

The Hope of the Christian

“...Christ in you, the hope of glory” - Col. 1:27

Norman Holmes

“The Hope of the Christian”

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**Zion Ministries
P.O. Box 161 Q-Plaza
1900 Cainta, Rizal,
Philippines**

Phone: (02) 697-0745

Email: zmi@skyinet.net

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Part I

A REVELATION OF OUR CHRISTIAN GOAL

Chapter 1

THE SPIRIT OF REVELATION

To understand the hope or future goal of the Christian, we need revelation from God. The natural man cannot comprehend the glorious plans of the Almighty by mere human wisdom. We read in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, “*as it is written, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love him.’ But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit.*” It is by the Holy Spirit that the plans of God can be revealed.

Furthermore, the Scriptures make it clear that the Holy Spirit has many anointings through which He accomplishes His various works. The specific anointing that can show us the hope of the Christian is called the spirit of revelation in Ephesians 1:17. The Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers, “*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation...that you may know what is the hope of His calling.*” The Ephesian church had already received the Holy Spirit many years before (see Acts 19:1-6), but the Apostle Paul knew that they needed a further anointing to help them along the pathway towards full spiritual maturity. We may also have been Spirit-filled Christians for many years, yet we need to pray for the spirit of revelation so that we may further understand the hope of God’s call upon our lives.

The ministry of the spirit of revelation is to reveal the secrets and mysteries of God. In Ephesians 3:3-6 Paul said that, “*by revelation He made known to me the mystery*” that “*the Gentiles should be... partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.*” Now the fact that the Gentiles can be saved is no longer a hidden secret or mystery. This is common knowledge in our times, when almost all of the worldwide Church is composed of Gentile Christians. However, the early

Jewish believers needed revelation from God (such as in Acts 10:9-16) before they could comprehend such a radical idea! In a similar manner, there is much that the Lord has purposed for our future that goes far beyond our minds' comprehension unless God reveals these plans to us by the spirit of revelation.

VISION MOTIVATES US

Proverbs 29:18 tells us, "*Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.*" In the King James Version this reads, "*Where there is no vision, the people perish.*" Revelation gives us a vision, or a goal to attain, concerning what the Lord wants to accomplish in our lives. Without this vision the things of God can appear worthless. We will cast off restraint to become lethargic and purposeless. Moreover, when we lack spiritual goals we will instead concentrate on natural goals for our life. This is because God placed the desire in the heart of man to succeed, be an overcomer, and do great things when He created man to have dominion over the earth (see Genesis 1:26).

People around the world aspire to become popular athletes, musicians, singers, and actors. Others aim at becoming successful businessmen or politicians. Yet high above these things, we need to have a vision of the eternal and glorious plans of God for our life. When we gain a heavenly vision of God's calling, then the natural goals that many people seek fulfillment in are seen as being insignificant and short-sighted. As an example, let us consider the difference between the natural and spiritual goals mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:25. Paul wrote, "*Now they [who run in a race] do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown.*"

We know that many athletes spend much time, effort, and money in trying to win prizes. A survey taken at one of the Olympics illustrates what sacrifices many athletes are willing to make. The competitors were asked that if there was a drug available that could guarantee them a gold medal, would they be interested in taking it even though a side effect of the drug would kill them within five years. The overwhelming majority of the athletes answered, "Yes!" While the gold-plated Olympic medals are only worth about \$26, an Olympic champion receives worldly honors and glory that they were ready to lay down their lives for, even if it could be obtained for only a

few short years. However, each Christian can prepare for a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!

This helps to show us how a vision or purpose gives motivation. The greater the goal, the more sacrifice a person is willing to endure to achieve their plan. This is why we need more revelation from God. It will motivate us to endure the preparations and accept the sacrifices that can cause us to hit the mark of the high call of God for our lives. We should become like the merchant in the parable recorded in Matthew 13:45-46. When this merchant found a pearl of great value he sold everything he had to obtain it. In a similar way we should find something exceptionally precious in God's kingdom that we will dedicate our life and resources to obtain. Martin Luther found the treasure of justification by faith, while Katherine Kuhlman found the riches of divine healing. They endured incredible hardships to fulfill their ministries because of the greatness of what the Lord showed them.

Yet far beyond the few years of our present earthly life and ministry, God has far greater plans for us! Paul said, *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,"* Rom. 8:18. He must have seen a glorious glimpse of the future hope of the Christian for him to consider that such sufferings as three beatings, three shipwrecks, 196 lashes, and many imprisonments (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28) were insignificant!

At the end of his life the Apostle was able to triumphantly exclaim, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing,"* 2 Tim. 4:7-8. Paul tells us that one of his eternal rewards is a crown of righteousness, far more glorious and worthwhile than the fading crown of olive leaves that the Olympic athletes of his day strove to obtain. Yet Paul also said in this verse that every Christian may obtain this eternal reward! There is a glorious calling offered to every child of God.

A VISION GIVES DIRECTION

A vision or call also gives us direction. We cannot accomplish everything that we dream of doing with our lives. A child may daydream about becoming a doctor, a pilot, a mayor, and an army commander. But if he tries to achieve all of these goals, he will probably not accomplish any of them! We need a vision of what God wants to do in our life so that we can focus in and discipline ourselves towards fulfilling that specific plan of God. In 2 Timothy 2:3-4 we are told that a good soldier of Jesus Christ must not entangle himself with the affairs of life that could hinder him from fulfilling his duty. Like the archer who aims to hit the center mark of the target, we also should aim to hit the *“mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,”* Phil. 3:14 KJV. Anything less than this is to sin, because according to the meaning of the Greek word ‘hamartia,’ to *sin*, means that we have missed the mark! May the Lord help each of us not to sin and fall short of the glory of God, but to hit the mark for which we have been created.

When the Lord gives us revelation concerning His future plans for our lives, it can help us become motivated and focused in to prepare ourselves. Then according to how quickly and completely we become prepared, we may qualify to enter into a greater measure of fulfilling our calling.

Let us consider this from the perspective of an army. Part of God’s plan is that He is preparing a spiritual army that will bring revival and salvation throughout the nations. It may be revealed to us that we are called to be a part of this army, but then the question arises, what position and reward will we qualify for in the army?

In natural armies there is a ranking system that a soldier must progress through, from a private to a corporal to a sergeant. It usually takes many years of preparation before a very few will obtain to becoming colonels or generals. Yet if a war begins, there will be a flood of new recruits entering the army. These untrained recruits will be enlisted as privates. At this time, the more mature soldiers will be promoted up the ranks to lead the new soldiers. Some experienced soldiers may be catapulted up many ranks in a short time. In the American Revolutionary War, there was one day in which George Washington promoted three captains to become generals!

In Psalms 110:3 the NKJV says, *“Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power.”* The NIV says that this will be, *“On your day of battle.”* This is speaking about the day of revival, when multitudes of people will choose to serve the Lord. They will be like the new recruits in the army who have to start at the beginning as privates. Yet those who had a vision of enlisting and becoming trained much earlier will find themselves prepared to jump up the ranks. Bible study leaders may become pastors, and soul winners may be promoted to become evangelists! So we do not want to just wait for the day of God’s power before we ‘join the bandwagon.’ If God gives us a vision of what is to come, then we should dedicate ourselves towards preparing for it *now*. By doing this we can secure for ourselves a greater measure of fulfilling the call of God so that we will not just be thirty-fold or sixty-fold Christians, but by His grace will become hundred-fold fruitful Christians.

WE MUST QUALIFY FOR REVELATION

The Scriptures make it clear that not everyone will gain revelations of the glorious plans of God. In Matthew 7:6 our Lord told His disciples, *“Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.”* Christ was telling us that the sinful people of this world are often not to be shown the wonderful things of God, just as you do not give pearls to pigs. A group of pigs will greedily crowd around a person who comes to give them something, hoping to be the first to push their snouts into the awaited slop of food that delights them. If you try to give them pearls, they will have no ability to understand their value and purpose. They will bite them, and finding them to be as hard and tasteless as rocks, they will spit them into the mud while they attack you to find the food they want! Even so, God often does not choose to reveal His riches to those who will despise and reject them. Revelations of His glorious plans will only be entrusted to those who will value them and seek to use them for their intended purpose.

Corresponding to this, Proverbs 25:2 tells us, *“It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter.”* God is glorified by hiding His secrets from those who would despise and abuse them. But who can qualify to search them out? It is for kings, for those who have already obtained a measure of wisdom and responsibility. They are the ones who can

appreciate and utilize the greater things that God can reveal. To them will be given the ability to search out the hidden things of God and obtain a greater glory. As our Lord said, *“For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given,”* Lk. 8:17-18.

We can see how Solomon had learned this truth in Proverbs 25:2 when he was a new king. At that time his leadership was challenged by the dilemma of righteously judging the two women who both claimed to be the mother of a certain child. After he searched out the matter and judged righteously, it brought a new measure of glory to him as all of the nation began to respect his leadership.

