooking most irritations that at one time or another beset all God's people. This is God's way to live.

**"Devils."** The word translated as "malicious gossips" here (2 Tim. 3:3 and also in 1 Tim. 3:11 and Titus 2:3) is *diaboloi*. The other 35 times it appears in the New Testament are translated as "devil." *Diaboloi* is a combination of *dia* (through) and *ballo* (to push or throw). *Ballo* is translated as "thrown" in Matthew 3:10; "throw" and "thrown" in Matthew 5:29; "thrown" in Mark 9:22; and "thrown down" in Revelation 12:9. Therefore, according to its root meaning, the word "devil" denotes a "thorough strike" or "complete destruction." Malicious gossip is an extended-meaning translation, in as much as the Devil (literally the Slanderer) maliciously gossiped about God in front of Eve (Gen. 3:5) and about Job in front of God (Job 2:4-5) in order to ruin them. Hence "malicious gossip" is spreading unfounded rumors or information of a personal nature, or saying things behind someone's back that you would not say to his face, at the prompting of the Devil who leads people to oppose God, entrap themselves in unrighteousness and bring devastation upon themselves and others. Satan loves to sow dissension and hatred among God's people and within families through malicious gossip. Let us carefully pass our words through the pattern given for our thoughts in Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true . . . honorable . . . right . . . lovely . . . admirable, if anything is excellent or worthy of praise, think about these things" (retranslated).

**Without self-control.** Appearing only once in the New Testament this statement is made up of "no" and "power," meaning the lack of power to control one's degrading passions. In truth, Christ came to this world because mankind was totally powerless to regenerate itself by its own efforts. For those who believe in Him, however, He gives authority to be the children of God, granting them a spirit of strength, love and forbearance so that they can have self-control. For this reason, the list of the fruit of the Spirit includes "self-control" (a combination of "have" and "strength" meaning that the believer can have strength to live righteously). Unfortunately, in these last days, there are those in the church who have replaced self-control with self-will, displaying in God's holy institution the attitude of "I'll do my own thing." In the end, they find themselves in deep trouble with God and society, wasting their lives and frequently falling prey to their own schemes. The shameful, sinful conduct of many nationally-known religious leaders and supposedly religious political leaders over the last few years bears witness to the truth that "without self-control" is regrettably a common characteristic of the members of the church in the last days.

**Brutal.** The word translated “brutal” appears only here in the New Testament and is a combination of “not” and “tame.” It describes violent, overly aggressive behavior such as was displayed by the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:28. Having just been freely forgiven by his master for an enormous debt, the man came upon his fellow servant who owed him a small amount of money. Grabbing him by the throat, he demanded immediate payment. While church members may not be displaying physical violence, they are dragging each other to court before the children of the world to seek judgment and restitution. How it must grieve the heart of our gracious Lord to see His children behaving in such a manner when they should be following His example of gentle humility, willingly forgoing their personal rights for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This also applies to family relationships—between husband and wife, from parents to children, and from children to parents. Those who have ears, let them hear!

**Haters of good.** Also appearing only once in the New Testament, “haters of good” is a combination of “not” and “loving the good.” “Good” here means “excellence” (See Luke 10:42). In the last days, there are those who love to speak in tongues more than they love the Lord, love the denomination more than true unity in the Lord, and love man’s philosophy more than God’s word. To love anything more than God and His plans is to be a hater of good. “Haters of good” will multiply in the church of the last days because a multitude of its members will be lovers of self.

**Treacherous.** The word translated “treacherous” appears three times in the New Testament: here in Second Timothy 3:4, then in Luke 6:16 regarding Judas (traitor), and in Acts 7:52 regarding the Jews ( betrayers). In the last days many church members will not remain faithful to God to the end. Some like a modern-day Demas will love the present world, and others will turn to other gods as Solomon in his old age worshipped the heathen idols of his foreign wives. “How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve?” says Scripture about the one who purposely continues to commit sin. Finally the betrayers will reach a stage where they can no longer repent because they have become completely deluded by sin. Their hearts will have become hard and some will even forsake “the living God” (Heb. 3:12). A Chinese proverb says, “If you know the law and transgress it, your penalty will be increased by one level.” Let us give this statement serious consideration.

**Reckless.** A combination of “forward” and “to fall,” the extended meaning is rash or reckless. It appears in Acts 19:36, as “rash,” referring to action that originates from an emotional outburst without thoughtful anticipation of possible consequences. Thus rash action is activity that is usually inadequate to accomplish anything worthwhile, but more than sufficient to spoil everything. In all things, we should seek the Father’s will and wait patiently for His guidance. Then we will do all things decently and in good order, and not act rashly, reacting only with our emotions.

**Conceited.** Conceited, originally meaning to “conceal by smoke,” appears three times in the two epistles to Timothy. It describes a self-exalting and boastful person who is unable to see clearly what either he himself or others are really like. Thus he is puffed up by his own smoke and can realize his past ignorance only after the fog is cleared away.

**Lovers of pleasure.** This is the only place that the phrase “lovers of pleasure” appears in the New Testament. “Love” often denotes tender affection and here is the same misdirected type of love as in “lovers of money.” In the church, there are those who are enslaved by their appetite for good things and who let their pleasures become a substitute for God. They are the ones described in the Scriptures as those “whose god is their appetite” (Phil. 3:19). “For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites” (Rom 16:18). May God have mercy upon us so that we will not be greedy Epicureans, but rather that we may be like Paul and say with him, “I buffet my body and make it my slave” (1 Cor. 9:27). May we endeavor to be masters of the good things in our lives and not slaves to them.

**Rather than lovers of God.** When the church members are completely self-centered, what place does the gracious Lord have in their hearts? When believers love to spend all their money on themselves, what is left for the Lord? Furthermore, some lukewarm churches have exiled the Lord out of their doors just as the church of Laodicea did. While He stands outside, His head is drenched with dew and His locks with the damp of night (Song 5:2). Even so, He is unwilling to forsake the church and continues to stand outside the church door knocking, and promising “If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20). May these churches hear the kind voice of the gracious Lord and open their doors to Him. May each individual open wide his own heart. When individuals and congregations forsake the sins caused by their “own self” and welcome the Lord back into His church, there will be hope for the church to fulfill His commission for the Kingdom of Preparation—to train personnel for the coming Eternal Kingdom.

**Holding to a Form of Godliness, Although They Have Denied Its Power.** The original meaning of godliness is to honor God in one’s thinking and living. It is interdependent with “loving God”; so if there is no love for God, there can be no godliness. In some churches in these last days, the “own self” reigns supreme and the devil is co-regent. It does not feel right to these churches to exhibit no godliness and they find it impossible to be truly godly; therefore, they compromise by holding to a form of godliness. They go through the motions but the power of godliness is missing. A man occupies the pulpit but no message from God is heard. They hold prayer meetings, but God’s power is never manifested. The gospel is spoken, but the hearts of non-believers are never pierced. An admonition is given, but believers are not built up. Missionary organizations in some of these churches spend only 20 to 30 percent of the donations they receive to accomplish the actual work of the mission and pocket the rest for themselves. They audaciously dare to play with fire in the presence of God who is a consuming fire.

**Captivate Weak Women.** Weak women are those swayed by various impulses, who lack both moral fiber and good sense. The unbearable weight of sin upon their consciences moves them to clutch at any salvation offered to seek relief from their sense of guilt, indulging their emotions through novel religious ideas and sensual desires, yet they reject the gospel.

In the last days, such women of low moral character will be found in the church. They will be captivated by married religious men and live in adulterous relationships with them. Some will claim that such behavior is perfectly within the will of God. Sometimes the pastor and other members of the congregation will pamper such people in

their wickedness, especially if they have economic or political standing, and condemn as unloving and mean-spirited those who properly call such behavior sin. This will be a gender reversal of the situation that existed in the church of Thyatira where Jezebel the prophetess “teaches and leads my bondservants astray, so that they commit acts of [sexual] immorality and . . . commit adultery with her” (Rev. 2:20, 22).

Indeed, Satan works overtime to destroy the moral values of believers. The story is told about an incident on a certain airplane flight that occurred when meals were being served. One of the passengers indicated that he was fasting. He was a member of the Satanic church and was fasting and praying to Satan, asking him to destroy the marriages of Christian leaders so that they could not testify for the Lord with power. Under this attack of Satan, marital unfaithfulness and divorce among Christians are increasing day by day. May God have mercy on His Church. When the enemy is attacking us with wave after wave of moral relativism, we must not remain ignorant of or indifferent to his tactics. The Bible admonishes us “to watch and pray,” and also to exercise moral discipline in His church.

When I had finished writing this section concerning the sins prevalent among the people of the Kingdom of Preparation in the last days, my heart became very solemn. I could not help but ask the Lord, “Does this tragic situation among your people move You to tears?” I now understand why our gracious Lord turned in disappointment from the nominal church to the overcomers to select the personnel of His Kingdom and, praise His name, there will be overcomers in the church, “from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God; and they will reign upon the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10). Thank God for His promise, “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne” (Rev. 3:21). May the Lord empower the overcomers in His church to stand up and be counted, and not be counted out.

**c. The Result of Being “Lover of Self”: “Always Learning and Never Able to Come to the Full Knowledge of the Truth.”<sup>10</sup>** Aristotle systematized how man can shape things to conform to his intended purpose by a process of four causes:

- the material cause—that from which something is made;
- the efficient cause—that by means of which something is made;
- the formal cause—that into which something is made; and
- the final cause—that for the sake of which something is made.

Simply put, in order to produce statues Michelangelo had to procure marble for his sculpting substance—the material cause. He then used his energy and tools as an efficient cause, turning the marble into a work of art. The marble shaped by his tools resulted in statues of David, Moses, and Christ in the bosom of Mary, which were in the form of his initial concept and design—the formal cause. Michelangelo’s works of art were then placed in public buildings, museums, and churches as a memorial to esthetic, artistic and religious values—the final cause.

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<sup>10</sup> In 2 Timothy 3:7, Dr. Lin translates *epignosis* as “full knowledge.” In Colossians 1:10, A.T. Robertson does the same thing, “growing by means of the full knowledge of God.” *Word Pictures in the New Testament Concise Edition*, edited by James A. Swanson (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2000), 492

Satan appears to use a similar four causes to develop characteristics in believers that are exactly the opposite of those that God wants to see in His Kingdom personnel. The **material** he uses is people, because people are the ones who do things. As long as they are willing to be used, Satan will give them power, money, prestige, shamelessness, beastly desires and so on. His **efficient cause** is the cunning deceit and other means he uses to tempt the “own self” to commit sins of every shape and shade. As for the **form** of his concept, he wants the sculptured ones to care only for themselves, which is directly opposite to the Scriptural teaching: “That they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Cor. 5:15). Lastly, his **final cause** is to tempt believers to practice the sins of Second Timothy 3:1-7 so that they will always be learning but never be able to come to the full knowledge of the truth. Satan works all these schemes simply because his name is Satan: “Adversary [to God and man].” Throughout history, the policies pursued by evil kings to keep the populace illiterate and without discernment were all initiated and directed by Satan himself. Satan’s explicit purpose is to prevent people from coming to the full knowledge of the truth. Thus, as a result of Satan’s efforts, the full complement of Kingdom personnel has not yet been trained.

Aristotle’s four causes can also be understood in terms of cause and effect, the relationship that governs all the events in this world. As examples, the sea is turbulent because the wind is at gale force; the leaves and branches quiver because the bird flew away. Likewise, because they practice the sins listed in Second Timothy 3:1-7 (cause), Christians are **“always learning and never able to come to full knowledge of the truth”** (effect).

(1) **“Always learning.”** The Great Commission of Christ, in the original language, contains one verb and three verbal forms: “Going,” “make disciples,” “baptizing” and “teaching.” Only “make disciples” is a verb (imperative) and the other three are participles. The literal translation of the first participle and the verb should be: “Going therefore you must make all nations my students” (Matt. 28:19). That is, as we go preaching we are to make the converts into learners. The verb “make disciples” (*matheueo*, derived from the verb *manthano*) signifies “to make a learner.” Converts are to become learners (1) by being baptized to demonstrate their repentance of their sins and their identification with the people of the new covenant—the church, and (2) by being taught, not only theology, but also morality and spirituality in obedience to Jesus’ commands. Therefore, in His Great Commission our Lord clearly tells us that the church, whose members are the people of the Kingdom of Preparation, is God’s school.

Since the church is to be God’s school, established to train the personnel of the Kingdom of Preparation, its main responsibility is to train its people to be useful mature vessels so that the gracious Lord will not be disappointed in either their character or deeds. What is the church to teach to accomplish this task? The Scriptures tell us that the church is “the pillar and support of the truth,” that is, its function is to support and reinforce truth (1 Tim. 3:15). The church establishes the truth by teaching believers to know the truth, live the truth and proclaim the truth, thereby making them worthy personnel to be honored and glorified with Christ in His eternal Kingdom. Indeed, one reason God gave us the Scripture is “for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). Every

one in Christ, even every student who enters into God's school, has a basic responsibility to fulfill, which is to learn well and then to practice what he learns.

Even though the importance of learning is repeatedly emphasized, unfortunately we enjoy leisure and shun work. Most of us behave as if we have never heard of God's desire for us to become earnest students for Him. Before the Israelites entered into Canaan, God repeatedly commanded them to learn, pointing out to them that the first requirement of learning is to **hear**. He said to them through Moses: "I am speaking to you in your hearing, that you may learn them [God's laws] and observe them carefully" (Deut. 5:1; 31:12-13). The gracious Lord also said, "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me" (John 6:45).

Did the Israelites hear? Truly, they heard and they heard repeatedly. As the prophet Isaiah told them, "Hearing, you often hear but do not understand; and seeing, you often see but do not know" (Is. 6:9 retranslated). They heard but they did not learn because they had little spiritual understanding. No wonder the Psalmist begged God saying, "Give me understanding that I may learn Thy commandments. . . .give me understanding, that I may know Thy testimonies" (Ps. 119:73, 125). The situation of the Kingdom of Preparation in the last days is precisely as it was in the days of the prophet Amos, "Men shall be hungry not from lack of bread, or thirsty because there is no water but because they cannot hear the word of the Lord" (8:11 retranslated). What prevented men from hearing? For one thing, the word of the Lord was scarce because at that time Judah and Israel together had just one true prophet (Amos). More to the point, however, the people in both kingdoms repeatedly transgressed and "they rejected the law of the Lord and have not kept His statutes" (Amos 2:4, 6). Today many believers cannot hear God's voice because they love self above all else and their lives are full of the sins of the flesh. Jesus Christ revealed a principle to us concerning hearing when He said, "By your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you" (Mark 4:24). If our measure (heart) is filled with filth and unrighteousness, to be always learning causes grief and is a waste of time and effort, because no progress is made toward coming to the full knowledge of truth. It is having a clean heart that enables us to hear God with understanding.

(2) **"Never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."** The literal translation of the phrase is "never able to come to full knowledge of the truth." "Full knowledge" (*epignosis*) is the same word translated "knowledge" in Ephesians 1:17. To appropriate full knowledge, first, one must be a believer in the Lord Jesus and have love toward his fellow saints, but in addition one must pray to the Father for spiritual wisdom through His revealed Word. Then full knowledge comes when God gives light to our spiritual understanding in order that we may know the great hope of His gracious calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance which we share with His Son Jesus Christ, and the surpassing greatness of His power that God has promised to manifest in the saints (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 1:18-19). Believers who care only for themselves and accumulate a load of the sins associated with self-love never understand the necessity of spiritual exercises such as prayer, holiness, being Spirit-filled, or being a soul-winner, and therefore, can never come to the full knowledge of God's truth.

Throughout history it has been a monumental challenge for philosophers to come up with an acceptable definition of truth. Some say that to reach truth, theory and fact must be in one accord. Others say that truth is simply critical thinking that agrees with

experience. Again, some say that truth is that moment when thinking and fact reach their highest point. While some say that truth is the objective evaluation of facts in accordance with the values of idealism; others say that practical results must determine what is usable since what is usable is true and only truth is useful. Truly, the multitude of answers given demonstrate that the search for truth has often been led by the blind walking around in the dark.

Christ said, that He is the truth (John 14:6) and that God's Word is truth (John 17:17). Therefore, the Scriptures have been organized so as to present this fact in an objective, reliable, and consistent manner. In the Old Testament God used types and prophecies to reveal that He is truth. Subsequently, the Gospels recorded the fulfillment of the types and prophecies through statements such as "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:29, which was the realization of the Isaiah 53 prophecy that a lamb would become a man and die by crucifixion for the sins of all those who were going astray) and through events like Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (John 12:12-16, which was the accomplishment of Zechariah's Old Testament prediction). For this reason the words "That the Scripture might be fulfilled" are quite common in the New Testament. By these words God declares that the facts (fulfillment) in the New Testament match the theories (prophecies) in the Old Testament. The two agree exactly. God's full truth, however, is more than the match between fact and theory, because in Christ all things must have practical applications. Therefore, in the Epistles of the New Testament (which includes Acts, written to an individual, and Revelation, written to the church), we see the foreshadowing and prophecies of the Old Testament having been combined with the facts of the Gospels to function as a unit in order to produce practical results in all places wherever the gospel is preached. For example, much of the Old Testament records prophecies about the coming Savior. The Gospels tell us the fact that our Savior became flesh and died on the cross. Then the Epistles exhibit the practical results of salvation working within us to conform us to the image of Christ. Thus, we are able to formulate a definition of truth—theory that agrees with fact that has practical results—which is confirmed through God's Word, both the written Word (the Scriptures) and the incarnate Word (Jesus).

God gave us the Holy Scriptures and sent the Lord Jesus Christ into our midst so that Christians might know and practice truth. Therefore, God is disappointed when His children are "never able to come to the full knowledge of the truth." Failure to recognize the consistency and progressive nature of God's revelation (as Jesus said, "You do not understand the Scriptures" Mark 12:24) is equivalent to never growing up to Christian adulthood with a full knowledge of God's Word and God's Son, Jesus. It is not that these believers are not learning, for some attend every meeting that comes along; but their hearts have become hardened, and the more they learn the less they hear. Many who are never able to come to a full knowledge of the truth are in such poor spiritual condition that they think they know everything, when in fact they are ignorant of many basic truths. They come, look and listen, but they fail to perceive because they indulge in the sins characteristic of the church of the last days.

In their ignorance, some church members imagine that since God is love, He must have a high level of tolerance for sin. They think, "Love money a little bit, cheat a little, tell some little lies, lust just a little. He certainly does not mind. Otherwise why does He bless me in my work for the church?" God is not blessing the work of such self-deceived individuals because of their character but for the sake of the responsibility He has entrusted to them. He is faithful and His gifts and callings are irrevocable. Since He is the One who entrusted their

job to them, He will take care of that work to the end. Since their character is flawed, even though they are able to cast out demons and perform miracles, the gracious Lord definitely will not acknowledge them as fit to be personnel of His coming Kingdom because He knows that they are lawless. Like any wise ruler, He certainly will not give lawless people authority in His Kingdom. Instead they shall be told, “Depart from Me!” and that shall be their destiny (See Matt. 7:21-23).

How can believers achieve a position of authority in the Coming Kingdom of God? Each must learn what faithfulness to God is and then practice it diligently.

## **Chapter VII. The Coming Kingdom's Personnel Will Be Overcomers Whose Fundamental Characteristic Is Faithfulness to God**

With the world's evil influence continuing to invade the church, and the church's own environment becoming ever more contaminated with wickedness, it is no easy matter to gain or retain a mind with clear spiritual understanding. Unless the hand of Almighty God had protected our young and tender minds after salvation, it would have been impossible for us to hold on to any of His spiritual truths. The wicked environment in both the world and the church causes the minds of many believers to become polluted. Consequently, because they lack faithfulness toward God, His Word, His people and the daily tasks He gives them, many believers will not be qualified to be Kingdom personnel because of character flaws and lack of training.

While He was still on earth, the gracious Lord, taught, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). After He ascended into heaven, He declared, "**He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne**"; and to emphasize the importance of overcoming said, "**as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne**" (Rev. 3:21). By these words He mean that we should follow His example, by overcoming just as He had to overcome in order to reign over all that the Heavenly Father entrusted to Him. He also said, "A disciple is not above his teacher," and because this is an eternal unchanging relationship between Him and us, we must ever follow His leading and teaching.

Scripture defines the Overcomer who will be welcomed into God's eternal Kingdom as the one who holds fast to the words of Christ and faithfully practices them "until the end"—either to the end of his life or until the Lord's appearance to set up His Kingdom (Rev. 2:26). The Overcomer must persevere as the means to "hold fast what you have in order that no one take your crown" (Rev. 3:11), that is, see to it that nothing causes you to forfeit God's plan and desire for you to rule in His Coming Kingdom. Believers who lose their crown will "shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" but those who remain in fellowship with Him can look forward to His appearing with great joy (1 John 2:28). The unfaithful servant can do nothing except "shrink away in shame" from his Lord's searching gaze, whereas the faithful servant avoids such shame and receives a kingdom that can neither be shaken nor taken away.

### **A. God's Call and Promises to Those Desiring to Be Overcomers**

Overcomer is an exciting name. There were many overcomers in Old Testament days. The heroes of faith listed in Hebrews 11 are the cream of the crop. In addition, there were Abram's 318 trained men who were born in his house, Gideon's 300 who lapped water from their hand, the brave men who loyally followed David and the 7,000 true believers whom God kept faithful and pure during King Ahab's idolatrous and adulterous reign. These all should be included on any list of overcomers. Their determined endurance, faith and love for God and man were woven together with their blood, sweat

and tears into a coat of light that reflected the glory of God. Throughout all the ages this glorious light is the brightness of the believers.

In Old Testament times God wanted all of His chosen people to walk in His way and be overcomers, but they would not. He then turned to the church to find the personnel for His Kingdom. A careful reading of the letters to the seven churches in chapters two and three of Revelation reveals a difference in the call to the overcomers in the first three churches from that to those in the last four. For the churches at Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamum, His admonition and promises to the overcomers were made **after** He had spoken to the entire church congregation. However, for the churches at Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea, His word to the overcomers was made **before** He had spoken to the congregation. The reversed sequence is an indication to us that in the very early days of the church, He desired for the entire church to be overcomers. Unfortunately, even in the earliest days the New Testament church began to fall into the immoral idolatrous behavior of God's people in the Old Testament by eating meat sacrificed to idols and committing adultery (Rev. 2:20-22). Disappointed in the spiritual life of the church as a whole, our Lord turned to choose those who overcome to be His Kingdom personnel. As Scripture says, "Many are called, but few are chosen" (Matt. 22:14). God calls all believers to be Kingdom personnel but because of their lack of desire for such an honor and negligible commitment to pursue it diligently and their manifest unwillingness to meet God's standard, few proportionately are actually chosen.

The letters to the seven churches disclose a mighty catalog of God's promises to overcomers. Those believers who become overcomers must pay a great price, but their enjoyment in the Lord and in the blessings He bestows will be marvelous indeed. Overcomers shall enjoy the bountiful salvation prepared by God beginning in the Garden of Eden, and as personnel of the Kingdom of God will fulfill their desire to enjoy it abundantly (Rev. 2:7). They shall not be hurt by the second death (Rev. 2:11). The phrase "hurt by the second death" is set in sharp antithesis to the term "crown of life" mentioned in Revelation 2:10. Moreover, since "crown" and "life" refer to the same thing, the overcomer's crown is life, that is, his splendid crown will be a symbol of his glorious life in the Kingdom of God. The overcomers will enjoy all the richness in the ascended Christ (hidden manna), and they will also receive the white stone with a new name (Rev. 2:17—The white stone was an award given in the ancient Olympic Games and it, like the present day Olympic gold medal, was reserved solely for champions.) The overcomers are those who do the will of God to the very end. For their faithfulness, they will receive authority over the nations, just like the Lord who Himself received authority from the Father and they shall receive the title of "morning star" (Rev. 2:25-28). The Overcomers shall also be acknowledged by Christ before the Father and their names shall remain permanently in the Book of Life (Rev. 3:5). The Overcomers shall be the core members of the Kingdom of God, "a pillar in the temple of My God" and they shall receive special titles (Rev. 3:12). Moreover, the gracious Lord will grant to all Overcomers authority to reign with Him as co-heirs, saying, "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Rev. 3:21). Oh, how great will be the glory bestowed on the Overcomers, exactly as the Scriptures have said, "What is the hope of His calling, [and] what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18). God has prepared for those who love Him "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,

and which have not entered the heart of man . . . [but] to us God revealed them through the [Holy] Spirit" (I Cor. 2:9-10).

### ***B. The First Step to Become an Overcomer—Salvation***

Anyone would consider the promises made to the overcomers highly desirable. To gain access to these wonderful promises, however, it is necessary to become God's child through salvation in Jesus Christ. The subjective, or personal, application of salvation can be received by anyone who wishes to partake of the water of life that is freely available to all. However, the objective reality of salvation, which is God's calling, must also be present (See Matt. 20:1-7; 22:1-10). Without an objective calling the individual's so-called salvation is only self-delusion and is not worth the paper it is written on: be it baptismal certificate or church membership form. For as our Lord has stated, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44, 65).

The ultimate goal of the salvation God gives is not solely for us to be born again. The Scriptures clearly teach that after being called, the believer has to walk in a manner worthy of the calling and to have hope (Eph. 4:1, 4). The idea that being born again is the whole purpose of salvation is widespread among churches in these last days. As a result, most believers have no hope for anything further after being born again. Without hope, there is no driving force in their lives. Without a driving force, they make no progress. As a result, most churches today are paralyzed—full of believers with little desire to grow and with little willingness to serve. The outcome of this condition is a church that is stagnant. They mistake the means (being born again) for the end result of God's plan for their lives (being the personnel of His Coming Kingdom). Having been saved, they think that they have already arrived at God's destination for them and they see no reason to stir themselves to move any further. As a result, the quota for Kingdom personnel is still unfilled and God's purpose for creating mankind has not yet been realized. Unfortunately, like a thick low-hanging fog, Satan's deception that the new birth is the sole end of God's plan for their lives has blinded many believers. Living in the fog, they cannot see the daylight of God's truth, and consequently, they are not well-balanced, and often display either low self-esteem or an exalted sense of self-worth. Thus God's desire for them remains unfulfilled in their lives while they continue to be oblivious to their call to serve Him unreservedly.

When the gracious Lord saved us, He gave us an abundance of grace. It was not intended solely for our own enjoyment but was provided to train us to be useful vessels. First, by means of His precious shed blood, grace wiped away our sins to give us peace with God. The other aspect of His salvation and grace is to save us from sin's dominion. As He saved the Israelites from the oppression of the Egyptians and the whips of the Egyptian taskmasters, He in like manner released us from the power and bondage of sin. This was foreshadowed by the second male goat of the sin offering—Azazel.

"Azazel" has seldom been fully or satisfactorily explained (See Lev. 16:6-10, 20-22). Some say it refers to the male goat itself. In most English translations Azazel is called the "sent goat" or "scapegoat." Some say it refers to the place where the male goat was sent, which was into the wilderness or to a mountain near Sinai. Others say that it is the devil's name for the wilderness or even for the devil himself. They reason that after people have sinned, they owe a debt to the devil, and this male goat was used to repay the

debt owed to him. When man sins, he shortchanges God. How could he be in debt to the devil? This last explanation is just too ridiculous! In reality, this noun is formed from a modification of the verb '*azal*', signifying "to move." Simply put, in order to emphasize the meaning, the first two letters *az* were repeated to form '*azazel*'. Thus the original meaning is intensified from "move" to "completely and thoroughly removed." Just as the Scriptures described, "the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness . . . to a solitary land [completely and thoroughly removed]" (Lev. 16:21-22). Thank God, as long as we are willing to confess our sins to Him, not only are all our sins wiped completely away but the power and authority of sin are completely and thoroughly removed also. As the Scriptures record, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1). Experiencing the two aspects of forgiveness (the new birth by Christ's shed blood and release from the power and authority of sin by confessing our transgressions to Him) is necessary for everyone who desires to become an Overcomer. If after our new birth we do not practice the confession and forsaking of sin, we will be powerless to overcome our "own self," Satan and the world.

In addition to releasing us from the guilt, punishment, power and bondage of sin through our faith in Christ and by daily confession of and repentance from our sins, our Heavenly Father's grace has also bestowed upon us gifts that go along with salvation:

- We immediately receive eternal life (John 5:24).
- We are "justified as a gift by His grace through [His] redemption" (Rom. 3:24).
- We are sanctified by the Spirit (2 Thess. 2:13).
- The function of our spiritual understanding is restored (1 John 5:20).
- Our conscience is cleansed by the precious blood of our Lord (Heb. 9:14).
- We have the indwelling Spirit to teach us all things (John 14:26).
- We receive authority to be God's children (John 1:12).
- We have angels as ministering spirits (Heb. 1:14).

All these blessings are the working capital that the Heavenly Father has bestowed upon us, not primarily for our own enjoyment but to enable us to do His business. By doing God's work, we are being trained to be useful vessels for Him. We can then become good and faithful Kingdom personnel just as the gracious Lord has said, "Well done good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21).

### **C. The Second Step to Become an Overcomer—Receive Divine Equipping and Training**

God is faithful and His faithfulness truly endures unto all generations. Even though mankind is stubbornly thick-headed and has delayed the execution of some of God's plans, each and every thing He has planned will come to pass one day. His plan to bring in His coming Kingdom will someday be realized. He gives us the new birth today in order that later we might become personnel of His Kingdom and that His plans for the Kingdom might be finalized. His faithfulness guarantees it. When His Kingdom

descends, we can accept His commission, “I will put you in charge of many things” (Matt. 25:21).

Who will be worthy to receive such a commission? Those who are chosen, and who are “faithful in a few things.” Faithfulness “in a few things” is developed in our lives by the training gained while doing business for God. As Scripture says, “Immediately the one who had received the five talents went and traded with them and gained five more talents” (Matt. 25:16). But the one who received the one talent “went away and dug in the ground, and hid his master’s money” (Matt. 25:18). As a gemstone must be cut and polished before it can reach its full potential, so God’s daily training of us likewise cuts and polishes our lives for future service. How are those called to be the personnel of the Kingdom cut and polished as gemstones to prepare them to be chosen?