However, this proverb is not mainly to be applied to natural kings and rulers. It is to encourage every Christian, as we have been called to rule and reign with Christ. Part of the preparation for our rulership includes learning to search out the secrets of God. The more revelation we receive, the more we will be able to arise to leadership. So if we want to become great in God’s kingdom, then part of the process is that we must learn to search out God’s secrets by the spirit of revelation.

Chapter 2

THE HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN

In Ephesians 4:4, the Apostle Paul wrote that we have “*one hope of our calling.*” God’s plans for each believer aim towards one ultimate goal, to one final purpose. God never has changed, and never will change His purpose for making man. God was not surprised by the fall of Adam and then suddenly had to think up a ‘Plan B’ for the new situation! No, we can read in Ephesians that we are predestined and chosen before the world was made (see Ephesians 1:11 & 1:4). God has planned one hope or goal for every Christian!

Several scriptures help paint the portrait of what this hope of the Christian is. Colossians 1:27 tells us that it is “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” In Romans 8:29 we are told that we are “*predestined to be conformed to the image of His son.*” Peter wrote that we are to be “*partakers of the divine nature,*” 2 Pet. 1:4. The Apostle John was inspired to declare in 1 John 3:2 that “*we shall be like Him,*” and in Hebrews 2:10 it is also revealed that the Father has purposed to bring “*many sons unto glory.*” To try to simply state all of this, *the hope of the Christian is that Christ in us shall grow and transform us to become mature sons of God unto glory!*

We need the spirit of revelation to begin to comprehend how great is this hope of glory, that we will be conformed to the image of Christ. Our Christian hope or goal is far greater than just being saved from hell, or going to heaven. Having a successful ministry and being prepared to reign in the millennium are also very wonderful attainments that the Christian can strive for, but we need to see that there is a high call of God that goes far beyond any of these things!

God has not changed His plans for man from when He first said, “*Let Us make man in Our image*” in Genesis 1:26. It is true that the fall of man has given us each a corrupted adamic

human nature. Nevertheless, through Christ’s redemption we can be rescued and changed from “*glory to glory*” into His image, 2 Corinthians 3:18.

THE HOPE OF THE CHRISTIAN:	
Colossians 1:27	Christ in you, the hope of glory
Romans 8:29	Conformed to the image of His Son
II Peter 1:4	Partakers of the divine nature
I John 3:2	We shall be like Him
Hebrews 2:10	Bringing many sons unto glory

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

I can clearly remember when I was a young Christian and God began to open my spiritual understanding to the greatness of this high call of God. One morning I was walking along a quiet country road, worshiping and loving my Heavenly Father with all my heart. Suddenly I found myself caught up to heaven, hidden with Christ in the bosom of the Father. There I was beholding the glory that the Father had given Christ before the world was created—a glory that filled the heavens. Yet the attention of God the Father as He was revealed in this glory was not centered in heaven, but He was looking down. Through Christ He was looking down past the galaxies and stars—down to our planet, and down to a little human form that was walking along a road and worshiping his Heavenly Father. As I was hidden with Christ in God, I heard the voice of the Majestic Glory as He was looking down upon this human form and declaring with the loving admiration of a father, “This is My beloved son with whom I am well pleased.” (Some scriptures that helped explain this vision to me include John 17:24; 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, John 1:18; John 17:5 & 22; Matthew 17:1-5, and 2 Peter 1:17-18.)

After I had this experience I realized that God the Father had spoken to me the same words that He had spoken to Jesus Christ. In Matthew 4:17 at the time of Christ’s water baptism, and again in Matthew 17:5 on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father had said, “*This is My beloved son with whom I am well pleased.*” As a young Christian who had been walking with God for only about four months, my mind struggled to understand how God the Father could say the same words to me that He had only spoken to Christ in the Bible! Yet while my unrenewed mind

struggled, my quickened spirit embraced and soaked itself in the remembrance of the glory I had seen, and in the love of the Father that I had experienced as He spoke these words. It took many months before my mind could begin to grasp the magnitude of what had been shown to me in a moment of revelation.

At the time that I had this vision I was a recently saved young man who had been a rock musician and a rebel from society. Now, over 30 years later, I am a missionary training many pastors, and writing books read around the world. What could so radically change the course of this life? Just as a burst of electrical power can magnetize a piece of metal so that it will forever point north, in a similar way it was this experience of “*Christ in you the hope of glory*” that forever fixed my spirit towards the goal for the prize of the high call of God.

The Lord through many different ways can reveal to each believer what the future hope of the Christian is. It could be through dreams and visions, while reading the Bible, or when listening to preaching. However it may come, we need to each learn to pray as the Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers, “*That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation ...that you may know what is the hope of His calling.*”

GOD’S ETERNAL PLAN

This hope (that we can become conformed to the image of Christ and be sons unto glory) has always been the plan of God the Father. He declared this intention when He said at the creation of man in Genesis 1:26, “*Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.*” To confirm this truth, the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:38 declares that Adam was “*the son of God.*”

If Adam and Eve had not sinned, they and their future generations could have remained the sons of God, conformed to His image, as man had first been created. Yet after their fall, Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat of the tree of life and were driven out of the Garden of Eden. This separation from God and the sinful, corrupted nature of Adam were both passed down to all their future generations (see Romans 5:12-19 and Psalm 51:5).

In John 8:41-44 we read how our Lord Jesus rebuked the religious Jews that falsely trusted that God was their father. Christ told them, *“You are of your father the devil”* because, *“You do the deeds of your father.”* Sin places man under the dominion of Satan, and will cause the sinner to spiritually be a part of the family of the devil. Misunderstanding this truth still causes multitudes today to falsely believe that they are part of the family of God. Many false religions and cults declare that they are all the “sons of God” because God was originally the Creator and Father of mankind. Unless they recognize the consequences of sin, and return to God through the salvation of Jesus Christ, the word of the Lord over them will remain, *“You are of your father the devil.”*

Yet as we already mentioned, the fall of man into sin did not surprise God and force Him to come up with a new plan. Before creation, God in His foreknowledge of all things had already decided how His plan for man would be brought to completion. He knew that man, through creation, would not remain His faithful sons; but would become spiritually dead in trespasses and sin, Eph.2:1. God knew that Christ would have to die as an atonement for our sin. Christ is called *“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”* in Revelation 13:8, because in God’s foreknowledge of world events, the sacrifice of Christ was deemed necessary and was decided upon before the creation of man! We can further read that from before creation the Father had decided to redeem us to Himself in Ephesians 1:4-6: *“He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”*

So throughout history, God has been redeeming and restoring those who put their faith in the Messiah, our Lord Jesus. Paul quoted from the prophet Hosea how from among the Gentiles as well as the Jews, *“it shall come to pass in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There they will be called sons of the living God,”* Rom.9:26. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are now returned back to God’s original plan, that they should be called the sons of God.

This is the hope of the Christian that we can all begin to enter into now. The Word of God declares to every born again Christian, *“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on*

us, that we should be called children of God...Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure," 1 John 3:1-3. While we are now the immature children of God, the Scriptures give us this hope that we shall continue to be transformed until we shall be like our Lord Himself!

This eternal plan of God—to prepare a vast family of sons—will be completed in the future after the millennial reign of Christ on the earth. At the beginning of the new heaven and new earth God declares in Revelation 21:7, "*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*" At this time every Christian will have entered into their full inheritance and will be the sons of God, to the praise of His redeeming grace!

JESUS CHRIST WILL ALWAYS REMAIN PRE-EMINENT

While we can each rejoice in this glorious hope, we also need to rightly divide this truth of how we shall be the sons of God. It is important to understand how to balance the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ, the *Son* of God, with the wonderful call of every believer to become the *sons* of God. Indeed, some people have been so unbalanced that they have declared themselves to be 'little gods' who are equal to Jesus Christ! This kind of satanic pride and deception has caused others to overreact and swing to the other side of imbalance. They have backed away and said, "You are preaching heresy, there will be no 'sons of God!' There is only *one* Son of God! You are exalting the flesh, and committing idolatry!" So we need to understand the balance of how God's glorious plan for His people (Christ in you, the hope of glory) will in no way detract from the unique and supreme glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord Jesus will always remain pre-eminent and exalted above all of His brethren.

The first way in which Jesus Christ will always remain pre-eminent concerns how He became the Son of God. The scriptures tell us that Jesus Christ was the Son of God from conception, from the moment that He began His earthly life within Mary's womb (see John 1:14 & Luke 1:35). In contrast, we are not conceived or born as the sons of God because we have inherited a

sinful adamic human nature. It is not from conception or our first birth, but from a second spiritual birth that we can be born-again to become the sons of God. At this time we are adopted to become the sons of God (see Ephesians 1:5 & Romans 8:15). This is why Jesus can be called the *only begotten* Son of God—we were not begotten from our conception, but were *adopted* into the family.

Another way in which Jesus Christ is greater than all His brethren is that Jesus Christ had a sinless life, even from the moment of His conception. It is a medical fact that the blood for a newly conceived child comes from the father. Leviticus 17:11 tells us that “*the life of the flesh is in the blood,*” and Christ’s Father gave Him sinless blood! That is why the angel Gabriel in Luke 1:35 could call Him “*that Holy One who is to be born,*” and in 2 Corinthians 5:21 Christ is called “*Him who knew no sin.*” In contrast to His sinless life, every other person has been conceived to inherit the sinful blood of Adam our forefather. David wrote in Psalm 51:5, “*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.*” In Romans 5:12 we can also read, “*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.*”

A third way in which Jesus Christ will always remain pre-eminent over his brethren is shown to us in Romans 8:29. Here we read that Jesus Christ is “*the first born among many brethren.*” Forever He will retain the distinction of being the Eldest Brother of all the sons of God. In contrast, we are His younger brothers.

Another way in which Jesus Christ will always be the greatest among His brethren concerns His original dwelling place. According to John 3:13, 6:38, 13:3 and other scriptures, Jesus Christ came down from heaven to the earth, to then return back to heaven. However, the rest of mankind has started from the earth and will return to the earth—although through Christ we can have the hope of attaining to a heavenly inheritance (see Genesis 3:19, 1 Corinthians 15:49).

So in many ways there will always be a difference between Jesus Christ and the rest of the sons of God. He is God who became man, while we are only men who now partake of the nature of

God by His grace and mercy. Nevertheless, our calling to become sons of God unto glory is still grace and mercy beyond our highest dreams!

Chapter 3

WHEN WILL THIS HOPE BE FULFILLED?

In Ephesians 1:17-18 we read how we need the spirit of revelation so that we may “*know what is the **hope** of His calling.*” The promise of “*Christ in you*” is also called in Colossians 1:27 our “***hope of glory***” because it has a future, conditional fulfillment. God will do His part to bring this to pass, but we have also been given our own part to accomplish if we would enter in and obtain this hope! As we further understand the process through which this becomes accomplished we can become co-laborers with Christ who will not frustrate the grace of God that can bring this to pass.

ITS BEGINNING AND GROWTH

The hope of the Christian begins to be fulfilled in our life the moment we become saved or born again. Christ then comes into our heart by His Holy Spirit, but not to instantly reveal His full power and transform us into becoming perfect, mature, glorious sons of God. If the Lord came in all of His glory and power to show a new Christian all the sins and imperfections that had to be instantly changed in his life, it would be much like blowing up an atomic bomb under his feet and expecting him to understand what happened! Instead, the Lord comes into our life meekly and gently, just as when He gently came into the world as a little baby born in Bethlehem. Gently and patiently the Lord begins the process whereby we can be changed “*from glory to glory*” into the image of Christ, 2 Cor.3:18. He invites us to enter in with the gracious words, “*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light,*” Mat.11:29-30.

When we are saved, Ephesians 1:11 tells us that we are sealed with the Holy Spirit. The Amplified Bible tells us in the next verse, “*That [Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance [the firstfruits, the pledge and foretaste, the down payment on our heritage], in anticipation of its full redemption and our acquiring [complete] possession of it—to the praise of His glory.*” Here we read that the initial work of the Holy Spirit in the life of each new Christian is only the down payment of what He will accomplish. It is similar to when a person might pay a down payment on a car or a house. They acquire the legal possession of what they have bought, yet it is only a small fraction of what they will still pay to fully own it. Even so, when we are born again, the love, joy, and peace that we experience with our newly transformed life is only a small fraction of what Christ will further do by His Spirit!

The process whereby we enter into the hope of the Christian continues on as our Christian life grows and matures. We will study in detail how we can work with and help along this process in Part II of this book. For now we only want to note that we need to actively participate in what God wants to accomplish in our life. When the Apostle John tells us that “*we shall be like Him,*” in the next verse he goes on to say, “*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies Himself, just as He is pure.*” We must actively join in with the working of God in our life, and purify ourselves, that we may qualify for this high and holy calling. If we ignore and disdain our heavenly inheritance, we can be rejected just as Esau lost his birthright, Heb.12:15-17. As our Lord Jesus said, only those Christians who abide in Christ and bear fruit will remain—the rest will be rejected and removed, Jn.15:1-6.

THE SAINTS NOW IN HEAVEN HAVE ENTERED INTO A PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

This process of our spiritual growth into the image of Christ will continue on through our earthly life until we reach heaven. Each saint who then goes to be with the Lord enters into a further fulfillment, but even this is not yet the full completion of the process.

In Hebrews 12:23 we read that the saints now in heaven are called the “*spirits of just men made perfect.*” In their spiritual character, they have been made pure and complete. As 1 John 3:2 tells

us, “*When He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” So when every redeemed saint arrives in heaven and sees Jesus, they will be transformed to become like Him, holy and pure.

However, the saints in heaven are also not yet fully like our Lord Jesus in one important aspect. They have not yet been given glorious resurrection bodies, as the Lord Jesus now has. Their bodies were laid to rest in the grave to await the last trumpet and the resurrection (see 1 Corinthians 15:52, 1 Thessalonians. 4:16). So while the saints in heaven have become purified and perfected spirits, they have not yet been rejoined with their resurrected bodies. As we shall soon study, this is an important later step that shall prepare all the redeemed to become full sons of God in the image of Christ.

SOME CHRISTIANS WILL ENTER INTO A GREATER FULFILLMENT BEFORE THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

To those who will be alive at the end of the Church Age, there is a revelation that is of great importance to understand. There is a further fulfillment of the hope of the Christian that will become available in these last days. As God moves on with His plans, we need to see what He is doing, and join in. We want to enter into all the fresh breakthroughs that He will offer His people, to help prepare the way of the Lord and be qualified to rule and reign with Christ in His kingdom.

In Romans 8:19-22 we read, “*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now...*”

Here the Apostle Paul tells us that creation is waiting and travailing for the revealing of the sons of God. The world was placed under the curse of sin when Adam and Eve fell in the Garden of Eden (see Genesis 3:17), but it has the hope that it will be delivered from this bondage. When

will this happen? The Word of God does not say that it will happen when Christ, the *Son* of God is revealed, but when the *sons* of God are revealed! Just as Adam and Eve brought this curse upon the world, it will be when the overcoming sons of Adam and Eve are revealed as the sons of God that this curse will be lifted!

In the meantime, Romans 8:22 says that the world groans and labors with birth pangs, waiting for the glorious ‘birthing’ of these sons of God. I read an interesting article in a Time magazine many years ago that helped explain this. The article said that a group of scientists had studied the increasing earthquake activity around the world in the 20th century. The scientists had gathered their data that showed that earthquakes were increasing in intensity as well as frequency around the world. When they made a chart of this, they said that it looked just like the chart of a woman’s birth pangs, as the contractions become faster and stronger before the time of birth! Probably none of these scientists were aware of this truth from the Bible, yet it gives us another confirmation that the time for the revealing or the “birthing” of the sons of God is drawing near.

Paul goes on to say that not only the world, but also we Christians are also to enter into this travail. *“Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons...”* Romans 8:23 NIV. The yearning of the Holy Spirit within us is for our complete redemption, and this yearning can become as real a burden in our times of prayer as when a woman travails in birth pangs. There have been seasons during my walk with God when I have experienced this type of prayer. Paul spoke more about it a few verses later in Romans 8:26, as the intercession of the Spirit *“with groanings which cannot be uttered [or verbally expressed].”* The burden of prayer can be laid so heavily on a heart, that only weeping, groaning, and a deep travail can express it. Yet the purpose of this spiritual travail is to form the nature of Christ within us. Or as Paul mentioned about the Galatian believers, *“for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you,”* this travailing prayer can also be on behalf of others whom the Spirit of God is working within, Gal.4:20.

The Book of Revelation goes on to tell us how the Church of the last days will also travail for the revealing of the sons of God. Many times the book of Revelation uses a picture or sign to depict a group of people. For example, in Revelation 17:1-6 we can read about the mystery of Babylon

the Great, the Mother of Harlots. Bible scholars agree that this is not referring to one specific person, but to a company of people, those who comprise the false Church. In a similar way, we read in many places (such as Revelation 19:7-8, Revelation 21:9-10, and Revelation 12:1-6) about a different mystery: the Bride of Christ, the true Church. In Revelation 12:1-2 we can study about how this woman, the Church, will travail in birth in these last days. Just as this woman is a group of people, the Church, the son that she brings forth will be a group of people, the offspring of the Church. We read, “*A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.... She gave birth to a son, a male child who will rule all nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.*” - Revelation 12:1-2, 5 (NIV).

Bible expositors have offered various possible interpretations about this great sign that John saw in heaven. Because of the similarities between this son and Jesus Christ, many expositors have taken this son (or ‘manchild’ in the King James Version) to actually be the Lord Jesus. However, there are clear reasons why this is not correct.