**1. God’s Training Is Necessary for Those Who Desire to Be Chosen.** After we are saved by grace from our sins and transgressions, we receive a dual position, both a “beloved child of God” and a “good and faithful servant.” To be a child of God, all one needs to do is to repent and receive Jesus. “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12). However, to be chosen as Kingdom personnel one must be a “good and faithful servant” of God and that requires training. For example, Abraham, the father of faith, did not achieve Kingdom personnel status instantly but after a long period of being cut and polished (Matt. 8:11). During his testing period, there were failures as well as successes, but overall, he was more than a conqueror. Not only was this true with Abraham, but with all the well-known Bible personalities such as Moses, David, Daniel, Peter and Paul. Praise the Lord!

The above believers became overcomers because they strove mightily and prevailed while being trained for God’s Coming Kingdom. In the same manner we believers today must successfully pass the tests of our training before we can be chosen to be His Kingdom personnel and receive a crown that is imperishable. In other words, God’s testing and training develops us. It is good for us. The Chinese sage Mencius said, “When Heaven is about to confer a great office upon a man, He will exercise his mind with sufferings, his sinews and bones with toil and his body with hunger. He will subject him to extreme poverty and confound his undertakings. Through these, He stimulates his mind, hardens his nature and increases his competency.” The Scriptures say, “You encounter various trials . . . that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4). Even our Lord was not exempt for He was “tempted in all things as we are” (Heb. 4:15).

The word *peirazo* is used in the New Testament 60 times (as a verbal form 39 times and as a noun 21 times) with the meanings of “test,” “trial” and “tempt.” It is translated as test or trial in John 6:6 (See also Acts 20:19, Heb. 11:17, James 1:2, 1 Pet. 1:6, 4:12, Rev. 2:10 and 3:10). Thus, when our Lord was on earth, all the trials He underwent were also His tests, and He passed them all because “[He is] without sin” (Heb. 4:15). The original meaning of sin is “missing the mark”—failing to meet God’s standard. Thus Jesus’ being “without sin” is equivalent to “did not fail God’s standard.” Praise the Lord! He stood in our shoes and took the test on our behalf. In being tested, He was just like us. While we frequently fail our tests, He never did! So He is able to say, “Which one of you convicts Me of sin?” (John 8:46) and also, “As I also overcame” (Rev. 3:21). For this very reason, God has “highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is

above every name" (Phil. 2:9). As a matter of fact, throughout Scripture, all great men of faith were cut and polished. No wonder Peter admonished us, "You have been distressed in various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

**2. God Himself Equips Those Who Desire to Be Chosen as Personnel of the Coming Kingdom.** By reading carefully the two parables about the master giving talents to his servants (Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 19:11-26), we know that the reason for such action on the master was not greedily seeking to increase his bank account during his absence. Rather, he was giving each of the servants an opportunity to acquire knowledge through learning and hardship. None of us were born with sufficient knowledge, either mental or spiritual, to do the work of a mature adult, whether it be secular or sacred. This life we now live is the school in which our heavenly Father trains us. To do God's business (work) in this life is important. However, the Master is not concerned with the amount of money earned for Him but whether or not the servant is learning to perform his designated task. Thank God, what He wants us to see is that the purpose of doing His business is not to provide financial support for His work but to equip His servants (us) so that He will be pleased to choose us to become Kingdom personnel. Today, when we selflessly go out to win souls, to serve the church graciously while enduring hard toil and utter frustration, to serve the Lord by rising early and going to bed late, or to advance the cause of the Kingdom by not speaking bitterly about hardship, we experience the means selected by our Lord to mature us. To be honest, if His desire was only for the work's sake and not for our training, the gracious Lord could have a Pentecost occur everyday so that there would be thousands saved daily. Moreover, He could send angels to preach the gospel (See Rev. 14:6-7), lead revival meetings and shepherd the church. They would definitely do a better job than most Christians do today, but He wants Christians to do the work and be trained by it. He wants us to pray for our needs with a seeking and single-minded heart. He wants us to prepare carefully and in detail. He wants us to co-operate with each other, using our several abilities to advance His work. Sometimes, we may need to pay a steep price in order to see some spiritual fruit. "He did not subject to angels the world to come" but rather, He wants us, insignificant humanity, to rule over His Kingdom (Heb. 2:5-8).

**3. To Be Chosen for God's Eternal Kingdom Means to Reign over It.** In Hebrews 2:5-8, we learn two things. First, there will be a future world much better than the present one. Second, in this coming world the rulers will not be angels but men. This present world will pass away, perhaps very soon, but a better world is waiting to come in. What will this future world be like? It will not be like that ideal world God first created on the earth and which has been deformed almost beyond recognition by the evil one. Also, it is not the Messianic Kingdom that God promised to the Jews, of which the mother of James and John requested from Jesus, "Command that in your Kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left" (Matt. 20:21). Nor is it that which the thief on the cross sought when he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your Kingdom" (Luke 23:42). (According to the gracious Lord's reply, He did not grant his request. He only promised that his soul would be saved. If he had not received training to be Kingdom personnel, how could he be a ruler in God's Kingdom?) The coming world will be a much better reality. The coming world will be the eternal

Kingdom—the Kingdom that God has been preparing since the foundation of the world. Neither the first ideal earth nor the Millennial Messianic Kingdom is the ultimate end of the salvation our gracious Lord gives. The final goal of salvation is, “There shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). Man’s reigning over the eternal Kingdom fulfills with the promise of our Lord, “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations” (Rev. 2:26), and “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne” (Rev. 3:21).

#### **D. The Third Step to Become an Overcomer—Continuing Faithfulness Toward God**

When the gracious Lord was on earth, He stated, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Luke 6:45). Earlier, the Holy Spirit spoke through Solomon, “Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life,” and also said that the behavior of a person is governed by how he thinks (Prov. 4:23; 23:7). These statements reveal that man’s heart and action are inseparable. The same relationship is described in the chapter on “Rectifying One’s Heart” in the Chinese classic entitled *The Great Learning*, “When the heart is not there, the eyes look but do not see; the ears hear but do not understand; the mouth eats but does not know the flavor [of the food]. So the ‘cultivation of the personality’ is dependent on the ‘rectification of the heart.’” Mencius said, “Education is no other than the concentration of loose thoughts!” All these statements confirm that the overcomer must first have the internal desire to be an overcomer before its form can be realized externally and he becomes an overcomer in fact. Without the desire all effort will be as futile as chasing the wind. Therefore, the believer must make it his heart’s desire to be chosen as personnel of God’s Kingdom and be fully willing for God to train him for this glorious honor.

Everyone with a free will, whether angels or men, must be tested and chosen in order to partake as overcomers in God’s Kingdom. In the case of Gideon, after a double elimination 300 men were selected from 32,000. The brave men who followed David were all victorious fighters. The Scriptures tell us that being chosen is largely dependent on our training before God does His choosing. For instance, the difference between King Saul and David as rulers can be seen from a cause and effect standpoint. Saul did not have much training before he became king, but David underwent extensive training and was tested beforehand. The effect, therefore, was that Saul rebelled against God whereas David was obedient. As another example, even the gracious Lord was trained for 30 years and was often tested with great severity to prepare Him to be the sacrificial Lamb of God who bore the sins of the world on the cross (Matt. 26:37-39).

**1. What Being Faithful Toward God Really Means.** The Scriptures plainly mark the way for the Overcomer, “Be faithful” (Rev. 2:10). Moses in his day was the chief steward over God’s household because of his faithfulness. God’s requirement to be faithful extended even to Christ. As the Scriptures recorded, “He [Christ] was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house” (Heb 3:2). The gracious Lord

saved us and gave us a dual position: to be both His children and His servants. Since we are His children, we should love Him. Since we are His servants, we should be faithful. No wonder the Scriptures repeatedly teach us both to love God and to be faithful (John 14:21; Matt. 25:23, 45; 1 Cor. 4:2). Jesus told us that when the Master returns to settle accounts with His servants, only those good and faithful servants will be eligible to rule over many things in His Kingdom. In Luke, He specified, “Be in authority over ten cities . . . over five cities” (Luke 19:17-19). What precisely does it mean to be faithful?

According to the grammatical structure in Matthew 25:21, faithful and good should be synonyms. The same relationship is obvious in Luke 19:17, because the “good” mentioned in the beginning of the verse is the “faithful” mentioned later. Further, the Greek word translated “good” often has the meaning of “best.” For example, when Jesus was preaching at Mary’s home, Martha complained because Mary did not help her. Jesus defended Mary by saying, “Mary has chosen the good part” (Luke 10:42). The word good here has the meaning “best” and is the same as the “good” used in Luke 19:17. This is what David meant when he said, “Thou art my LORD; I have no good besides Thee,” that is, to know Yahweh was his best and highest desire (Ps. 16:2). James also said, “Every good [best] thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above,” which means He always wills what is best for His children (James 1:17).

Since “good” and “faithful” are synonyms which can also mean “best,” being a good and faithful servant of the Lord simply means “to do one’s best.” This agrees with the Chinese definition of the word faithful which is “doing all one can.” In fact, the person who begins doing his best and trying his hardest will become faithful even if previously he had not been. So, whether the criteria is occidental or oriental, religious or philosophical, being faithful is simply “doing one’s best.” As long as His servant is doing his best, the Master is satisfied. For this reason the Master gave the same praise to the servant who made about \$2,000 on his investment as to the servant who made approximately \$5,000. The Master’s concern was not the results of the work as much as the training and edification of the believer through the work. Although the one who made \$2,000 earned \$3,000 less than the one who made \$5,000, he put forth his best effort and thus accomplished his Master’s desire for him, and he was chosen to be one of the personnel for the coming eternal Kingdom (Matt. 25:22-23).

The Kingdom needs people: those who are brave and faithful, those who live for the Lord rather than for themselves and those who are willing to lay down their lives for the sake of the Kingdom. The Kingdom does not have much need for such things as denominations, buildings or organizations. It needs personnel who allow their Lord to train them daily. Religious leaders are constantly looking for new plans, new methods or new organizations to advance the church’s agenda. God’s plan, however, is to develop people. The organization looks for better methods. God wants better men. What the Kingdom needs is not more exciting methods, or unctuously glib orators, or public-relations experts, but faithful men whom the Holy Spirit can train, develop and utilize—men who practice faithfulness toward God and denial toward self.

“Why” people ask, “is it that many good faithful workers in the church are taken by the Lord in their prime? If they had lived longer, would they not have been more beneficial to the work of the Kingdom of Preparation?”

The Kingdom of Preparation is important but the personnel required by the Lord in the eternal Kingdom are more important. Once the personnel have been trained and have become useful vessels, have taken their tests and passed, they are qualified to be “the chosen ones.” Since His eternal Kingdom needs them, the gracious Lord would certainly want them to put down their earthly labor and do what He has prepared for them since the foundation of the world and thereby enjoy the glory that He has prepared for them.

Christ, for instance, was on earth for only 33 1/2 years and other than the twelve disciples, only about 500 believed on Him. But when He was on the cross, He said, “It is finished!” Finished? At that time, nearly everyone in the whole world was in the hand of the evil one, steeped in sin, and even in Judea there were tens of thousands who were not saved. “They were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Surely if He had lived here for only another 30 or 40 years, many more souls would have been saved. How could He say “It is finished!”? It is true that God’s entire program for the eternal Kingdom was not finished but the training that Christ needed and His mission, which included dying for sin on our behalf, was finished. Thus He could truly witness to God the Father concerning what He Himself had done, “I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was” (John 17:4-5).

Because some people finish their training and go to the eternal Kingdom relatively early in life, it does not mean that work here is unimportant. Earthly work is the medium to accomplish His goal. It is God’s tool. If there were no work, then there would be no training. Thus, by letting believers do His work here and now, God is training them to be competent personnel in His Coming Kingdom. Similarly, a mother might teach her 12-year-old daughter to do housework now so that later the daughter can be a good and faithful housewife. Parents require their children to attend school, to faithfully and diligently do their homework in order that in the future they may become good and faithful employees, parents, citizens and witnesses for our Lord. The individual who is not doing his best in his work will not become the faithful and useful personnel needed in God’s eternal Kingdom. Faithfulness is more than talk; it is “getting down to business” and is achieved by years of training through diligent work.

**2. How Believers Become Faithful.** God did not say that one has to be an Abraham, Daniel, John or Paul in order to be an Overcomer. If He had, we would have no hope because we are so far behind them. God simply requires that we “be good and faithful,” that is, do our best to accomplish whatever task He gives us. Everyone has the potential to do his best in each of several areas of faithfulness.

**a. Faithful Toward God.** First, Overcomers should be faithful to God, which is not a simple matter. After the nation Israel left Egypt, she came to Mount Sinai where the LORD appeared in thunder and lightning. The people promised Moses that they would obey all that the LORD said to him. Later on in the wilderness, however, they tempted God ten times and once they reached the land of Canaan they grew increasingly worse. They even erected idols in His temple in Jerusalem. Because of their unfaithfulness, the LORD called them harlots and eventually their homes and cities, including Jerusalem, were broken down and their nation destroyed. Among individuals, Solomon, who was a prolific writer of proverbs and songs and the wisest man who ever lived, did not remain

faithful to God his Creator in his old age. As a result, the kingdom was divided into two nations, Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Unlike Israel and Solomon there is One of whom the Scriptures have said, “He was faithful to Him who appointed Him” (Heb. 3:2). The Scriptures record that Jesus was faithful by seeking only the will of the One who sent Him (John 5:30). His words were those that the Father taught Him (John 8:28). Of His actions He said, “I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 6:38). No wonder when He prayed to God, He could say, “I glorified Thee on the earth” (John 17:4). Overcomers need to make the Lord Jesus their model for faithfulness to God. As the Holy Spirit said, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1).

**b. Faithful Toward God’s Word.** Second, overcomers should be faithful to the Scriptures. On the eve of the second coming of the gracious Lord, Satan, ever the adversary, knows that his days are numbered and is putting up his final stubborn resistance. He will leave no stone unturned in his effort to separate people from God’s Word so that the personnel for the Kingdom will not be made ready. Since the nineteenth century, he has encouraged liberals to question the veracity and validity of the Scriptures to undermine biblical authority. During the twentieth century, he has been using the cruel inhumanity and materialism of Communism to destroy scriptural spirituality. Satan wants to destroy the Scriptures through “saturation bombing,” furiously using whatever ideology or tactic he can shape to his purpose. Currently, in certain fringe charismatic movements Satan offers some so-called tongues to replace the authority of the Scriptures. Whenever people leave an opening for the devil, heresies and demonic teachings emerge, and believers become confused. Consequently, the full complement of overcomers is not yet ready. Therefore, the Kingdom of Inheritance has not yet come to earth, and Satan is still holding on by using his standard mode of operation—deception!

Believing in the authority of Scripture is very important. But more than that, daily obedience to the Scriptures is required. Faith in God’s Word is the cause that produces obedience. Failure to be faithful to God’s Word leads to faith that is easily shaken, or even lost. Joshua was an overcomer in the Old Testament who was faithful and, therefore, successful in everything he did. From the moment he raised the banner, the battle was won; and the moment he appeared on the scene, success was assured. This was true because he obeyed, followed and meditated on God’s Word above all things. God asked him to “only be strong and very courageous” according to His Word (Josh. 1:7). May all overcomers be faithful to God’s word more than to man’s words and be faithful to God’s authority more than to man’s authority, because only His word is settled in heaven and only His authority rules over all. Although some passages of Scripture are not easily understood, the Holy Spirit will teach us as long as we are willing to study thoroughly and meditate extensively. Gradually, our minds will perceive the truth, and we will arrive at a comprehensive understanding that will light up our features and stimulate us to run on the road to Zion. Praise the Lord!