First of all, the book of Revelation was written as a book of future prophecies according to Revelation 1:1, 1:3, and 22:6. When John wrote the book of Revelation near the end of the first century AD, the birth of Christ was already a historical fact that had taken place about 90 to 95 years before. John was given visions about the future, not about past historical events.

A second reason why this ‘manchild’ is not Jesus Christ is because John said that this vision he saw was a great sign in heaven. We all know that Christ’s birth in Bethlehem was an actual earthly event, not a sign in heaven. We find a third reason in Revelation 12:5, where it says that the child was caught up to heaven immediately after his birth. However, Jesus did not ascend to heaven after his birth, but after his death and resurrection. For those Roman Catholics who believe that the vision of the heavenly woman was Mary, this contradicts another of their wrong doctrines about Mary because the woman of Revelation 12 also had other children in verse 17.

When we correctly examine the book of Revelation, we find that these events written of in chapter 12 speak of something that will happen in the last days around the time of the Great Tribulation. It is speaking about a heavenly woman. This is not Mary or earthly Israel, but the same heavenly woman spoken of in Revelation chapters 19, 21, & 22; which is the Church, the Bride of Christ. This woman will be groaning in travail. This will be just like the travail that we have studied in Romans 8:18-23, that both the physical world and individual Christians will enter into. Furthermore, all this travail will be for the same purpose: to prepare for the revealing of the sons of God!

The Church in the last days will travail and bring forth a company of sons who will be further conformed to the image of Christ in the following important ways.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE MANCHILD OF REVELATION 12 AND JESUS CHRIST

The first similarity we can study is how both Christ and the ‘manchild’ will sit on the throne of God. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:6, God’s plan for each Christian is that He has “*made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.*” Yet the book of Revelation has told us more specifically who will enter into obtaining the fullness of this. In Revelation 3:21, Christ said, “*To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*” We then most specifically read in Revelation 12:5 that it is the son or ‘manchild’ who is snatched up or ‘caught up’ to the throne of God. These overcomers in the last days will be a group brought forth by the travail of the Church, who will sit with Christ on the throne of God, entering into His great power and authority.

Another correspondence between Christ and this ‘manchild’ is that both will rule the nations with a rod of iron. We can first see this prophesied about Christ in the Old Testament, in Psalm 2:7-9. There we read, “*The Lord has said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’*” Then in the Book of Revelation we see that Christ offers this same inheritance

to the overcomers in His Church! In Revelation 2:25 & 27 He said, *“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; ‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron; They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’; as I also have received from My Father.”* Finally in Revelation 12:5 we see that this will be fulfilled by the ‘manchild’ Christians of Revelation 12:5 in the last days, where we read that the woman bore a manchild who was to *“rule all nations with a rod of iron.”*

Another way in which Christ and this ‘manchild’ will be similar, is that both of them are lifted above the power of Satan. We read of how this has been granted to our Lord Jesus Christ in Ephesians 1:20 & 21. There we see that God the Father revealed His mighty power *“when He raised Him [Christ] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion.”* Yet when you study Revelation 12:1-13, we see that although the devil wanted to destroy the ‘manchild’ when he was born (v.4), he could not. This was because the ‘manchild’ was caught up to the throne of God (v.5) while the devil was cast out of heaven, vs.8-9. The devil could no longer attack him, but only attack the woman (v.13).

A further interesting similarity between Christ and this ‘manchild’ is that the devil tried to kill them both when they were born, but they were taken away from this danger. In the gospel of Matthew we can read how baby Jesus was taken away from Bethlehem when Herod tried to kill Him, Mt. 2:13-16. In Revelation 12:4-5 the manchild was taken up to heaven, away from the enemy’s power, when the dragon wanted to devour him.

Also, we find that at the birth of Christ and the ‘manchild’ there was a great slaughter of children when the devil tried to destroy his opponent. Matthew 2:16 records how Herod killed the other young children in Bethlehem when he was seeking to destroy Christ. Yet Revelation 12 tells us that after the woman brings forth the ‘manchild,’ the dragon (the devil, v.9) went to attack and kill her other children. We then read in verse 17, *“And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”* The extent of his success in destroying the other offspring

of the woman is recorded a few verses later, in chapter 13:7 where we read, *“It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them.”*

The Word of God tells of two former times in history where the devil caused a great slaughter of children at a time when God was preparing a great deliverer for His people. The first was in the time of Moses, when Pharaoh had all the Israelite male children put to death, Exodus 1:22. The second time was when Herod had all the male babies in Bethlehem killed. However, Revelation 12:17 suggests that this will happen a third time near the end of this age. I believe that we may be seeing the beginnings of this fulfillment in present world history, when we consider the worldwide multiplication of abortions. Statistics now show that in many nations, more than half their children are being killed before birth through abortion. Why this new slaughter of millions of innocent lives? Could it be that the devil is aware, as in the times of Moses and Christ, that a new deliverer (or company of deliverers) is being prepared? While the Church and even the planet Earth groan in travail that this deliverer will be prepared and the sons of God will be revealed, the devil in his fear and fury will do his worst to try to stop the plan of God, Revelation 12:12.

THREE CATEGORIES OF CHRISTIANS IN THE LAST DAYS CHURCH

Some good Christians have objected to this interpretation of the ‘manchild’ of Revelation 12. They have felt that it wrongly offers a higher position to some Christians to make them like a proud, selective ‘elite.’ Yet the Word of God often says that there will be different inheritances, or categories, or levels of maturity among God’s people. Just as different athletes will qualify for different rewards and higher positions according to their abilities and dedication, the believer who completes his Christian race well can gain a greater reward than the half-hearted or lukewarm.

Many times in the Word of God the different levels of maturity and reward are shown to us in three levels or categories. For instance, Jesus talked about three levels of faithfulness among his servants, in the parable of the ten talents (see Luke 19:11-27). The most faithful servant who

gained ten talents for his master was given ten cities to rule, while the faithful servant who earned five talents was given five cities. However, the unfaithful servant had what was given him taken away, and received no reward. In Matthew 13:23 Jesus also talked about three different levels of fruitfulness that various Christians would experience; namely thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and a hundred-fold.

As some other examples of three different levels of inheritance or maturity, we can study what the Apostle John wrote about in John 2:12-14. There he mentions three spiritual levels of growth that he called the little children, the young men, and the fathers. In Moses' Tabernacle we have these same three levels of spiritual experience clearly depicted by the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. Furthermore, in Revelation chapter 12 we can see how these three categories of spiritual maturity will be revealed among God's people in the last days.

In studying about the son, or 'manchild' of the woman, we can see a further conformity with the image of Christ that has caused some Bible expositors to mistakenly suggest that the manchild *is* Christ! This manchild is a *full overcomer* that the devil cannot attack, and represents the most spiritually mature Christians. Yet the woman, the Church, can be attacked by the devil although in the end she is delivered, Revelation 12:13-16. We could call her a *partial overcomer* because of her final triumph. But the rest of the woman's children, spoken of in Revelation 12:17 and 13:7, are those who will be *overcome* by the devil in the last days. It does not necessarily mean that they will lose their salvation, for the book of Revelation makes it clear that many saints will lose their lives in the last days but will still enter into a heavenly reward (see Revelation 7:14, 20:4).

Two dreams that the Lord gave me to prepare me for the mission field could help illustrate the differences among these three groups. In the first dream, after I had been in the ministry for about 3 years, the Lord showed me what would happen if I went to the mission field at that time. I had already graduated from Bible school and had served the Lord in different teaching, pastoral, and evangelistic ministries. I was praying about whether it was then the time for me to become a missionary. In answer to my prayers, the Lord gave me a dream.

In this dream I was a missionary traveling around the nations. As I continued to travel, one of my shoes slipped off my foot. I immediately noticed this and put it back on. Yet a while later, the shoe slipped off again, but it took me a little longer to notice it and put it on again. After several more times I had grown insensitive to when my shoe would slip off, until finally both shoes slipped off at the same time. At that moment I looked up into the heavenlies to see a mighty evil spirit opposing me. Then another evil spirit behind me revealed himself in the heavenlies—then another on my side, until more and more surrounded me and closed in for the kill!

I woke up at that point, convinced that I was not yet ready to face the satanic powers that would oppose me when I began to travel around the nations as a missionary. We are told in Ephesians 6:12-15 that part of our Christian armor to overcome the evil principalities and powers in the heavenlies is, *“Having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.”* My ministry preparations, or my ‘gospel shoes,’ were not yet firmly secure for me to be able to travel around the nations. Different nations have different evil principalities and powers that rule over them, and when a missionary enters their domain, these evil spirits will oppose them. From this dream I felt the Lord was showing me that I needed further spiritual preparations, for if I prematurely went on the mission field I would be overcome by the attacks of these principalities and powers and probably returned home in defeat. I am glad to have listened to the Lord’s warning in that dream so that I did experience a short missionary ministry with a sad ending!

After several more years of Christian growth and ministry, I was again praying about whether it was time for me to aim for the mission field. At that time, the Lord gave me a second dream for guidance.

In this dream, I was reading an account of how a missionary to Asia had failed and returned home. While reading this, I was caught up in the spirit and traveled to Asia. There in the heavenlies over Asia I stood before the prince of darkness that had caused this other missionary to return home in defeat.

As I stood before this great king, the strong impression that came to me was not concerning whether he was good or bad. Rather, it was that he had power and authority. He was the spiritual ruler over a nation, a mighty king! With great condescension he seemed to choose to notice little

'me' standing before him. Then he began to speak to me such things as, "What are you doing here? I did not invite you to come! You are not welcome here!" His words began to quickly wear me down until I felt insignificant and ashamed. I began to open my mouth, intending to apologize to him and say that I would leave if he wanted me to! Yet as I opened my lips, the anointing of the Holy Spirit broke forth from my innermost being, and arose to come forth out of my mouth with the reply, "I did not come here by your invitation, I have been sent here as a messenger of the Lord." Then the battle began in earnest. For every accusation that this satanic king would speak to me like a fiery dart, I would reply with a scripture that would cut through his lie like a sword.

This struggle went on for some time until I began to feel weary. Then the Spirit of the Lord arose from my innermost being with a new anointing, and I found myself saying, "And besides all this, I am not under your power, for I have been raised and seated with Christ far above all principality and power." Then from the heavenlies above Asia where I fought with this evil ruler, I found myself caught up again to a much higher realm in the spirit, to be seated with Christ in heaven! There I looked far, far down, and thought that perhaps I could still see that evil prince of darkness I had been fighting against. Yet the battle was over—he was so insignificant from where I was seated with Christ in the heavenlies, that he looked like an ant; and I could no longer hear any of his words of accusation.

When I woke up from this dream, I felt that it was the revelation of God to me that I had become prepared to face and overcome the principalities and powers that would oppose me on the mission field. Shortly after this dream my family moved to Asia. In the 23 years since this, I have seen the Lord demonstrate His authority among the nations to cause us to overcome such enemies as armed Muslim rebels, a fanatic Hindu riot, civil war and coup attempts, deadly sicknesses, snakes, Communist death threats, and much more. Yet far above the blessings of being protected by God, it has been our special joy to see the power of God released to bless thousands of pastors as well as national leaders, as the Church has been built up and the gates of hell have been battered.

In considering these dreams, I have observed in them some parallels in spiritual experience that can be drawn with the three groups of the ‘manchild,’ the ‘woman,’ and ‘the rest of her offspring’ in Revelation 12. Each of these three groups occupies a different place or level of spiritual position. The third group, the rest of the Church’s offspring written of in Revelation 12:17, was like my spiritual experience at the time of my first dream. There I was standing on the earth when the evil principalities and powers revealed themselves over me in the heavenlies, to attack and overpower me. This will be the same end as those carnal offspring of the church who dwell on the earth, who will be overcome by the devil in the Last Days (see Revelation 12:12, 12:17, & 13:7).

The ‘woman’ or the Church, however, occupies a higher spiritual level than what some individual Christians live in. In Revelation 12:1 we see her in the heavenlies, with the sun, moon, and stars. While the woman is also attacked by the devil, we see that she is protected and emerges triumphant in Chapter 12. This reminds me of when in the second dream I faced the prince of darkness in the heavenlies but was delivered.

Yet the ‘manchild’ of Revelation 12:5 was given a much higher spiritual level than the woman had among the sun, moon, and stars. The manchild was caught up to the throne of God! This manchild never had to fight against the devil, but instead ruled triumphantly with Christ in heaven. This experience was similar to what I had a glimpse of in the second dream, when I was caught up above the satanic king in the heavenlies over Asia, to be seated triumphantly with Christ in heaven.

Have you heard of the phrase, “Keep looking up?” That is a good encouragement that we should always be looking up to Jesus in heaven. However, there is a different perspective that we can also have—“Keep looking down!” Psalm 2:4 tells us that “*He who sits in the heavens shall laugh,*” as the Lord looks down upon the troubles on the earth. If we can now learn to be spiritually seated with Christ in the heavenlies, we can also obtain that triumphant joy, and become prepared for the much greater revelation of this triumph that the “manchild” will enter into before the end of this age.

OVERCOMERS HAVE OFTEN TASTED OF THE AGE TO COME BEFORE OTHERS ENTER IN

It should not surprise us that some Christians in the last days will enter into becoming conformed to the image of Christ in a greater and faster way than some others. God will always reward those who diligently seek and obey Him! As a consequence, there have often been believers who have pressed into God and received a spiritual experience that did not become generally available to the saints until a future dispensation or age.

We can see this in the life of Enoch. He was a man who learned to walk with God, and this qualified him to enter into some spiritual experiences far in advance of the other believers of his time, Gen. 5:24. He received revelation about the Second Coming of Christ (see Jude 14-15) and was translated or ‘raptured’ to heaven, Heb.11:5. Only now, as the Second Coming of Christ draws near, does the worldwide Church hope to experience what Enoch entered into thousands of years ago!

David was also a man who entered into the blessings of a future age before most of God’s people. He lived in the Age of the Law, when the Israelites drew near to God through the sacrifices that God had ordained through Moses. However, David was a man after God’s heart who could see beyond the rituals of the Old Testament. David entered into experiencing the worship and the blessings of the New Covenant dispensation of the Church Age. He wrote in Psalm 40:6, “*Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; my ears You have opened; burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.*” Now when David spoke that prophecy, there were perhaps many priests and Levites that were afraid that their king might be slipping into heresy! The priests taught all the people the importance of the animal sacrifices and the offerings of Moses’ Tabernacle. When David seemed to ignore these things and instituted a new form of worship through the singing and music at David’s Tabernacle, it was because God had brought him beyond the normal spiritual experiences of his day. David’s experience with God was what was to become the pattern in the next age for the New Testament Church, as the early Church leaders recognized in Acts 15:15-17. David was living in the liberty and joy of the Age of Grace 1,000 years before Christ made it generally available to the people of God!

Another example of this principle is the Syrophenician woman of Matthew 15:21-28. When she asked the Lord Jesus for help, Christ replied to her, *“I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”* We know that it was only after the cross that the blessings of the Gospel were to be spread to the Gentile nations (see Matthew 10:5-6, Matthew 28:19, & Mark. 16:15-18). Yet this Syrophenician woman pressed in and received help *before* it was offered to the Gentile nations, because of her faith and humility.

The Apostle Paul was also a man who lived ahead of his times. In 2 Corinthians 12:2,4 we can see how he was caught up (or raptured) to the third heavens. There in Paradise, Paul *“heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”* Paul received revelations that God did not let him speak about! As a very mature, spiritual man, Paul heard and experienced things that most Christians would not be able to comprehend. Even the Apostle Peter said about the writings of Paul, *“in which are some things hard to understand,”* 2 Peter 3:15-16. Because of our limited capacity to understand truth and revelation, Paul had to be careful about what he should write for the Church, as some revelations cannot be easily comprehended here during this age!

In Hebrews 6:5 we are told that some mature saints have *“tasted...of the powers of the age to come.”* This is what Enoch, David, Paul, and others experienced when they had spiritual breakthroughs to enter into blessings and experiences that were ahead of their time. Yet the Word of God suggests that this advance ‘pressing in’ will also be available in these last days! The ‘manchild’ Christians of Revelation 12:5 clearly will enter into levels of blessing and authority which the woman, the general worldwide Church, will not yet have entered into. Nevertheless, whoever may become the ones who will enter into these blessings will not be able to proudly boast that they are ‘special.’ It is only by the grace and mercy of God that any of us will be able to run a good Christian race and qualify for the rewards of God.

Through the spirit of revelation, we can see more and more clearly what our Lord is offering to His people in these last days. Through whatever scriptures or experiences the Lord may choose to speak to us, we need to gain a clearer vision and see the race that is set before us. Then we

will be able to follow the exhortation of Paul in Philippians 3:12-14, *“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

ALL CHRISTIANS WILL BECOME THE MATURE SONS OF GOD AT THE RESURRECTION

Step by step our Lord is moving on towards fulfilling His ultimate purpose for man. As we study the Scriptures we can clearly see when this plan will be completed and we will all become the mature sons of God. Our Lord Jesus declared that it would be at the time of the resurrection. In Luke 20:35-36 He said, *“But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.”*

The Apostle Paul also confirms this truth in Romans 8:23. After writing about how the creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God in verses 19-21, he went on to say, *“Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.”* So in these verses Paul makes it clear that the time of our full adoption and the revealing of the sons of God will be at the resurrection. At this time the redeemed and resurrected saints will be like Christ, not only in spirit, but also physically.

This is why the saints now in heaven have not yet been fully conformed to the image of Christ. As we mentioned before, they have become purified and perfected in spirit. However, they have not yet been perfected in body. But when the redeemed are also given immortal glorified bodies, then we shall fully be like our Lord and Elder Brother. Our human body will be transformed to be like His!