**c. Faithful Toward God’s Household.** Next, the Overcomer should be faithful toward God’s household, which is the church of the eternal God. As we said before, Moses was God’s spokesman and chief steward over His household because he was faithful (Num.12:7-8). His faithfulness was so remarkable that it was used as an illustration to help us understand the faithfulness of Christ (Heb. 3:2). In spite of repeated murmuring

by the Israelites, he labored faithfully, willing to perish himself in order that the Israelites might be saved. Such an honorable and selfless attitude produced faithfulness that is certainly worthy of our deepest admiration and provides a clear and distinct pattern for us to follow in our Christian conduct.

But today Christian young people seem unwilling to follow Moses' example of faithfulness toward God's household. Many manifest little desire to become trained active members in the Lord's church. One reason may be that most of them do not understand that the church is God's appointed institution to train personnel for His coming Kingdom. Also, some churches have so many problems that they have lost their attractiveness, and others are so lacking in obedience and love for God that they fail to reach out to either the lost or new converts. They have the false notion that as long as they keep themselves relatively separate from the world and have Christian fellowship among themselves, they have accomplished enough. Such thinking is from the flesh of either unchurched believers or lazy church members and is not scriptural.

The Lord has never done anything meaningless and He established the church for a definite purpose. If the existence of His church were an option, He would not have said, "Upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18). Ideas that the church is not needed or that the church is not required to be effective in carrying out her divine mandate very probably come from the evil one. From her very beginning, Satan has attacked God's church as he attempts to extinguish God's Kingdom. In the Old Testament days as well as in the New, Satan has tried again and again by a variety of means to destroy God's institution. Even in our own time Satan, using the cloak of communism as his disguise, is continuing to try to destroy the church. In some countries, the church has been declared illegal, her property confiscated, her pastors jailed and the people severely persecuted.

Contrary to expectations, as the satanic attacks on God's holy church increased, she became more holy, healthy, productive and victorious. Since the church is a holy institution and not just another building on the corner, even in such a harsh environment as the rule of communism in China, droves of young people are moved by the Holy Spirit to dedicate themselves for the sake of His Kingdom, willing to sacrifice life and limb as they make their commission from the King of kings the highest priority of their lives. They willingly accept a job from God that entails hardship, poverty, and abuse as their daily lot and still do a wonderful job under the power of the Holy Spirit. Their determination to take the hard and narrow road for the sake of God's love has caused unbelievers and political leaders to think of them as "fools for Christ." But in China, as always happens, God wins the battle in the end. May believers everywhere who desire to be overcomers imitate these heroic young people in their life of dedication. Hallelujah!

**d. Faithful Also in the Little Things.** Finally, we must be "faithful with a few things," that is, in the least of things (Matt. 25:21; compare to Luke 19:17 and Matt. 25:40). The training to do one's best should apply not only to heavenly things as mentioned previously but also to the ordinary tasks of our daily living, such as cleaning house, washing dishes, mowing the lawn and so on. The gracious Lord desires wholesome and complete vessels. He does not want "half baked" ones. A person's true nature is not usually seen in big events, but in small things. It is easy to pretend on big occasions, but in small things one's true nature easily slips out. Also, big works are readily seen by

others, and it is easy to be praised for them. However, it is difficult to catch people's attention with small things and whatever praise people might give is negligible. People are often lazy and thus seek to excuse their negligence to do a complete and thorough job with talk such as "let us not complicate life with too many details." The gracious Lord knows the deceitfulness of our flesh, so He purposely works to strengthen us by developing our faithfulness in little things. To that end He said, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much" (Luke 16:10), that is, faithfulness arises out of what we are through and through; how we handle ourselves with the little things expresses how we will handle ourselves with much. A well-known Chinese proverb says, "If a person cannot rule over a single-room household, how can he rule the empire?" So what should the one who aspires to be an Overcomer in God's Kingdom do? He should faithfully perform all the little tasks of life now in order to be fully trained for the Coming Kingdom, as Scripture says, "Whoever shall force you to go one mile, go with him two" (Matt. 5:41).

In the history of earlier Chinese pastors, Mr. Ming-Dao Hwang is the only one whose moral character matched his writings. He outstripped many other ministers simply because his character surpassed theirs. It is said that he came to know the Lord when he was a teenager, and while at home, he had to help with such household tasks as sweeping the floor, washing off the patio, dusting, and so on. Every time he wiped the chairs and tables, he would also turn them upside down and wipe the bottom of the legs. He really understood how to train himself to do his best even when doing housework. Thus Mr. Ming-Dao Hwang learned that faithfulness in little things is a very great thing.

**3. God Chooses Only Faithful Believers to Rule over His Eternal Kingdom and the Unfaithful Simply Are Not Chosen.** Several passages of Scripture tell us that the rulers of this present world are the angels. How can this be reconciled to the Scriptures that tell us, "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19)? Remember that the evil one was an angel in the beginning. The Scriptures tell us in another place that there are chosen angels (1 Tim 5:21). Since there are chosen angels, there must also be those who are not chosen. Therefore the world today is under the rule of two classes of angels. Addressed as "prince" (Dan. 10:13, 20-21), Michael the archangel and the princes of Persia and Greece are all angels of the same rank. Their only difference is that one is a chosen angel and the other two are not; one is obedient and the others are disobedient. This same situation exists among believers: some will be chosen to rule and some will not be. The Scriptures tell us, "I never acknowledged you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23 retranslated); "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you" (Matt. 25:12); "Cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness" (Matt. 25:30) and "By your own words I will judge you, you worthless slave" (Luke 19:22). All these are words of judgment from the gracious Lord upon those faithless believers who were called unto salvation but because of their unfaithfulness were not chosen to be Kingdom personnel, that is, they are saved but will suffer loss of reward. Dare we cover our ears and refuse to listen to such words as these?

Everything that the sovereign God allows to happen, even living under satanic communism, is intended to cut and polish and equip His servants to accomplish all that He has purposed from the foundation of the world. Such training is hard work and takes

time. When He equipped Moses, He did not spend just 80 years training him but 120 years. When He was preparing Paul to be a brilliant diamond by cutting and polishing him, God did not work in the apostle's life for just three years in the Arabian Desert but for his entire life, until he could finally say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7). The preparation of an Overcomer is not a simple task accomplished through a life of ease. Since the desire to be lazy is one of the traits mankind inherited from Adam, it is no wonder that so few of those called to be Kingdom personnel are chosen for that glorious honor (Matt. 22:14).

At this very moment God urgently desires believers to dedicate themselves to the long hard training necessary for them to be chosen as personnel of His coming Kingdom. Let those who want to be chosen enroll in God's school and do their best to be faithful to the Lord, to His Word, to His church and in little things until faithfulness becomes second nature to them and their daily habit. Then the heavenly Father's desire for man to rule His Kingdom will be fulfilled and the Kingdom of heaven will quickly descend.

#### **E. Overcomers Must Battle**

The earthly life of Jesus was one huge battleground. Shortly after His birth, King Herod, prompted by the devil, tried to take His life. His words show that His entire life's work was a continuous battle against sin, evil, death, demons, illness, wind and storms. He always stood with the Old Testament prophets and His words sliced as a saber through the opposition of the religious leaders of His time. He always won His battles with His banner flying at full mast. He defeated the tempter in the wilderness and lived in harmony with the wild beasts (Mark 1:13). (The peace between man and animals was lost early in man's history [Gen. 9:2] but Isaiah 11:6 tells us that it will be restored when Messiah comes.) Even on the cross at Golgotha when all seemed lost, He, by humbly submitting to suffering unto death, accomplished the greatest victory ever recorded anywhere. As the Scriptures say, "that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). Praise the Lord!

Jesus told us, "A disciple is not above his teacher" (Matt. 10:24). If our teacher worked and struggled like He did, what about us, His kindergarten students? Job said, "Is there not a warfare to man on earth?" (Job 7:1, retranslated). We who are the children of the Kingdom must struggle with sin and evil (Heb. 12:4), and buffet our bodies (1 Cor. 9:27), and we must also, directly or indirectly, battle against the devil who is the chief evil power in the spiritual realm and who rules over this world of darkness (Eph. 6:12). We know that our efforts alone will never bring victory; but as Christ is training us to become His Kingdom's personnel, He wants us to experience combat in our own lives and personally gain victory under His leadership. Our strategy in this spiritual battle, therefore, is to apply in faith the victory that Christ has already won on the cross. Then we can be like Him, just as He said, "The cup that I drink you shall drink; and you shall be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized" (Mark 10:39), that is, we will partake of His tribulation and then undergo our own battle so that later we can boast of and participate in His victory. Salvation is freely given but overcomers must battle their way to the Kingdom.

**1. The Battle to Live for the Lord (Luke 13:22-30).** As Jesus proceeded on His way to Jerusalem, passing from one city or village to another, someone asked Him, "Lord, are

there just a few who are being saved?” Jesus did not give him a yes or no answer but only said, “Strive to enter the narrow door” (Luke 13:23-24). What did Jesus mean? As explained earlier, since the Scriptures were written in ancient languages, apparent contradictions frequently are nothing more than the same word having several different meanings. One example is the word “good” which has been translated into over 70 different Chinese words. Another example is “eternal life” which in Romans 6:23 refers to God’s gift that can be received by whoever will accept it. However, as explained previously, in Mark 9:43-45 Jesus speaks of entering into life, but in 9:47 the same event is called **entering the Kingdom of God**. Moreover, in Mark 10:17 Jesus is asked, “What shall I do to **inherit eternal life?**” Upon seeing that His instructions are rejected, Jesus says in 10:23 “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to **enter the Kingdom of God.**” According to its context, “eternal life” refers either to God’s present free gift as in Romans 6:23, or to the Kingdom which He prepared for us from the foundation of the world, as in Mark. Therefore, in Luke 13:23-24 “saved” refers to life in God’s Kingdom that is to come. That is why Jesus said we must work to prepare ourselves for it, unlike our present salvation which was given by God’s grace and enables us to repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ—without works.

But when Jesus says “**strive to enter**,” what exactly does He want us to do? The basic meaning for “strive,” which occurs eight times in the New Testament, is “to fight” or “to struggle,” and the words “agony,” and “agonize” are derived from it. The word was translated from the original as “strive” three times, “striving” once, “fight” twice, and “fighting” and “laboring earnestly” once each. For example, when Pilate asked Jesus if He were King of the Jews, Jesus answered, “If My Kingdom were of the world, then My servants would be fighting” (John 18:33, 36). The word “fighting” is the same word that is translated in Luke 13:24 as “strive.” So, when Jesus said for us to “strive to enter the narrow door,” He meant that rather than being half-hearted, we must set our heart and mind to make an all-out effort to enter by the narrow door, just as an Olympic athlete would strive to win the Decathlon.

Recall what the phrase “narrow gate” means. The terms “narrow door” and “narrow gate” occur in the New Testament three times: Luke 13:24 and Matthew 7:13 and 14. Earlier we determined that the narrow gate in Matthew 7:13 and 14 means the believer’s dedication that enables him to begin living wholeheartedly for God. The “narrow door” in Luke 13:24 signifies the same thing. So Jesus is telling us the first battle we must fight if we desire to be overcomers is to live a dedicated life for the Lord.

Therefore, we can say that salvation occurs in three periods: past, present and future (See 2 Cor. 1:10-11). Past salvation (regeneration) resulted in our deliverance from the great peril of spiritual death—“even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ” (Eph. 2:5). Present salvation (preservation) is God’s delivering us from situations that have harmful consequences as Paul said “For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:19). Future salvation (glorification), as the Holy Spirit explained through Paul, is “The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely into His Heavenly Kingdom” (2 Tim. 4:18). To summarize: past salvation is the new birth “by grace through faith”; present salvation is by our prayer with the help of the Holy Spirit; but future salvation as personnel of the Kingdom of God requires

“striving.” Moreover, Jesus Himself warns us that if we do not strive now to enter, we may be among the “many, I tell you, [who] will seek to enter and will not be able” (Luke 13:24b). In order to avoid this disaster Jesus commands us to “strive to enter by the narrow door” (Luke 13:24a), that is, give ourselves daily to serve God without reservation.

It is not easy for believers to give themselves daily to serve God without reservation. The Scriptures clearly state, “the mind set on the flesh is hostile towards God [or is the ‘enemy of God’]” (Rom. 8:7). In these last days, all kinds of education (whether family, social or academic) teach young people to set goals such as self-gain, self-enjoyment, self-interest, self-convenience, self-indulgence and the like. No wonder the Scriptures prophesied regarding the last days that the church will be full of those who are “lovers of self” (2 Tim. 3:2), since they have been trained to do just that. On the other hand, the Scriptures require “that they [the believers] who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf” (2 Cor. 5:15). Without the special grace the Lord makes available to us, such a life would be utterly impossible.

As an example, a short while ago a China Evangelical Seminary alumni came to share with me the progress of her life. She is currently teaching at a Christian school, but she recalled that she was very uncomfortable when she first entered CES because all her previous college professors and education had taught her to be self-centered. Her CES professors and education, however, stressed that God and others were to be first, and it took her about two semesters to adjust to this 180-degree change of outlook. This one case shows that to really live for the Lord is not an easy matter. It takes hard work and determination.

Consequently, many believers who dearly love the Lord have to struggle over and over again to continue to walk on the path of true dedication, to make their lives a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God, and thus to achieve a triumphant spiritual life which is an absolute requirement for those who would be Kingdom personnel. If we are not transformed by the renewing of our mind (*nous*, spiritual nature), our spiritual insight will not be sharp and sensitive enough to discern what is that good, acceptable and perfect will of God (See Rom. 12:1, 2). Without dedication to give us a renewed mind, we lack the means to know, let alone to obey God’s will. To dedicate oneself is not a matter of simply walking forward to the altar, letting the speaker pray for you, and then returning home, as though nothing has happened at all. Dedication is living for the Lord moment by moment. So to rise each morning, to live, to eat and to drink are not just for our personal enjoyment but are for the maintenance of the body which the Lord has entrusted to us. All our dealings with other people and every event in our lives are opportunities for us to fulfill the responsibilities that have been bestowed upon us by the Lord. Everything is because of the Lord and for the Lord. Without dedication we cannot even begin to be an Overcomer and when Christ returns we will not be able to enter (inherit) the Kingdom of God because the Lord has clearly said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he [the Overcomer] who does the will of My Father [can enter]” (Matt. 7:21).

It is important to remember, however, that to live a dedicated life for the Lord and to be chosen by God for full time ministry are two entirely different matters. Every Christian is to live for the Lord because He saved us specifically to live for Him in this

world in order to become His Kingdom personnel in eternity. This is the secret of life's true happiness. On the other hand, for full time service to the Lord, the individual must experience both the Lord's calling and sending in addition to living moment by moment for the Lord. No one should volunteer for full-time ministry without God's call, so that neither the individual nor the church will be hurt. Only the Lord knows who is qualified and who is not qualified to be a preacher. This is especially a reminder to all the young people who sincerely love the Lord and desire to show that love by a full-time ministry as their vocation.