THE RESURRECTED SAINTS WILL SHINE WITH THE GLORY OF GOD

In 1 Corinthians 15 the Apostle Paul teaches us extensively about what the saints will be like after the resurrection. Let us now study about this glorious inheritance awaiting us as part of the hope of the Christian. In 1 Corinthians 15:41-43 we read, *“There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead...It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.”*

In these verses we read how our mortal bodies shall be raised in glory. This will be the fulfillment of *“Christ in you, the hope of glory,”* in Colossians 1:27. At this time all the sons of God will shine with the glory of God! As our Lord Jesus stated it, *“Then the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,”* Matthew 13:43.

How we will have the glory of God shining forth from us can perhaps best be glimpsed by seeing how both Christ and Moses had God’s glory revealed through them. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus’ *“face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light,”* Matthew 17:2. Then about Moses we read, *“Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai...that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone when he talked with Him. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near to him,”* Exodus 34:29-30.

While all the resurrected saints will partake of the glory of God, we must further understand that some of the resurrected sons of God will be more glorious than others. As Paul said, *“There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead,”* 1 Cor.15:41-42. Here Paul explained that just as the natural heavenly bodies shine with different glories, so will the saints’ resurrected bodies shine with different glories.

Of course, our Lord Jesus will be the most glorious of the sons of God. The book of Revelation shows this to us, when John writes that Christ will be the light of the new Jerusalem. He wrote of

that heavenly city, *“The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light,”* Revelation 21:23.

Daniel was also told how the resurrected saints will shine with different degrees of God’s glory. The angel said to him, *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake...Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever,”* Daniel 12:2-3.

To be able to understand better how there will be different degrees of glory among God’s redeemed, we can learn from a vision recorded by John Bunyan several hundred years ago. John Bunyan was an English preacher who is famous for his book *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which has been translated into more languages than any book except the Bible. He also wrote many other books, including one named *Visions of Heaven and Hell*. In this book he records the true story of how an angel brought him to see heaven and hell. While in heaven, he had the following conversation with one of the saints in heaven:

I remarked, “As I was brought here, I saw among the saints some that appeared to shine with greater brightness than the others. Are there among the blessed different degrees of glory?”

He replied, “The happiness and glory which all the blessed here enjoy is the result of their communion with and love to the ever blessed God. The more we see Him, the more we love Him; and love changes our souls into His nature, and from this results our glory. This makes a difference in the degrees of glory. Nor is there any murmuring in one to see another’s glory much greater than his own. The ever blessed God is an unbounded ocean of light and life, and joy and happiness, filling every vessel that is put therein, till it can hold no more. And though the vessels are of various sizes, while each is filled there is none that can complain. My answer therefore to your question is that those who have the most enlarged capacity do love God most, and are thereby changed most into His likeness. This is the highest glory heaven can give. Nor let this seem strange to you, for even among God’s flaming angels there are diversities of order and different degrees of glory.”

John Bunyan was told in this vision that there were different degrees of glory among the redeemed in heaven, but that no one is jealous or complains about this. Everyone is as full of God's glory as they can contain. So in this sense everyone is equal and satisfied. Yet it is also true that some saints are larger vessels than others, that can contain and shine forth more of the glory of God! This is of utmost importance to understand, because it is while we are here on earth that we are developing our capacity for God. It is now that we can learn to behold the glory of the Lord, and be "*transformed into the same image from glory to glory,*" 2 Cor.3:18. Those who hunger more for the Lord, that seek and find Him in a greater way, will have enlarged their capacity to become filled with more of the glory of God for the ages to come. And the more that we have a vision of this, the more we will want to press on and use every day that we are given in this life to prepare for the glorious inheritance of the saints! As Paul said, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us,*" Rom.8:18.

THE RESURRECTED SAINTS WILL REIGN WITH CHRIST

Another part of the inheritance of the resurrected and glorified sons of God will be to rule and reign with Him. This will fulfill God's original intention for man when He created Adam. As it is recorded in Genesis 1:26, we read, "*Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth,'"*

He we can see that God had originally created man to rule the earth. However, this authority was lost when Adam and Eve submitted to the devil instead of submitting to God. Now, through Christ's salvation, we are being redeemed and prepared to fulfill God's plan for man.

To understand this more from a natural illustration, let us consider what often happens in the family of a rich or powerful man. If the man is perhaps a king or a wealthy businessman, he will want to prepare his sons for the inheritance that they will be given when they become mature. As the sons begin to grow up, they will slowly be given some authority and wealth as they are

trained and tested by their father. Those who become wise and industrious will usually be given a larger inheritance than the sons who are foolish or lazy.

In a similar manner, God our Father is now preparing His sons for their future inheritance of reigning with Him. Now is when we are learning our lessons and preparing for our coming position in His kingdom. As we are told in Romans 5:17, *“Those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”* In this present life we are learning how to be *“more than conquerors,”* Romans 8:37.

The timing when the saints will first begin to fully enter into their future position and authority will be at the time of the first resurrection. When Christ returns in glory to begin His millennial kingdom for one thousand years, we read in Revelation 20:6, *“Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”*

As we study the kingdom order of the Millennium, we see from the Scriptures that the different sons of God will be given different positions and levels of authority. Jesus Christ, *the* Son of God, will be the King of kings, Rev.19:16. At this time the kingdoms and nations of the world will become ruled by our Lord Jesus Christ (see Revelation. 11:15, Zechariah 14:9). Yet while Christ will be the King of all the kings, this tells us also that there will be other kings! Christ will rule the world from the international capitol of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:16), yet each nation will also have its own local rulers. Then Christ’s promise to His saints will be fulfilled, *“And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations; he shall rule them with a rod of iron,”* Revelation 2:26-27.

The Bible tells us very clearly who will be the king of Israel during the Millennium. As Jeremiah was prophesying about the restoration of Israel and the Millennium, he declared, *“But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up for them,”* Jeremiah 30:9.

The Word of God also tells us that some will rule at the level of being governors of states or provinces. Christ Himself declared that His twelve apostles would rule over the twelve tribes, or

the twelve provinces, of Israel. When Jesus was teaching one day about the future reward of His servants, Peter asked what would be the reward of the twelve apostles. Christ replied in Matthew 19:28, *“So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.’”*

Christ also taught that some of His servants would rule over cities. In Luke 19 He told a parable about how He was going to heaven for a time, and then He would return to establish the kingdom of God throughout the earth. Starting in verse 11 we read, *“Now as they heard these things, He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately. Therefore He said: “A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, ‘Do business till I come.’ But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We will not have this man to reign over us.’ And so it was that when he returned, having received the kingdom, he then commanded these servants, to whom he had given the money, to be called to him, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned ten minas.’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Master, your mina has earned five minas.’ Likewise he said to him, ‘You also be over five cities.’”* -Luke 19:11-17

So the Scriptures tell us the basic levels of authority that will be established in the Millennium to rule over the world. There will be one King of kings (Christ), but then individual kings to rule over each nation. As each nation is further subdivided, there will be governors who will rule over each state or province. Then on a more local level, there will be different saints who will be the mayors over cities or groups of cities.

While the Bible already outlines Israel’s rulership in the Millennium, the Scriptures do not so specifically tell us who will rule the other nations. We can assume that the best and most godly Christians during the history of those nations will be chosen by the Lord. Perhaps Joseph will be the millennial king of Egypt, just as he had righteously governed the nation as their former prime

minister. Maybe Daniel will be given a position of international authority over the Middle East, just as he had gained an inheritance among those nations when he had ably governed them during the ancient past (see Daniel 12:13). Perhaps many of today's most godly Christians will become governors and mayors. One possible reason why the Scriptures do not tell us more about who will be given the positions of authority over other nations, is because many people may still be in the contest to qualify for these final positions! Who will qualify to rule in the Millennium, and at what level of authority? Could you become a mayor, or governor, or a king? Those who gain a higher vision and undergo the greater preparations may be among those who will be chosen by the Lord for these higher positions.

THE AGES TO COME

After the Millennium, Revelation 20:11-15 records how God will judge all mankind and destroy our present heaven and earth. Chapter 21 then tells us how the Lord will create a new heaven and earth in which He will continue to entrust greater authority to His redeemed saints. The Lord declares in Revelation 21:7, "*He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.*" If we are to inherit *all* things, this could suggest that the authority that God will entrust to His sons will only increase in the ages to come. While we can now only see these things as "*through a mirror dimly,*" we can certainly expect from our knowledge of God's character and ways that His plans will continue to grow and unfold throughout all of eternity future.

This hope is further confirmed when we study the dispensations or ages that the Lord has made during the time span of our present heaven and earth. Bible scholars usually see seven ages during which God has moved onward with His plans. From the Garden of Eden (often called the Age of Innocence) down through the time of the Jews (the Age of Law) to the present time of the Church (the Age of Grace), the Lord has step-by-step moved onwards and lifted His people up to higher levels of spiritual experience. When Christ returns, the Millennial Age (or the Kingdom Age) will begin. This will be the last dispensation or age in our present heaven and earth, as shown to us in Revelation 20. Then just after the Millennium, in Revelation 21:1 John recorded the beginning of the new heaven and earth.

During the seven dispensations in our present earth, the Lord has led His people into a progressively higher and purer spiritual experience. We can see great development and change when we even only consider the last three dispensations of the Jewish Age, the Church Age, and the Millennial Age.

If we were believers during the Jewish Age we would have been serving God through many natural rituals such as circumcision, animal sacrifices, and the dietary laws of Moses. God's presence among His people was symbolized by the tabernacle or temple of God. Now in the present Church Age we have a much more spiritual relationship with God. Instead of natural circumcision, we seek the circumcision of the heart. Animal sacrifices have been replaced by the once-for-all-time sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God. Natural rituals have been largely replaced with spiritual realities in our Christian faith. The temple of God is now the people of God by His indwelling presence.

However, a much greater level of spiritual experience will be further enjoyed in the Millennial Age. Satan will be bound, Rev.20:1. The resurrected saints will rule the nations in righteousness. Jesus Christ will be among us as He rules the world from Jerusalem, Zech.14:3-9 & 16, Mic.4:1-4. Habakkuk tells us of this glorious time when he declared, "*For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea,*" Hab.2:14.

We can easily see how each new dispensation or age has lifted the spiritual experience of God's people onto a much higher level. Yet the Scriptures give us a further glimpse of the progressive plans of God in eternity to come. In Ephesians 2:7 we are told that we were redeemed, "*that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus,*" Eph.2:7. From the original Greek this verse clearly says there will be many ages yet to come in God's plans. Since there will only be one more age to come in the duration of the present heaven and earth, this means that there will still be many more ages to come in the new heaven and earth! Not only will God's plans for the redeemed be much higher in the new heaven and earth—where there will be no death, sorrow, or pain when God makes all things new—but

in that future heaven and earth there will continue to be progressive steps higher and higher in God's plans for His sons, Rev.21:4-7.

Yet what will happen during these future ages in the new heaven and earth? We are probably too immature and earthbound to be able to comprehend much of God's eternally progressive plans. When Paul recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 about being caught up to heaven he said that he heard "*inexpressible words, which it is not lawful to utter.*" The Lord has much ahead for us that is so heavenly and glorious that it would be impossible for us to comprehend, and inexpressible for us to declare.

However, we do know that our Heavenly Father is infinite in His wisdom, power, and love. Since we are finite beings, we will always be able to develop and expand to be more like Him. We will forever be able to enter into new experiences with God, and be enlarged and changed "*from glory to glory.*" In the ages to come He will continue to show us the exceeding riches of His grace. The hope of the Christian goes far beyond what we are able to presently conceive. "*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him,*" 1 Corinthians 2:9. Yet the glimpses that we can now comprehend are so wonderful that we should dedicate our lives towards the hope of obtaining this glory!

Chapter 4

THE VISION OF ZION

As we study the aspects of revelation that help us see more clearly the hope of the Christian, we increasingly find the importance of the term ‘Zion.’ The name ‘Zion’ gains a growing prophetic significance as we go through the story of the Bible. From its original meaning as a fortress hill in Jerusalem, Zion goes onward in the Old Testament to signify the high calling of God for His people. By the end of the New Testament it reveals the center of heaven’s purposes and placement. What does this all mean for us? Let us start at the beginning.

The first time the name Zion is found in the Bible is in 2 Samuel. There we read, *“And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, ‘You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you,’ thinking, ‘David cannot come in here.’ ...Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David). Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David...So David went on and became great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him.”* - 2 Samuel 5:6-7, 9-10.

When David first became the king of all Israel, he went up with his army to attack the Jebusites at Jerusalem. He wanted to establish a good capitol for his nation, so David chose this city with a strong fortress that was just five miles (8 km.) north of his hometown, Bethlehem. The Jebusites had built a fortress there on a hill on the southeast side of Jerusalem called Mount Zion. The hill was named after this fortress, as the name ‘Zion’ means ‘a fortress or stronghold.’

Once David captured this fortress it became his royal capital that he also named ‘The City of David.’ As he ruled from Zion, the Lord expanded his kingdom until David ruled over a great empire from the Euphrates River all the way to Egypt.

As well as being the City of David where the king ruled in great authority, this hill called Mount Zion also gained another great significance in David's time. Mount Zion was where David built a tabernacle and placed the Ark of the Covenant. We read, "*David built houses for himself in the City of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God, and pitched a tent for it...So they brought the ark of God, and set it in the midst of the tabernacle that David had erected for it.*" - 1 Chronicles 15:1 & 16:1.

This ark, originally placed in the Holy of Holies of Moses' Tabernacle, was where God dwelt, spoke from, and revealed His glory to His people, Ex.25:22, Ps.80:1, & Lev.16:2. King David placed the ark in a tabernacle on Mount Zion, which he made as a place of worship where God dwelt in the midst of His people, 1 Chron.16:4-37 & Ps.9:11.

When the ark was placed in this tabernacle, Zion then became famous for two reasons: both the throne of the king and the ark of God were there! The throne speaks of authority, while the ark speaks of worship and God's glory. The significance of the throne and the ark in Zion continue on to have greater prophetic meaning as the Scriptures unfold.

In the natural, we understand that many who live in the capital of a nation have higher social and educational standings than those who live out in the remote countryside. Furthermore, if you live or work at the national palace, or the 'White House,' you could hold a very high position.

We find a similar spiritual parallel in the Scriptures. Psalm 76:1-2 tells us, "*In Judah God is known, His name is great in Israel. In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling place in Zion.*" Here we can see a greater spiritual knowledge as we are brought into the geographical center of God's people. On the outside, among all the Israelites, God's name is great. As we focus down to the most important province, we find a higher level of spiritual awareness: "*in Judah God is known.*" This is a higher spiritual level, as there are many people who know that God's name is great, yet they do not personally know the Lord. Then as we narrow down the search to examine the center of the nation, we come to the capital. Here in Jerusalem we find a

much higher spiritual experience, for Jerusalem has the tabernacle, and on Mount Zion in particular is God's dwelling place.

All the Israelites were God's people who could prepare for an eternal reward in heaven. Some were offered higher callings than others, such as the tribe of Judah that gained the kingship. Yet the people who lived on Zion were in the very center of the action, because the throne of David and the worship at the ark were there.

Accordingly, Zion became synonymous with the high calling of God that was available to God's people in the Old Testament. Those born in Zion were given high honor, Ps.87:1-6. Mount Zion was a place of joy and safety, the city of the great King, Ps.48:1-14. The people will see God in Zion, Ps.84:7. There the Lord will appear in glory, Ps.102:16.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ZION IN THE CHURCH AGE

Many of the Old Testament prophets went on to see the growing spiritual significance of Zion in the time of the Church Age. Amos 9:11-12 prophesied that the Tabernacle of David (on Zion) was going to be rebuilt. The early Church leaders understood that this would be spiritually fulfilled in the Church (study Acts 15:14-17).

Isaiah saw that revival in the last days would come to Zion. He declared, *"When the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and purged the blood of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning, then the Lord will create above every dwelling place of Mount Zion, and above her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day and the shining of a flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering,"* Is. 4:4-5.

A generally accepted interpretation of this prophecy is that it will be fulfilled in the Church of the last days. Those who accept the purging and dealings of the Holy Spirit will be prepared for glorious revival!

Obadiah had a further revelation about Zion. He saw that the conflict between the descendants of Jacob and Esau would be brought to final victory on Mount Zion. This is prophetic of the

conflict between the ungodly and the righteous in the last days. The final victory of the righteous is described in this way, in verse 21: *“Then saviors shall come to Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”* These ‘saviors,’ also translated as ‘deliverers’ in many Bible versions, does not singularly speak of the work of Christ at the end of this age. It speaks of the overcoming saints, the sons of God whom the world is waiting to see revealed, Rom.8:19-21.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ZION IN THE MILLENNIUM

Other Old Testament prophets continued to have an expanded vision of Zion’s purposes not only in the last days, but also into the Millennium. Micah and Isaiah both prophesied that Mount Zion would be exalted to lead and teach the nations. We read: *“Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, ‘Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off...nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.... So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever.”* - Micah 4:1-3 & 7

This prophecy can speak of how the Lord will exalt His church in the last days, but its complete fulfillment will be during the Millennium. In Psalms 2 and 110 we can further study how King David prophesied that the Messiah would reign from Zion. Just as King David ruled over his great international empire from Zion; even so the Lord Jesus, the Son of David, will rule the world from Zion during the Millennium. The nations of the earth will send their delegations every year to Jerusalem to worship the King of kings, the Lord Jesus, Zech.14:16-17.

So we can see throughout the Old Testament that Zion was the place where authority (the throne of the king) and God’s worship and glory (the ark of God) were revealed. This authority and glory from Zion was prophesied to become spread throughout the world through the Church.

Then during the millennium it will continue to be revealed to the nations from Mount Zion in Jerusalem, where the King of kings will rule and be worshiped.