**2. Overcomers Battle Their Sinful Nature, That Is, Their “Old Self” (Rom. 7:14-25).** Two terms used in Scripture to describe our sin-dominated nature inherited from Adam are the “flesh” and the “old self.” Many assume that Adam was driven out of the Garden of Eden because he sinned in eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The fact that God designated one tree to be the “tree of the choice of good and evil” implies that before Adam ate the fruit he did know what good and evil were. This knowledge would have provided information for his conscience to act upon, once a concrete case was laid before it. Thus the main reason was that “man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil. . . . the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden” (Gen. 3:22-23). Adam had become like God, not in omniscience and omnipotence, nor in holiness and righteousness; but in that Adam decided for himself what was good and what was evil and would not rely upon God’s standard of right and wrong. Like so many rebellious hearts today, Adam desired to set up his own standard. Therefore, his eating fruit from the “tree of the choice of good and evil” was an outward manifestation of his wicked rebellious heart.

**a. Knowing My “Flesh,” That Is, My “Old Self” (Gal. 5:24).** To win a battle a military strategist must know both himself and his enemy. The church currently is in such a dire situation due to a lack of knowledge about herself as well as about the enemy. One who does not know himself, even if he knows the enemy, cannot be the victor. The condition of those who have not the slightest idea what the enemy is like is much worse. The church in these last days resembles Belshazzar, king of Babylon. When the army of the Medes arrived at the city gate, he was holding a banquet, singing and drinking, unaware of the imminent danger. In the same vein, Satan is attacking the very citadel of our faith and life, and many believers are unaware of either his presence or his tactics. As a result, the evil one is running wild, fearing nothing. Before we can engage the enemy in warfare, we must undergo training to resist our sinful nature (old self) and to learn to walk the narrow way faithfully.

**(1) How Our “Own Self” Is Formed.** Because Adam had a very high opinion of himself, he chose his own way instead of submitting to God’s authority and thereby committed high treason against the Deity. As a result, he was separated from his Creator. Ever since Adam’s transgression, the saying, “One rotten apple spoils the lot,” has been true. Like Adam, all his descendants have become like sheep that have gone astray, each turning to his own way. This natural tendency is intensified by each one continually looking after his own self-interest. This deplorable trait of self-centeredness took root with Adam and each generation has passed it on to the next generation. From the moment a baby is born, the development of all its emotions, thinking, will, religious nature and morality are concurrently developing and nourishing the growth of “self.”

Parents continually teach their children to look out for themselves. Teachers, likewise, instruct their students how to gain an advantage, develop their talents and position themselves well in everything. Even religious teachers instruct their followers to develop self-discipline and piety in order that they may go to nirvana or paradise after death. Often assistance is given to the poor and needy to build up the personal merit of the giver and not primarily for relieving others' pain and sufferings. Thus the whole sum of man's education is usually dedicated to the purpose of equipping one's "own self" and emphasizing the importance of the "self."

**(2) The Total Corruption of Our "Own Self."** The accumulation of self-centered behavior over many years gradually forms a human heart that is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. It cannot be cured by natural means. Even in the days of Noah, God said, "My spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh" (Gen. 6:3) in recognition of the corruption of the flesh. The common cry of mankind in these last days is "I am number one!" "Own self," unconcerned with country, family or friends, gives itself over to such devilish actions as contempt for the law and human rights abuse—caring for nothing and no one, just self.

Not only is society afflicted with self-centeredness, but the church is imitating society. The statement "In the last days . . . men will be lovers of self" (2 Tim. 3:1-2) discloses that the basic reason for all kinds of lawless and unrighteous acts in the church is self. In many churches humanism has replaced the Scriptures and democracy had been substituted for theocracy. Consequently, the church, like that of Laodicea (*lao [laos]* is people, *dicea [dike]* is habit, judgment, right), has become lukewarm toward spiritual activity because the "own self" takes precedent over God's Word. Christ, the Head of the church, not only has no part in running the church, He has been driven outdoors. Nevertheless, He still stands knocking on the church door asking to come inside. Christians who desire to "no longer live for themselves but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf" will find it as difficult to do so as trying to fly without wings unless they receive special grace from the Lord. No wonder the Lord said, "Many are called, but few are chosen" to be personnel of the Kingdom of God (Matt. 22:14).

**(3) The Self-centeredness of Our "Own Self."** Our "own self" is full of all kinds of deceit, treachery and evil and often takes suggestions from Satan. Therefore, it is displeasing to the Lord and at enmity with God. It manipulates God's truth and often goes to extremes so that it either overemphasizes an idea or falls short of the truth. One's "own self" just cannot do what is right in God's sight. While its basic nature may be disguised, its ugly outward manifestations can be seen everywhere. Showing-off is its frequent goal and seeking self-benefit is its underlying principle of operation. Self-promotion is its usual tactic and being a "wise guy" is its style. It is greedy with its hand outstretched saying, "Give! Give!" Whenever there is entertainment to be had, self will be there early. But if there is responsibility to be fulfilled in church or to family, self is nowhere to be found. It shuns work and seeks leisure, having no idea that it is by building up others that one is built up and that in helping others oneself is also helped. All this shows three legacies gained from Adam: pride, dishonesty and laziness. When self suffers setbacks, it complains and blames itself, wasting away and at times even committing suicide because it has no resources to enable it to struggle and rise above circumstances. Self does not know the importance of developing strength. When it is

lonely, self will feel isolated and will talk to itself for self-comfort. When excluded by others, self withdraws into itself, to avoid contact with others. When self accomplishes a little success, it revels in it with great pride and self-congratulation. When others put self on a pedestal, it gloats and believes their flattery is genuine and thus is deluded.

Most people under the influence of self are unwilling to keep themselves pure but willingly swim in the muck and mire of polluted society. Ignoring the warning, “People who create evil will themselves perish,” they fall prey to their own schemes and intrigues until eventually they must eat the bitter fruit of their actions. When their conscience begins to bother them, they do feel ashamed but hide their guilty feelings by rationalization or else accuse others of causing their problem. Unwilling to accept the counsel of others to repent, they sear their consciences and are eventually led by the ugly acts of “own self” or “flesh” into self-deception, deception of others, and sometimes even self-destruction. When the holy, righteous God saw that our “old self” could not be cured, He nailed it to the cross with Christ to deliver us from its domination. Unfortunately, most believers do not seem to know that self has been defeated or how to make that defeat real in their lives. Instead, they tolerate their “old self” as a long-time friend and so end up committing the greatest mistake of their entire lives—honoring self instead of getting rid of it. How sad this is!

**b. Knowing God’s Grace.** God’s grace has accomplished two amazing things. The first refers to **everything that the Lord has done for us** on the cross that we could not do on our own. The other refers to **what He has prepared for us** that we are not presently qualified either to receive or enjoy. If we are willing to live up to God’s conditions, however, all that He has prepared for us can be ours. Believers in these last days often misunderstand God’s grace. They tend to think that grace would not be grace if there are conditions or demands to be met before it can be fully received. Consider, for example, that the very air we breath is also God’s grace. Without air, all creatures would die immediately. Air is God’s gift and we can freely enjoy it. However, if we want to receive oxygen for our lungs, we have to fulfill certain conditions: inhale and exhale. If we do not breathe, we certainly cannot enjoy a breath of fresh air. Similarly, to be fully dedicated to God, we must learn how to appropriate God’s grace in order to put off our “old self.” We must know subjectively what the Lord has already done for us on the cross, and we must objectively strive to live for God daily in order to attain to the hope that our Lord has for us. If this is our desire, then we need to pay close attention to the following four points.

**(1) That on the Cross Christ Has Already Dealt with Our “Own Self.”** As previously discussed, our “own self” refers to all that we inherited from our first father, Adam. The Scriptures calls it “I” (Gal. 2:20, 6:14), “old self” (Rom. 6:6, Eph. 4:22), “flesh” (Gal. 5:24, Rom. 7:14), “own life,” “old man,” “sinful nature” and other similar expressions. In the original language, “life” is sometimes a translation of the word *psuche* (soul), as in Matthew 10:39, and 16:25. The Scriptures tell us that God knew our lives (souls or “own self”) had been damaged beyond repair and that He decided to completely resolve the matter by putting our “own self” to death. So He nailed our “own self” to the cross where it died along with Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the four occurrences in the New Testament of the verb “crucified” are either aorist (simple past) or present perfect (action completed with existing results)

(Rom. 6:6, Gal. 2:20, 5:24, 6:14). In Galatians 2:20, the verb “crucified” is in the present perfect tense, passive voice. So the literal translation is, “With Christ, I have been co-crucified.” In Romans 6:6, the verb “crucified” is in the simple past tense, passive voice with a literal translation similar to that in Galatians 2:20. The difference is that the present perfect action in Galatians 2:20 is already complete but emphasizes the existing results, that is, our co-crucifixion with Christ remains effective to this very day. With illumination from the Holy Spirit and by the grace and power of God, we can enjoy presently what Christ did for us on the cross almost 2,000 years ago. The aorist action in the context of Romans 6:6, however, means that our co-crucifixion with Christ was completed in the past, occurred only once, and is forever complete. Therefore, it is impossible for us to crucify our “old self” or “own self.” If we could crucify our “own self,” then our crucifixion with Christ on the cross would be of no value whatever. To pray, “Lord, please crucify my old self” or “Please help me to crucify my old self” is muddled praying. The truth is that we cannot crucify our “old self,” because Christ crucified our “old self” on Golgotha over 1900 years ago—long before our own birth, even before our great-great-grandfather was born. Christ has already crucified “I” or the “old self” with Himself on the cross, and when He died on the cross, our “old self” died with Him.

**(2) That Because of God’s Grace Believers Can and Must Apply to Themselves What Christ Did for Them on the Cross.** This “co-crucifixion” of Christ and our “own self” appears to be quite mysterious but it is a reality that can be experienced as is shown by the perfect tense in Galatians 2:20 which emphasizes the existing results of our past death with Christ. All those who have already experienced this truth will say “Amen!” But for those who still have not, let us explain further. The reality was accomplished once (aorist) and is forever effective (perfect), but it exists in the objective. If we want this objective reality to become our subjective experience, we must ask God for it. The death of Christ as our sin offering was not made effective in our lives until after we had received Him and were born again. But the salvation that we now experience was paid for over 1900 years ago. Once we asked for and received the objective salvation He accomplished so long ago, it instantly became our subjective possession and enjoyment. **Our overcoming life is received in the same manner as we received our salvation.** Praise the Lord!

Because of what Christ did for us ages ago, we are this moment able to declare to our old self: “You are accursed because there is no goodness in you and thus you are good for neither God nor man. You have already been crucified with Christ. Through identification with Christ on the cross, you are already dead and buried.” Now, having accepted this truth, we should yield our lives daily to Christ to be led and empowered in our new nature by the Holy Spirit of God. Even though we can speak of our co-crucifixion with Christ, experiencing the reality of it in our lives, however, is not so simple. When we declare this biblical truth to our “old self,” our old nature is usually not extinguished, but it continues just like before, because we either do not know how to apply this truth or we have not grasped the reality of having died with Christ.

Perhaps we can better understand how to apply the fact of our past crucifixion with Christ by examining Paul’s phrase “I buffet my body” (1 Cor. 9:27). The verb “buffet” was formed from a combination of two words: “under” and “cheek bone.” The original

meaning is “to punch and bruise the cheek bones.” It is the vocabulary of boxing and means “give a black eye to.” Paul’s purpose in giving his body “a black eye” is to bring it into slavery. However, the term “my body,” the object of the verb buffet, is not the physical body. It is the “self.” This kind of expression in the Scriptures is called the whole (body) for the part (self), or sometimes the expression is reversed with the part being put for the whole entity. An example of the latter is “to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance” (Is. 45:23), where every knee and every tongue (the part) means every person (the whole). Thus Paul’s statement, “I buffet my body” leaves no doubt as to the forcefulness used to subdue his “own self.” He wanted to express the seriousness of his intent, desire and action in dealing with his “own self,” so that it would not come around later to trouble him again. The way he handled it was by realizing and seriously applying the truth that, “With Christ, I have been co-crucified” (Gal. 2:20).

**(3) That One’s Death with Christ Must Be Sincere.** Originally the “co” in “co-crucified” had the meaning of “accompany,” “unite with” or “experience together.” So to be “co-crucified” certainly does not mean that either Christ or we died alone. Rather, both parties (we and Christ) were united on the cross and both experienced death together. Even though our joint crucifixion with Christ is a historical fact, yet before we are able to make this truth a reality in our spiritual life, we must have a genuine willingness to die to our “own self.” In other words, prior to applying our objective co-crucifixion with Christ, we must personally affirm our willingness to die. At the very bottom of our heart, we regard our “own self” as most precious and we are not willing to readily part with it, as Scripture says, “No one ever hated his own flesh” (Eph. 5:29). Everyone always makes sure to take care of himself. Satan knows very well this tendency of our flesh, saying, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life” (Job 2:4). It is common enough to hear believers say that they are willing to stop living for themselves and, henceforth, to live for the Lord. Unfortunately, they probably do not know exactly what they are talking about. People often imagine that as long as they make up their mind, which makes them feel good, that they can do what they have set their mind to do. However, if this were the case, all New Year’s resolutions would be readily accomplished. The truth is that most resolutions are just talk, and that is exactly what the Scriptures say, “For I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate” (Rom. 7:15).

Thus, dying to self is not merely making a resolution. Furthermore, if we really want to die to our “own self,” it is not something that we can do on our own. The Holy Spirit must lead us to the point where we see ourselves as completely hopeless, genuinely realizing that in our “own self” there is nothing good. In addition, we must have experienced the hopelessness of attempting to crucify our “own self.” As a matter of fact, “self” seems to become more active with every nail that fastens it to the cross with Christ. Thus we must realize the importance of simply acknowledging the death of our “own self.” Once we acknowledge, or see this reality, we can then by simple faith receive what Christ did for us on the cross.

The truth of our having been co-crucified with Christ has always seemed to the church as a whole to be an impracticable, or even unattainable, goal. As a result, believers have had a very difficult time finding practical teaching and guidance on this subject. To compound the problem, “self” is frequently more active among certain

groups who claim to be spiritual and to have already been crucified with Christ than among those who make no such assertion. They are often full of pride, considering themselves better than others. When they are obviously trying to show off, they shamelessly say it is zeal for the Lord. When they are really interpreting the Scriptures using their own understanding, they lie and say it is inspiration from the Lord. When they are undoubtedly trying to build up their own kingdom, they deceive themselves and others by saying that they are only expanding the Kingdom of God. When they are demonstrably catching converts only to increase their group or denomination, they say that they are just saving souls. Onlookers are confused by such actions. Why do believers indulge themselves in such delusions? Do they really think they can fool the all-seeing God? They engage in such immature action because they are deceived by their “own self,” which is unwilling to be crucified with Christ. Thinking that to “deny oneself” is actually identical “to being crucified,” they fail dismally and are frequently snared by the very trap that was set up by their “own selves.” Objects do not disappear merely because we deny their existence. Neither does denial of self do away with self. The deceitfulness of the flesh leads us to try to subdue it by self-denial, but the more we try to crucify it in this manner, the wilder and more lawless it gets. How then is the crucifixion of our “own self” to be achieved?

**(4) That It Is the Holy Spirit Who Leads Us to Die with Christ.** After our spiritual lives have been awakened, that is, when the spiritual function of our mind is restored, the power of sin (one’s “own self”) in the members of our body and the new power of our mind (*nous* or renewed spiritual understanding) begin to wage a protracted war between themselves (Rom. 7:23, 8:6). In the beginning of our spiritual life, we might not sense the power of sin. But as time goes on, when our spiritual life has begun to bud, the Holy Spirit Himself will lead us to discover some of the degradation and deceitfulness of our “own self.” Meanwhile, we ourselves might have started to fight the flesh with all our might. We try to control it with such remedies as rededication, vows, or resolutions. We might even devise some strict rules to regulate it, hoping that such will bring our “own self” under control. All these self-efforts might work for a short time, but eventually we must cry out like the apostle Paul, “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free?” (Rom. 7:24). The leading by the Holy Spirit from a “wretched man” to the point of “no condemnation” may occur more than once (Rom. 8:1). Since the goal is usually not reached the first time, the Holy Spirit will continue to lead until we go through a series of painful struggles. Finally, we will come to experience the fact that our own efforts are totally useless and that they produce even more failure and discouragement (Rom. 7:18-24). We will also discover that in our spiritual warfare our “volunteer efforts” are completely useless. Then we are moved to say, “Lord, I am done in! I can never handle my ‘own self.’ I am dead.” Thus the Holy Spirit has led us to our death—the very place of despair. Our own efforts are finished. Then we realize how foolish and ignorant it is to substitute sanctification by one’s own efforts for living by faith in what Christ has done for us. At that point, we will finally realize that when Christ was crucified on Gogoltha, our “own self” really died there with Him. We can then effectively declare to our “own self,” “You are worthless. God crucified you with Christ on the cross. By faith I accept your complete death with Christ, and I make Christ my all in all.” In this manner, the Holy Spirit leads us into the death of Christ, and the spiritual crisis is over. The stubborn “own self” is now powerless and “my body has been buffeted.” We now

can have the upper hand over our “own self.” Therefore, we have gone from despair, “wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?” to the realization of “Thanks be to God [deliverance is] through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24-25). Now, we can proceed with our training to become the personnel of God’s Coming Kingdom. Praise the Lord!

## **Chapter VIII. Other Characteristics of the Personnel of God's Coming Kingdom**

In the Old Testament, God gave commandments, laws and ordinances for Kingdom training, to influence all the nations concerning the wisdom of the LORD (Deut. 4:5-6) and to attract all nations to Himself (Is. 2:2-3). God's plan was to give His Word to the Israelites through Moses, so that he and Israel's future prophets and priests could teach the people to be overcomers. In the same way, God has given believers the Kingdom's constitution in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) to teach them to submit themselves to God's training which will prepare them to rule with Christ in the coming Kingdom of God.

In these days the church, with a heavy emphasis on evangelism, often focuses on the worker's service and neglects the development of the worker's character. In the mid to late 1980s, there were several exposures regarding the disgraceful lives of famous church leaders. Their moral failure can be attributed to the overemphasis on the worker's service to the neglect of the worker's spiritual life. Many mistakenly think that once they have believed in Jesus that they will no longer be held accountable for their actions or attitudes and will suffer no loss because of them (Compare 1 Cor. 3:8-15). Previously when we discussed the basic requirements for the Kingdom's personnel, we mentioned the possibility that some believers may be able to preach, cast out demons and work signs and wonders, yet they might not inherit the Kingdom. Those who are lawless (*anomia* "without law") will receive no reward when Christ comes but will hear the Judge's sentence, "Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23). Believers must realize that God's grace is not a license to live a wanton life. After creating a new person in Christ Jesus, God's grace is provided to develop the spiritual maturity of the new person. Jesus is the Lord of Salvation so that He can become the believer's life, wisdom, righteousness, holiness, and everything else that he needs. Thus, grace is not a passive talisman for sinners but is an active instrument for building up the believer's character. God's design is to provide salvation through grace at the beginning; then progressively to use grace to transform and renew Christians into the likeness of Christ which will enable them to become the personnel of His Coming Kingdom. Therefore, the Sermon on the Mount was given to instruct those who are willing to strive diligently to become Kingdom personnel. Matthew 5 through 7, however, does not apply to the lost who are not citizens of the Kingdom of Preparation.

The first section of the Kingdom's constitution, commonly called the beatitudes, gives a list of the characteristics to be found in the Kingdom's personnel. It is not easy for believers to develop these characteristics, but the Scriptures tell us, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). There is a similar Chinese proverb that says "Nothing is impossible for those whose heart is fully set on it." May all those who desire to be Overcomers apply themselves to understand what the characteristics of Kingdom personnel are and to work diligently to develop these traits in their own lives.

### **A. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit . . .**

There are two words in the New Testament that can be translated as “poor.” One (*penes*) has the meaning that a person is “not wealthy” but life is manageable. The other (*ptochos*) indicates that one is so poor he must beg in order to survive. The latter word is the poor used in Matthew 5:3. This same word is used twice in Luke to mean a beggar: “and a certain poor man named Lazarus” and “Now, it came about that the poor man died” (Luke 16:20-22). Thus the expanded translation of Matthew 5:3 should be “Blessed are the poor who in their spirit must beg in order to live.” Since our spirit does not need food to live, why should it beg? We must remember that all we need spiritually is found in the Lord. Only He can provide for our needs. Therefore, the application of the verse should be **“Blessed are those who in their spirit dare not act unless first they ask the Lord.”** Jesus lived such a lifestyle. He said, “Whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner” and “I do nothing on My own initiative” (John 5:19, 8:28). Those believers who live a lifestyle similar to Christ’s, although they are still living on earth, already have the Kingdom of Heaven governing their lives. Thanks be to God!

However, many believe that they are self-made and thus are very proud of their own achievements—my money, my education, my children, my house and my every possession are mine because of my own abilities. The person who is poor in spirit, however, wholeheartedly acknowledges that all things are due to the grace of God which enables him to perform the various activities of life. Without God’s grace, he dares not act. I still remember that when I was teaching at Bob Jones University in the late 1950’s, my conversations would often include “By God’s grace!” The students thought it was just my habitual way of talking for later a student came and said, “Dr. Lin, you often said ‘By God’s grace’ and we thought in the beginning that it was just your way of talking. Then we learned that it was really your ‘Amen!’” Truly, “By God’s grace” is my “Amen.” As God’s children receive Kingdom training everything rests on God’s grace. We must always ask God first, whether eating, going to school, to work or to business or merely getting a haircut. We should also ask God daily to give us His grace, guidance and protection. This is not being overly concerned with unimportant details but is genuine training for the children of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>11</sup> If we do not obey the Ruler of Heaven now, how can we rule in His future Kingdom?

### **For Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven**

When we believed in the Lord Jesus unto salvation, we were raised with Christ and seated in heaven with Him (Eph. 2:5-6). But whether or not we can reign with Christ depends on submitting now to God’s training program in our lives. For instance, do we seek His will in all things through prayer? If after prayer a matter is still unclear, we should hesitate, that is, refrain from taking action. But once a course of action becomes clear to us through prayer, we are to proceed immediately. When we train ourselves in

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<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Mounce says of ‘poor in spirit,’ “The Greek word for ‘poor,’ *ptochos*, carries the nuance of extreme poverty....To be **poor in spirit** means to depend upon God for all help.” *Matthew*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 38. Charles C. Ryrie writes that the term signifies “A poverty of spirit which involves a recognition of one’s worthlessness before God.” *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 82

such a manner to be poor in spirit, the Kingdom of Heaven **is** ours. (“Is” is present tense, so no waiting for the future is necessary. It has already started.) The Kingdom of Heaven is ours and we need not worry about whether or not we will later obtain the imperishable, undefiled inheritance that will not fade away, reserved in Heaven for us (1 Pet. 1:4). We can firmly believe that we “are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5). Hallelujah!

### ***B. Blessed Are Those Who Mourn . . .***

To mourn is not an admonition for believers to weep and cry. Neither does it mean that we are to have low self-esteem and feel sorry for ourselves because of our sins. We handle sins in our lives by immediately handing them over to the Lord in repentance, believing that “Though my sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow” (Is. 1:18). Following confession we should no longer go about with a sorrowful face and thus despise the Almighty God by doubting that He has already forgiven us. Quite the opposite, we are to “rejoice always” in the Lord.

So what does the word “mourn” mean? Ecclesiastes 7:4 says, “The mind of the wise is in the house of mourning, while the mind of the fools is in the house of pleasure.” It is a Chinese custom that when a man dies, his son shows his filial piety by not combing his hair or shaving his face and by not attending celebrations among friends and relatives. This illustrates the “house of mourning.” From the spiritual perspective, the Lord Jesus is with us all the time; but from a human perspective, our Lord has left us to go on a far journey to receive a Kingdom. What should our attitude be until He returns? When a husband goes on a long trip, his wife writes and tells him how she misses him—she cannot sleep at night, has no appetite or interest in going out and she does not enjoy life at all because her beloved husband is not at her side. She will often end her letter with, “My dear, please come back soon.” Where is our heart while our beloved Lord is on the far journey to receive His Kingdom? If our heart is with Him, the vanities of the world cannot distract our minds and the pleasures of life will not be able to steal our affections, because our enjoyment is bound up in our dearly beloved Lord. On the one hand, we should be sad that the Lord is away from us. We should also be eagerly looking for His return with the Kingdom. When He returns, He will see us as a beautiful, adorned bride! No wonder the apostle John said, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

### ***For They Shall Be Comforted***

As children of the Kingdom of Heaven, our hope is not in this present world. We do have the freedom to bestow our love on the world and its entertainment and to neglect the Lord. If, however, we want to have a part in His coming Kingdom, we must remember the Lord’s words, “A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master” (Matt. 10:24). In this verse the terms “disciple,” “teacher,” “slave” and “master” are not used in their usual sense, but refer to the relationship between the believer and Jesus. If we live in the “house of mourning” for the Lord on earth, the comfort we receive shall be eternal as the Scriptures say “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts” (2 Thess. 2:16-17a). This comfort and hope are grounded in the divine nature and in the divine promises and are granted to believers now, but because

of their eternal nature, they shall also be experienced and enjoyed in the eternal Kingdom of God. Our present comfort and hope, intended to encourage us to keep ourselves pure and good, are for the enjoyment of those whose heart is set upon the Lord. At the same time, let us remember that it is the Father who prepares everything and gives it to us (Matt. 20:23). So, when we have done all things which God has commanded, our attitude should be, “We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done” (Luke 17:10). We do not deserve eternal comfort and hope, but God’s grace will provide them for us in spite of our personal unworthiness. Amen!

### **C. *Blessed Are the Gentle . . .***

The scriptural meaning of gentle certainly is not walking with head bowed, speaking with a trembling voice, smiling weakly when abused and making no retaliation. Matthew stated, “Say to the daughters of Zion, behold your King is coming to you, gentle, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden” (Matt. 21:5). The Lord Jesus is the almighty King and deserved to have entered into Jerusalem with great pomp and pageantry. Instead He gave up His right to royal treatment and entered Jerusalem humbly “mounted on a donkey.” This is being gentle. Demanding His rights would have given the people wrong ideas about the nature of His Kingdom. Thus, the believer is being gentle **when he gives up what he deserves for the sake of the Kingdom of God.**

Genesis 13 tells us about Abraham’s gentleness. In Near Eastern tradition the elder has the right to choose the grazing land that he desires. However, Abraham willingly let the younger Lot choose first, for he said, “Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left” (Gen. 13:9). How gentle! Even though Lot chose the better grazing land, God told Abraham, “For all the land which you see, I will give it to you and your descendants forever. . . . Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you” (Gen. 13:15, 17). Praise the Lord, because God’s promises are always reliable.

I remember as a youth reading a story entitled “The General by the Tree,” which told of a Chinese general in the old days. In every battle, he was always in the front leading his troops. But when it came time for rewards, he was always found standing apart under a large tree while others put in their claims first for the spoils of war. Being gentle is just this—a willingness to refrain from claiming what one actually deserves especially when such restraint advances the cause of the Kingdom of God.

The general in the story surpassed many present day church leaders who vigorously elbow their way to a place of public notice to receive the praise of men. But when the time comes to fulfill responsibilities, they linger far behind. In today’s Chinese church, many love to be called elders or directors, but possess so little Bible knowledge that they do not even know the number of books in the Old or New Testament. Even though they are rarely present for church work, they claim to be “expert and experienced.”

Like a church, a country also degenerates when too many of its citizens seek fame and fortune and too few are fulfilling their responsibilities. I often say to the Americans, the United States is not what it used to be. On my first trip to the United States about 50 years ago, I was very impressed by the diligence and efficiency of the United States

governmental workers. I said to myself, “With people like that, it is only natural that they are a strong and powerful nation.” At that time, the Chinese governmental workers were lazy and greedy. They were subservient to their superiors while soliciting bribes from the citizens whom they were supposed to help freely. They had little sense of responsibility toward fulfilling their duties. When I applied for my Chinese passport in 1947, nothing happened for six whole months. So, I asked a Christian official to inquire. At first they could not even locate my application form, but finally they found my papers and issued my passport. If I had not inquired through an official, I doubt if they would have ever issued it. But now, the United States, too, is sliding downhill. Believers must forsake the self-serving examples in the world and even in the church and actually forgo their own rights for the sake of others and the Kingdom in order to be gentle and to reap the blessing of their gentleness.

### ***For They Shall Inherit the Earth***

When I was younger and read “shall inherit the earth,” I could not understand its meaning. I would ponder, “What is meant by the word ‘earth’ or ‘land?’ Does it mean that a gentle person will become a real estate magnate?” One day I was reading Isaiah where it said, “But he who takes refuge in Me shall inherit the land, and shall possess My holy mountain” (Is. 57:13). In this verse, the phrase “shall inherit the land” is parallel with “shall possess My holy mountain.” In the Old Testament, God’s holy mountain sometimes refers to God’s governmental center as in Psalm 2:6 “But as for Me, I have installed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain” (Also see Is. 2:2-4). Thus **the gentle** in Matthew 5:5 who inherit the earth **will inherit God’s governmental center**. Those who are willing for Christ’s sake to give up what they deserve today shall one day be put in charge of many things in the Kingdom prepared for them since the foundation of the world (See Rev. 21:1-22:5).

### ***D. Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness . . .***

In the Old Testament and the four gospels, righteousness signifies, “walking blamelessly” (Luke 1:6). In Paul’s epistles, righteousness is the result of justification, meaning that believers are declared to be blameless and without sin. Thus walking blamelessly applies only to those who are saved. Since Christ gave Himself for us, we should walk blamelessly by thirsting for God’s will as much as one who being extremely hungry and thirsty desires food and drink.

We study the Scriptures not simply to gain knowledge but to understand God’s will, to know what is right and wrong and how to obey God’s will. In the coming Kingdom, God will acknowledge as overcomers only those believers who consistently obey His will. The primary way to be spiritually motivated to hunger and thirst for righteousness and to learn how to pursue it is by taking care how we hear.

The fourth chapter of Mark is a discourse on the importance of how we hear. Normally, we emphasize whether the preacher preaches a good sermon or not, but this chapter talks about whether the hearer hears well or not. The theme of the chapter is in verse 24 where Jesus said, “Take care what you listen to. By your standard of measure it shall be measured to you.” This verse tells us that the amount of blessing God gives us is dependent on the size and quality of the measure that we bring to Him.

I recall a sister in Shanghai, China, who sincerely loved the Lord. Before every worship service, it was her habit to pray and ask God to allow His word to enter into her heart. Later she gave a testimony saying that she had been enlightened by my sermon. I was deeply touched. No wonder this sister was like a dove. Every time you met her, you were wonderfully edified because every time she came before the Lord in the worship service, she appeared with a hungry and thirsty heart. Since God is faithful, He certainly would not disappoint her.

So, the spiritual principle to be learned is that according to the measure you bring to the Lord He measures out your blessing. If you bring a criticizing measure with you to the service, you will go home with grief. If you bring with you a could-not-care-less measure, you will go home empty-hearted. If you bring with you a measure only to comfort your conscience, all you will get is a little comfort. In the same manner, if you bring a humble and teachable measure as you listen to the preaching of God's Word, you will enjoy God's fullness again and again. No wonder the Psalmist says, "Open your mouth wide and I will fill it" (Ps. 81:10). God stands ready to supply our needs; all He demands from us for the rich abundance of His good gifts is a wide-open mouth. God expects us to come to worship with a clean humble heart and a teachable spirit that expects to receive edification and spiritual blessing from Him in order that we in turn might be a blessing to others.

### ***For They Shall Be Satisfied***

Believers who hunger and thirst for righteousness will never find satisfaction from the world. Not only are the evil doers and deceivers in the world growing ever more vicious, the nominal church, too, is straying farther away from scriptural standards. The heart of a righteous person aches continuously as he sees the proliferation of lawlessness both in the world and in the church. In Second Peter 3:13 the Lord has pledged that there shall be new heavens and a new earth where His righteous ones who walk blamelessly will dwell. Everything there shall be measured by God's standard and all creatures shall follow God's will. There will be no lawlessness, no immorality, and no unrighteousness on this new earth but only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness today shall one day be fully satisfied in the eternal Kingdom of God.

### ***E. Blessed Are the Merciful . . .***

Scripture tells us that God has always desired His people to be merciful. This was true when the Jewish peoples' "loyalty [was] like a morning cloud and like the dew which goes away early" (Hos. 6:4, 6). It was also true in the New Testament. When the Pharisees were plotting in many ways against the Lord, He declared that we should "desire mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13; 12:7, NIV), which shows that God's priority for believers is to help those in distress more than to stress religious externals. Ministers especially need to have a heart full of mercy. For this reason, in Paul's letters to Timothy, in addition to his usual benediction of grace and peace, he added mercy saying: "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Tim. 1:2 and 2 Tim. 1:2). Only when ministers have mercy from above will they have a merciful heart that desires to save lost souls and shepherd the Lord's flock. Since all God's children have His nature (2 Pet. 1:4), all His Kingdom personnel must show God's tender mercy

to others (Luke 1:78). Those who fail to show mercy will be judged mercilessly (James 2:13).

We who are biblical conservatives often criticize the religious liberals for preaching a social gospel, and rightly so. They are concerned mainly with charity and not with souls, with poverty and not with spiritual needs. The liberals have forsaken the fundamental truths to pursue the immediate, reversing the proper sequence. On the other hand, we conservatives have often neglected the importance of showing mercy to people. There are some brothers and sisters who love the church and would donate tens of thousands of dollars for a building program, but when a poor brother needs assistance, they refuse to give even a few dollars. This, too, is forsaking the fundamentals. The Lord said, “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos. 6:6). In the original language, the word “loyalty” can also mean “mercy,” as the Lord used the word in Matthew 9:13 when He quoted Hosea 6:6. The Lord does not delight in animal sacrifice, but He desires for us to be merciful to the poor. The gracious Lord has told us that the merciful are those who see His brethren when they are hungry and give them food, thirsty and give them drink, strangers and invite them in, naked and clothe them, sick and visit them, or imprisoned and come to them. To be merciful is to be righteous. This is God’s requirement to inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The Kingdom is not a last minute plan developed after the Jews rejected Christ, but God planned it for the merciful since the creation of the world. Those who are merciful shall be called “blessed of my Father” and thus inherit the Kingdom (See Matt. 25:34-41). Praise the Lord!

Therefore, if the church has brothers and sisters in need, we must strive to help them so that they will not be required to go outside the household of faith to seek assistance. In the world, if a member of the Smith family who needs money has to go to the Jones family for assistance because his own family members are unwilling to help, it is a shame to the Smith family. In like manner, if God’s child needs help and the family of God is unwilling to aid him and sends him to unbelievers for assistance, the Lord is shamed. Scripture tells us, “If anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8). This applies mainly to believing brothers and sisters, but we should extend mercy to everyone.

Having mercy upon others should include giving not only food, clothing and shelter but also the Gospel. These days there is a strong emphasis on evangelism. Numerous books are written on the subject and evangelistic meetings take place with all kinds of fancy attractions. Why are there so few who are really finding God’s grace and being saved? Probably because those believers who hold the meetings lack mercy in their hearts. How many evangelists have wept openly from the pulpit for the lost sitting right there in front of them? How many pastors fast and pray with tears for non-believers? How many evangelists, who shout aloud from the pulpit while presenting the importance of evangelism to believers, have shared the gospel with the cab driver or the staff of the hotel where they stay? If they do not, then their loud pleading is nothing but deceit, but God is not deceived. So often, our evangelistic efforts are like country western music—all good feelings, emotions and tears devoid of reality.

Messengers of the gospel, have you ever considered sharing the gospel with your unbelieving friends sitting right next to you? If they die in their sins, they will forever

and ever suffer pain in eternal fire and will not be able to get even a drop of water to cool their parched tongues. If you are to show them mercy, you must do so by diligently presenting the gospel to them now. We need to cancel some of our numerous meetings and come to the Lord more frequently on bended knees, asking Him to give us merciful hearts, fasting for the non-believers, and shedding sincere tears for them. Then we will be able to present the gospel to the lost in mercy and gain some of them for the Kingdom.

### **For They Shall Receive Mercy**

The word mercy in Matthew 5:7, although sometimes translated “compassion” or “pity,” is actually a verb of future tense and passive voice. With the exception of the first and eighth beatitudes all of the verbs used in the passage are in the future tense, as in “shall be comforted,” “shall inherit the earth,” “shall be satisfied,” “shall receive mercy,” “shall see God” and “shall be called sons of God.” Thus most of the blessings in the beatitudes will be realized mainly in the future Kingdom and are “the joy of your master” which the gracious Lord has prepared for His Kingdom personnel (Matt. 25:21). Thus Scripture rightly says, “Mercy triumphs over judgment,” that is, triumphs over God’s judgment that would doom any of us. In the case of the merciful, the glorious influence of mercy returns unto them and overcomes any possible punishment (James 2:13).

### **F. Blessed Are the Pure in Heart . . .**

To determine what is meant by “pure in heart,” we must first understand the word “heart.” In the Scriptures heart may mean “thoughts,” “emotion,” “will,” “conscience” or “psychological function.” To understand a word’s precise meaning, we must examine its context in detail, and sometimes we have to check both the Old and New Testaments. Relevant to this case, John tells us, “In whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God” (1 John 3:20-21). This tells us that the one who shall see God must have a conscience that does not condemn him. When our conscience condemns us, we become afraid of God and do not seek His face in prayer and dedication. For example, if we happen to commit some sin of a serious moral or spiritual nature, our heart becomes distressed, and we naturally are afraid to meet even our pastor face-to-face. Even more, if we fall into grievous sin that we refuse to confess, we dare not face our holy God. However, if we are confronted by a righteous pastor and are led to freely confess our sin to God and to whomever else we have sinned against, then we can welcome the face of both man and God and eagerly listen to their word. So here in Matthew 5:8 the word heart refers to the believer’s conscience, and **“pure in heart” refers to the one who has a clean conscience.** Thank God, when we confess our sins, our conscience is cleansed and restored to good working order by the blood of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 9:14) and will no longer condemn us (Heb. 10:2). But the moment unrighteousness reappears within us, conscience will condemn us once more. But the door to a clean heart and restoration is always open to those willing to repent and confess to God as the Scriptures say, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

There are two main ways to deal with sin. One is to suppress sin into your subconscious mind and, in layman’s terminology, to “forget it.” Suppressed sins

submerge into your subconscious mind, but on various occasions they will bubble to the surface. They will spill out “refuse and mud” so that your heart becomes like a “tossing sea” (Is. 57:20-21). It takes a lot of energy to suppress a troubled conscience and that leaves little energy for productive work. A suppressed conscience can trouble a person so much that he becomes very ill. The better way to deal with sin is to confess it and hand it over to the Lord. Whenever we discover our sins, if we immediately go to the Lord and hand them over, He will remove them and instantly make our hearts clean and our desires pure. We will become people who are “pure in heart.” Such cleansing is necessary to keep our conscience from troubling us and our prayers unhindered.

Could your conscience be condemning you right now? Is it telling you that you should not have done a certain thing or should have done something you know to be right? If so, do not conceal your transgressions. The Scriptures say, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion” (Prov. 28:13). As long as you are willing to go to the Lord and confess your sins, no matter what kind or how great, they will be forgiven and your conscience will become clean again. Then you can say with Paul who lived his life with a perfectly good conscience (Acts 23:1), “I have fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7). May his life be our example and daily experience.

### ***For They Shall See God***

Before receiving salvation, we were under the influence of the evil god of this world, and the glorious light of the gospel of Christ could not shine into our darkened hearts. We were so blind that even when we looked at the almighty power and divine nature of God, which are obvious on every hand, we could not recognize His workmanship, sovereignty and providential ways. Then one day by God’s grace, the truth that His Son had been born on earth and died for us on the cross began to shine in our hearts as brightly as the sun at high noon on a cloudless July day. The Holy Spirit moved us to turn from our sin and darkness and to enter into God’s marvelous truth and light and thereby know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He had sent. This truly is life eternal.

The Person of the Trinity whom we now see by faith, who was manifested to Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel and finally to all mankind for 33 years on earth, is our Lord Jesus Christ (See John 12:37-41; Is. 6:1-5). But the Scriptures promise in Matthew 5:8 that “they shall see God.” The Son has always been the Father’s Revelation to mankind, yet in the future we shall also see the very essence of God the Father, whom we cannot presently see since, “No man has seen God at any time . . . nor seen His form” (John 1:18, 5:37); because He dwells in unapproachable light (I Tim. 6:16); and no man can see God and live (Ex. 33:20). In Hebrews 12:14 the phrase “will see the Lord” refers to the future. Therefore, God’s desire for the present is for His only begotten Son to be the glorious light through which He reveals Himself to us (John 1:18, Heb. 1:3). The gracious Lord has taught us, however, that if we maintain a pure heart, when He appears (future) we shall see God—see Him just as He is (1 John 3:2). At that time, we shall serve Him and also “see His face” (Rev. 22:3-4). May the Lord give us grace to enable us to develop the character of His Kingdom’s personnel: to behave, live, work and serve with a pure heart. Then we will rejoice to behold His face.

### **G. Blessed Are the Peacemakers . . .**

The word “peacemaker” was formed from a combination of the noun “peace” and the verb “accomplish or make.” This combination occurs in the New Testament only twice: once as a verb translated as “having made peace,” referring to Christ’s great accomplishment on the cross (Col. 1:20) and once as a noun here in Matthew 5:9 where it is rendered “peacemaker.” To make peace between God and man is a characteristic Kingdom personnel must have to fulfill the commission they have been given. It is mainly through our testimony of what Christ has done for us that we carry out the ministry of reconciliation given unto us by God (2 Cor. 5:18-19). Therefore, whoever wants to inherit the Kingdom God prepared from the foundation of the world should have both the desire to lead the lost to the Lord and fruit reaped through the exercise of that desire. To cultivate within us the desire to harvest fruit for Him, Christ taught through the parable of the ten pounds that when He returns His faithful servants will be rewarded with positions of authority in the Kingdom (Luke 19:11-27).

**1. The Peacemaker’s Mission.** One reason why Chinese churches did not grow in the past was because the believers did not pay close attention to the Lord’s admonition, “Freely you received, freely give.” In worship services, revival meetings and conferences, the speaker often urged in a loud voice that the listeners should be zealous to lead the lost to Jesus. He would rebuke his audience for being selfish and hiding the saving grace of Christ, allowing tens of thousands of non-believers to enter into eternal fire and suffer eternal punishment. The listeners, however, would give excuses such as “I am not well-versed in the Bible” or “I have no theological training.”

When believers reason that it is not that they are unwilling to reconcile the lost to God, but that they are unable to do so; they fail to realize just what their commission is. They do not understand that the Lord does not command them to preach either theology or the Bible to non-believers. Since the unbelievers’ spiritual understanding (*nous*) has not yet been restored, to talk to them about theology will be a waste of time. What does God want us to do to make peace between Himself and the lost? He just wants us to give our testimony, as He said, “You are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48). God has given us an example in Scripture of what is meant by “these things.” After the Lord had cast the legion of unclean spirits out of the demon-possessed man, the cleansed man wanted to follow Jesus. The Lord, however, instructed him, “Go home to your people and report to them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He had mercy on you.” The Scriptures finish the account, “And he went away and began to proclaim in Decapolis what great things Jesus had done for him; and everyone marveled” (Mark 5:19-20). Our gracious Lord told the man of the Gerasenes, “Tell what great things the Lord has done for you.” What does He ask us who are saved by His grace to tell? The same thing. We are to tell others the great things that He has done for us!

A Chinese proverb says, “Every family has a book of difficulties.” It can be said concerning believers, “Every believer can testify.” Of course, you must have accepted Jesus into your life in order to have a spiritual experience about which to testify. However, if you have repented of your sins (had your mind changed), have experienced joy and peace from God’s forgiveness and cleansing of your sin, and have become God’s own dear child, you can testify about these things. Whenever you are willing to clearly tell others of your salvation experience of being born again, the Holy Spirit will use your

testimony to begin working in the heart of the listener, convicting him of his sin and leading him to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord. Thank God, even though no person on earth is able to make another person believe in Jesus, as long as you are willing to perform your God-given mission to be peacemakers, the Holy Spirit Himself will work to accomplish in the unbelievers all that is required for salvation. Hallelujah!

**2. Doing the Work of a Peacemaker.** At this point, someone may say, “It is easy to say we should be peacemakers between God and man and lead others to the Lord, but it is not so simple to actually do it!” This is true! But realizing the difficulty of peacemaking helps to prepare us to undertake the task. There are two main principles we must understand in order to be equipped to bring about the reconciliation of sinners to God.

**a. Seeing the Importance of Lost Souls.** When our Lord was on earth, He came to Bethsaida and applied spittle to the eyes of a blind man. He laid His hands on him and asked, “Do you see anything?” The man “looked up and said, ‘I see men, for I am seeing them like trees, walking about’” (Mark 8:22-24). This is the reason why the majority of Christians are unable to lead people to the Lord. They do not see that the unsaved are eternally lost. If people were walking about like trees, without an eternal spirit, death would be the end of them, and time spent witnessing to them would be wasted. But people are not walking trees; they have an eternal spirit because Jesus said, “Fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). The Scriptures also say, “then the dust will return to earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). What can clear our vision?

We need the gracious Lord to lay His hands on us as He did on the man, “Then again He laid His hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly” (Mark. 8:25). Paul prayed for the church at Ephesus, a good church that had “faith in the Lord Jesus . . . and . . . love for all the saints. . . [that] the eyes of [their] hearts may be enlightened” (Eph. 1:15, 18). So we need to pray for ourselves that the Lord will let us see how precious people’s souls are and what the hope of His calling upon us is. As the Lord gave His servant a talent of silver for the purpose of “doing business,” so God called us to make peace with Him and gave us a testimony in order that we also might call others to make peace with Him. Thanks be to God.

**b. Knowing How to Lead Others to Christ.** In any endeavor, the first step is always the hardest to take. If a believer has never led others to the Lord nor personally experienced making peace between God and man, he may not know where to start. I would like to make a few suggestions for those who desire to be Kingdom personnel and want to give peacemaking a try.

First, do not overreach. We can eat only one meal at a time, and souls likewise are saved one at a time. Ask the Lord **whom** you should approach first. It could be a relative, a schoolmate or a buddy. You should **pray for him** daily and ask the Lord to open his eyes so that he can see that life is uncertain, empty, and futile; that he needs to go beyond materialism and see the reality of eternity. At the same time, ask God to make a way for you so that you might have an **opportunity to give your witness**. God always hears sincere and righteous prayers.

Then one day you may run into the one for whom you have been praying; invite him over for coffee and dessert. After some small talk, **use the occasion** to say, “Joe, is it

okay if I share with you an experience that I had some time ago?" If he replies yes, then silently thank God for opening up a way for you. If you have had any misunderstandings about Jesus, the church and Christians before you came to believe, tell him about them. Otherwise, you can share the troubles, frustrations and the frequent helpless feelings that are a part of life. Then **share with him** how the Lord led you step by step so that you might understand why He died for you, was resurrected and then ascended into heaven. Tell how upon repenting of your sins that you were forgiven and set free from sin's power. Then, share how you invited Christ into your heart and experienced the inner change of heart and a breakthrough in living, and how you now are enjoying the peace and joy of believing in Jesus.

**After witnessing**, you must then **ask him**, "Joe, are you willing to accept Jesus just like I did?" If you do not ask, all will be lost. So you must ask. By the grace of God, many will say, "I am willing." If so, lead him to Jesus by asking him to pray after you sentence by sentence. Help him to take the garbage from his heart by confession of his sins so that Jesus can clean up all his insides by disposing of the trash. Then ask him to invite Jesus into his heart. After praying, if he was sincere, you can ask him, "Can you tell me where is Jesus now?" In most instances, he will point to his heart and say, "In here."

Praise the Lord, salvation is just that simple, but we often make such a complicated procedure out of it that we end up frustrating ourselves and blaming Joe for not being willing to believe in Jesus. Now in the event Joe is not willing to accept Jesus right then, do not be discouraged. We never know whether or not at some later time, when he has reached the end of himself, he might remember our testimony and ask Jesus for salvation. Or perhaps he will hear the gospel again and our witness will help him understand how to accept Jesus. Regardless, we cannot be discouraged in witnessing for the Lord. When the time comes, there will be a harvest. Scripture admonishes us "not to lose heart in doing good" and then promises us, "For in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary" (Gal. 6:9; Eccl. 11:1).

Sometimes when someone declines to accept Christ when I ask him, I will say, "Okay, maybe you want to go more slowly. But I was wondering if you could help me in a small matter?" Usually he will say, "Can I really help you?" I say, "Certainly." When he says, "Very well, just tell me how," then I say, "Will you please pray daily with these words, 'Jesus, I would like to believe in you but I do not know how. Please teach me the way.'" You need to tell him that all you can do is to point out the way for him, but you cannot convince him to believe. But as long as he is sincere and will pray the prayer, some day Jesus will meet up with him. Some might take three or four days; some may take ten days. One person I told in the morning to pray such a prayer met Jesus that night. Praise the Lord! He is not a dead teacher but a living Savior.

### ***For They Shall Be Called Sons of God***

In this beatitude "making peace between God and man" is the condition and they "shall be called sons of God" is the promise. That is, believers who minister in reconciling men unto God shall become Kingdom personnel who have the position of "sons of God." While Scripture says in John 1:12, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God," this verse says that peacemakers shall be called

children of God. What is the difference between becoming a child of God by believing in His name and being called a son of God by doing the work of a peacemaker? To resolve this seeming paradox, we must recall once more that Scripture was written in ancient languages, where each word may have multiple meanings and technical phrases may have several explanations. For example, in the Old Testament the phrase “son of God” can mean Israel (Ex. 4:22), the king (2 Sam. 7:14), angels (Job 1:6), the Messiah (Ps. 2:7), or leaders (Ps. 82:6). In the New Testament a distinction is made between believers who are sons saved by grace and those believers who are sons of God by being peacemakers. The former became sons of God by confessing their sins and believing in (that is, accepting) Jesus (John 1:12) and they were led by the Holy Spirit to become sons (Rom. 8:14). However, peacemakers become sons of the Kingdom of God by being overcomers (Rev. 21:7), and these are also called sons of glory (Heb. 2:10 and Rom. 8:21). In addition, these sons of God are sanctified because they are willing to be spiritually and morally separate from this corrupt world and not even to touch anything that would defile either body or spirit. This is a life-long task achievable only by letting the fear of God rule in their lives (See 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1).

Therefore, the sons of God mentioned here are those who are the future personnel of the Kingdom of God and are worthy to be called the sons of the Kingdom. Since we have been called, that is, we have been saved, we should aspire to be chosen by striving to become overcomers. Further, since we ourselves have made peace with God, we should be messengers of God to reconcile sinners to Him. May God help us to heed His Word and thereby become peacemakers.

#### ***H. Blessed Are You Who Have Been Persecuted for the Sake of Righteousness . . .***

Earlier we mentioned that the word “righteousness” has two meanings. The first meaning is that in the Lord Jesus Christ we have received the righteousness of God and have been justified in Him from all our sin (1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 3:24, 26). This meaning for righteousness was initially defined regarding Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Abraham who had God’s righteousness reckoned to him only because “he believed in the LORD” (Gen. 15:6). Later in the Old Testament days of Isaiah, the word “righteousness” became a synonym for “salvation” (See Is. 51:5-6, 8; 61:10; 62:1). In Jeremiah’s days, “the LORD our righteousness” simply became another name for the Messiah (Jer. 23:5-6). After Jesus was born, this word also stood for a person—Christ (1 John 2:1; Heb. 7:1-4, because He met the standard of righteousness on behalf of those who could never reach it by their own efforts. After He had done this, all those who believe in Him, that is, accept Him for all He is and has done, will have the righteousness which He accomplished enter into their hearts. As a result, they can reach the spiritual standard that God requires for salvation. This is precisely what the Scriptures say, “I will put my Laws into their minds [*dianoia* “mind” refers to the function of the *nous*] and I will write them upon their hearts” (Heb. 8:10). Therefore, for salvation and righteousness we no longer need to (nor are we able to) follow what is written on stone tablets. By willingly and sincerely accepting Jesus into our hearts, God’s requirement is accomplished, and God’s standard is achieved. Truly, great is the righteousness that Christ has accomplished!

Early in Scripture the word righteousness began to take on other meanings such as compassion, pity and good works. For example, “righteousness” in Deuteronomy 24:13 (“When the sun goes down you shall surely return the pledge to him, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you; and it will be righteousness to you before the Lord your God”) is exactly the same as that recorded in Psalm 112:9, “He has given freely to the poor; His righteousness endures forever.” Since the word “righteousness” is often equivalent to doing good works, in some early translations of Matthew 6:1, the word “good works” was substituted for the word “righteousness.” However, recent Greek New Testaments have accepted, and modern English versions have translated, the word as righteousness, with the commentaries explaining that here the word “righteousness” means piety.

Matthew 5:10 also uses righteousness to mean good works when speaking of those “persecuted for the sake of righteousness,” who are believers who meet God’s standard in their confession and daily life. These Christians can expect to be persecuted for maintaining God’s righteous requirements in their lives and are parallel in attitude and action to those martyrs at the end of Revelation who lay down their lives in God’s service, and as their reward “will reign with [Christ]” (Rev. 20:4-6). The conditions for becoming personnel of God’s Coming Kingdom here in Matthew 5:10 seem to require substantial sacrifice, but it is the pathway that must be traveled to receive the highest reward. As the Scriptures say, “we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him” (Rom. 8:17) and “but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation” (1 Pet. 4:13). Therefore, the second meaning of righteousness is knowing and maintaining God’s standard.

When I was younger I did not understand the Scripture, “Do not be excessively righteous” (Eccl. 7:16). Since I thought that believers should always become more and more righteous, I wondered how being excessively righteous could be wrong conduct. But when I came to understand that righteousness means doing everything according to God’s standard, I realized that anything excessive (even righteous deeds) is transgression and that falling short of the standard (missing the target God sets for us) is sin. We must follow the example of righteous Noah and live our lives by using God’s standard as our own. As the Scriptures say, “Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22). When maintaining God’s standard in their lives results in persecution and suffering, Kingdom personnel should not regard it as personal but should endure it for the sake of righteousness.

Please allow me to re-emphasize this teaching about suffering. Intense suffering for the Lord and even martyrdom are special graces from God. It is not something that every believer can endure. Only God knows how much suffering His child can withstand. He will not allow the Christian to be tested beyond what he is able to bear but will with the testing make a way of escape, “in order that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). Mencius knew a little about testing and therefore said, “When Heaven is about to bestow a great responsibility onto a person, Heaven will bitterly test his will, strain his sinew and starve his body.” In the New Testament Stephen is a good example of laying down one’s life for the advancement of God’s Kingdom. Throughout church history, there have been many great martyrs who likewise bear this testimony. For some of you overseas brothers and sisters who are living daily in the refining fire, be strong and courageous. Realize

that your “momentary light afflictions are producing for [you] an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison” to your present hurt, pain and suffering (2 Cor. 4:17). Christ ascended into heaven, and sat down at the Father’s right hand. When Stephen was martyred Christ rose up to honor Stephen and to welcome him home (Acts 7:55). What a glorious privilege that was. May we all be similarly welcomed.

So, “persecuted for righteousness sake” refers to all kinds of persecution, mistreatment, insults and injuries suffered in the process of accomplishing God’s standard, doing good works or in declaring the gospel and the glory of Christ. In reality, suffering is directly proportional to spiritual growth. The Scriptures clearly tell us, “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil. 1:29). In discoursing on the three ways of learning, Confucius taught: some know naturally, some know by learning and some know through hardship. Indeed, there is much spiritual enlightenment that cannot be obtained except through trials and tribulations. For instance, the truth of eternity is often not fully grasped until our dearest one leaves this world. Moreover, let us remember that we are living in the enemy’s world and should expect tumult and conflict because the whole world lies in the hand of the wicked one. Thus, being oppressed for the sake of the truth and ridiculed for doing what is right in God’s eyes is unavoidable. This is just as the Scriptures say, “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12). Such sufferings are not only the signposts of godliness, but are also tests of our faithfulness towards the Lord

### ***Rejoice, and Be Glad, for Your Reward in Heaven Is Great***

You who are persecuted, ridiculed, insulted and maybe even martyred for the Lord’s sake, rejoice and be glad (the original meaning is to dance with joy). Those who endure testing will not only possess the Kingdom of God they will also receive exceedingly great rewards.

Scripture sometimes emphasizes a truth through an expansion and repetition format. The blessing in Matthew 5:10-12 of receiving our great reward, that is, of reigning in the Kingdom of God, is an example. The Holy Spirit used expansion (more information is given on a truth) and repetition (the information is given many times in many different verses) to describe this blessing of inheriting His Kingdom which is reserved eternally in heaven, and “is imperishable, undefiled and will not fade away” (1 Pet. 1:4). This blessing is a **reward** of which the Lord said, “It is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father” (Matt. 20:23; See 1 Cor. 3:8-15). This blessing is **great** because it is “Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has provided for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9). This blessing is **to be enjoyed** with the great heroes of the faith just as the Scriptures have said, “Because God had prepared something better for us, so that apart from us, they [the heroes] should not be made perfect” (Heb. 11:40). This is God’s premium-grade grace prepared only for those who are worthy to enjoy it by virtue of their faithfulness to Him each day. Thus the overcomers are the ones who will enjoy His promise, “I will grant to him [the overcomer] to sit down with Me on My throne” (Rev. 3:21).

The eight beatitudes in the fifth chapter of Matthew contain eight character traits with eight promises for those who possess these traits. As a whole, those desiring to reign

with Christ and inherit the Kingdom that God has prepared for them from the foundation of the world, (that is, to receive the final installment of the promise of eternal life that God has pledged since the days of old) must possess these character traits. Character, though, is not developed in one day. Tough training is essential. Salvation is freely given and once you accept Jesus your life will be changed. To become God's Kingdom personnel, however, one has to meet certain qualifications developed through training. Some may go through the training and still fail, but others will pass. This is why the gracious Lord said, "**Many are called, but few are chosen**" (Matt. 22:14, emphasis added). May we be among those both called to salvation and chosen to be personnel of the Kingdom of God.

## **Concluding Words of Exhortation**

Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior and Lord? If not, please confess your sin, open the door to your heart, and invite the crucified Christ to come in. If you are saved, please do not disappoint the Lord. Strive to enter the narrow gate (dedication) and walk on the narrow way (do God's will).

There is a saying "You get what you pay for." For Kingdom personnel, the parallel is "You become an Overcomer by how you prepare yourself." Always pray before you act.

Let your love for the Lord make you willing to live the life of a mourner, longing for His soon return. Do all things for the Lord and His truth. Be willing to give up what is rightfully yours and suffer unjust abuse. Emphasize your responsibilities and not your rights.

Desire earnestly that God's will be done in everything and everywhere. When there is opportunity, do good to all but especially to the household of believers. Maintain a pure conscience in all behavior. Do the wonderful work of soul winning and thereby make peace between God and man.

Suffer silently for the Lord without indulging in self-pity. In suffering and deprivation, even to the point of death, rejoice and be glad in Christ.

If the lack of training is the mother of failure, then preparation is the father of success. Those who industriously do God's will for their lives daily will discover that this training will fully prepare them to be future Overcomers. If such diligent preparation is needed in business, sports, academic achievements and even our home life, then how much more should this be true for our spiritual life. We will never be sorry if we are well prepared. Since the equipping of the Kingdom's personnel comes only through God's grace, we should not regard ourselves as self-made Overcomers. On the other hand, we should be spiritually and morally healthy and strong. We should never avoid hardship nor fear difficulties.

We should regard the rise and fall of the Kingdom as our personal responsibility and be willing to lay down our lives in order to accomplish our God-given mission. How can our weak and corrupt "self" be transformed into a supernatural and powerful spiritual life? It is God who gives the peace and strength that will keep our spirit, soul and body so that when He returns we will be blameless. He who called us is faithful, He will do it. What is impossible for man is possible with Him! In Him nothing is impossible because He is "the great, the mighty, and the awesome God" (Neh. 9:32). He has promised to give strength to the weary and to him who lacks might, He increases power. As long as we ask Him in faith and are confident that He who began a good work in us will perfect it, He will constantly renew our strength (See Phil. 1:6). Such believers "will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary" (Is. 40:29-31; Ps. 103:5).

Let us boldly arise and together go up to the mountain of our Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, the governmental center of the Kingdom of God.

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