THE HEAVENLY ZION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

When we then go on to study the New Testament, we find that the vision of Zion is lifted much higher. From the heights of world dominion in the Old Testament, Mount Zion is revealed in the New Testament as the heavenly center of God's power and glory!

In Hebrews 12:22-24, we read the following about the heavenly destination of the Christian: *“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.”*

Here we see that there is a heavenly Mount Zion and Jerusalem, just as there is an earthly Zion and Jerusalem. This heavenly Jerusalem is described for us in Revelation chapter 21. Just as there is a location in the earthly city of Jerusalem called Mount Zion, where the throne of the king and the worship of God were located, we find this is also true of the heavenly city. In Revelation 14:1-3 we read, *“Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.”*

This scripture reveals that those who will stand with the Lamb on the heavenly Mount Zion will be singing their worship before the throne, the four living creatures, and the elders. This clearly shows us that the heavenly Mount Zion is at the throne of God Almighty, as described in

Revelation chapter 4. So just as the earthly Zion is the place of the throne and of worship, we find that the true Zion in heaven is at the throne of God and is the center of worship.

Many people have had visions and dreams of various parts of heaven. There are the floral gardens and forested areas of the outer paradise. There is also the heavenly city, with streets, people, and places where various events take place. But the most wonderful place of all is at the throne of God where His glory, power, and worship are fully revealed. This is the heavenly Mount Zion!

When new converts or ‘babes in Christ’ go to heaven, they first arrive at the outer edges of paradise. The beauty and joy that they partake of there are overwhelming, and they may stay there for a long time to get adjusted to these lesser glories of heaven.

Other saints may be ready to enter the heavenly city when they die. They find that there are twelve gates named after the twelve tribes of Israel, Rev.21:12-13. These gates also speak of the various spiritual experiences that the Israelite tribes entered into. According to their own spiritual experiences on earth, the saints will find entrance into the various parts of the heavenly city where they will be with saints of similar calling and development.

However, the highest place of authority and glory will be given to those who are around the throne of God. Not everyone will be prepared or will qualify for this level of experience. We have seen in the previous chapter how the resurrected saints will each be filled with varying amounts of glory, just as the stars, moon, and sun shining in the sky. They will each be ready for different levels of authority, such as kings, governors, and mayors. Among the three groups of Revelation chapter 12, we saw that it is only the ‘manchild’ that will be caught up to the throne of God. And as we now consider the parallels with the Israelite nation, we see that only a few lived in Jerusalem, and fewer still lived near the throne on Mount Zion.

Understanding these truths about Zion will open up much of the Scriptures to us. As we study about Zion, the vision can grow brighter that there is a glorious hope available to each Christian who wholeheartedly prepares himself. Some Christians may be saved and be merely content to

escape hell. Others may start to gain an interest in gathering eternal heavenly rewards. But the Christian with an enlarged vision and a pure heart will want nothing short of God's best. We will be gripped with the desire, like the Apostle Paul, to *"press toward the goal for the prize of the high call of God in Christ Jesus,"* Phil.3:14. The hope of this calling is available to every Christian who will dedicate themselves to fulfill all of God's will, regardless of their background. The key is not where we have come from, but where we are spiritually going!

THE HIGHWAYS TO ZION

The Psalmist said, *"How blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee; in whose heart are the highways to Zion! Passing through the valley of Baca [or, 'weeping'], they make it a spring... They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before God in Zion,"* Ps.84:5-7 NASV. This speaks to the New Testament Christian of how we need to have our hearts centered on obtaining the goal of standing before God at His throne in heaven. Through all the tears of our earthly pilgrimage, God can comfort, refresh, and lift us higher and higher. If our heart is fixed on obtaining an eternal inheritance at His throne, we can go from strength to strength and from glory to glory until we will appear before God at the heavenly Zion. As our Lord Jesus said, *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne,"* Rev.3:21.

Have you caught the vision that it is possible to sit with Christ on His throne for eternity to come? Are you pressing on toward the high call of God for your life? Do you have the highways to Zion built in your heart that will lead you on towards obtaining this goal? John the Baptist was sent with a ministry of repentance to build that highway in his generation. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, *"Make straight...a highway,"* Is.40:3-5; Mt.3:1-3. Isaiah chapter 35:8-10 also tells us more about that highway that would be built in the wilderness. There it is called the "Highway of Holiness" that would lead God's people on to Zion.

THE VISION OF THE HOPE OF GLORY

The Lord wants to plant a vision of hope within the heart of each of His people. There are going to be great revivals throughout the world in these last days. The assemblies of Mount Zion, composed of every church that is pressing on in holiness towards the high call of God, will be covered with His glory, Is.4:3-6. The Lord will exalt His Church to great authority and glory, to help prepare the way for the Second Coming of Christ. After returning to judge the nations and bind Satan and his hosts, the Lord Jesus will then reign over the world from Mt. Zion in Jerusalem for one thousand years, Is.24:21-23; Rev.20:1-6. Moreover, in heaven the Lord sits on His throne in Zion, where He invites the overcomers to sit with Him on His throne and reign with Him in glory throughout eternity. We can become conformed to the image of Christ and dwell on Mount Zion, where we may partake of the mighty glory and authority of the wonderful Lamb of God forever.

Do these truths stir your heart to run after God's best? If so, let us dedicate our lives to obtain the "pearl of great price" that He offers us. By the spirit of revelation we can see what is the hope of our calling, yet we need to press on to gain its fulfillment. For this reason we are now going to study how to acquire the wisdom that we also need to actually obtain our hope of glory.

Part II

**WISDOM TO OBTAIN
THE HOPE OF GLORY**

Chapter 5

THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM

In the first part of this book we have seen that to understand the hope or future goal of the Christian, we need the spirit of revelation. As we receive a vision of God’s purposes for our life, that vision can then motivate us and give us direction so that we will press on toward the goal for the high calling of God.

However, for us to know the hope of our calling is not enough. As our Lord Jesus said in Matthew 22:14, “*Many are called, but few are chosen.*” It is not enough for us to merely gain a revelation of our future goal—we have to get there! For us to enter into *obtaining* the hope of the Christian, we also need the further anointing of the spirit of wisdom. That is why the Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers that they would receive both the spirit of wisdom and of revelation to understand the hope of their calling. His prayer was, “*that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling,*” Ephesians 1:17-18.

The spirit of wisdom is one of the principal anointings of the Holy Spirit. In Revelation 4:5 the Apostle John recorded that, “*There were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*” These seven Spirits, or anointings of the Holy Spirit, are listed for us in Isaiah 11:2—“*The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*” The second of these seven anointings is the Spirit of wisdom.

When Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 1:15-23, he asked the Lord that they would be given the spirit of wisdom along with the spirit of revelation. These two anointings

work together to balance each other and complete God's works. This is because the spirit of wisdom interprets and applies revelation, so that we will know how to bring God's plans to fulfillment. Simply stated, the spirit of revelation begins the work of God, by showing us *what* God wants to do in our lives; while the spirit of wisdom helps finish the work of God, by showing us *how* we can accomplish the goal.

BUILDING MOSES' TABERNACLE

Some examples from Scripture will help us to understand this more clearly. First we will consider how the Tabernacle of Moses was made. Its construction started as a revelation from God to Moses. In Exodus 25:8-9 the Lord spoke to Moses and said, "*And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you...just so you shall make it.*"

By the spirit of revelation, Moses received the vision of building a tabernacle. However, Moses was not the person who actually used the tools that built it. There were embroidered cloths to be woven, molten metal objects to be cast, gemstones to be cut, and wood to be carved...many complicated skills were needed to actually construct the tabernacle with its furnishings. So while Moses by the spirit of revelation received the plans for the tabernacle, it was other skilled craftsmen with the spirit of wisdom who actually built it.

In Exodus 28:3 Moses was told, "*So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments...*" Then in Exodus 31:2-6 the Lord further told Moses, "*See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you.*"

So here we can see how the spirit of wisdom was needed to actually construct the tabernacle that Moses was commissioned to build. Moses received the plans by the spirit of revelation, but it was to Bezalel and the other workers whom God gave the spirit of wisdom, so that the tabernacle and its furnishings could be built. The spirit of revelation upon Moses, and the spirit of wisdom filling the craftsmen, together accomplished the task and caused Moses' Tabernacle to be built according to the heavenly pattern.

That shows us how the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of revelation worked together to make a sanctuary for God in the ancient times. Yet now in the New Testament times we are told that it is the people of God who are to be His temple, 1 Cor.3:16. How can we know *what* God wants to build in our lives, to make us His sanctuary? It is by the spirit of revelation. Then how can we know *how* God wants it to be built? It is by the spirit of wisdom!

DELIVERANCE FROM THE SEVEN YEAR FAMINE

A second example from the Scriptures of the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of revelation working together is when Egypt was delivered from the seven year famine in the times of Joseph. In Genesis 41 we can read how Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, had two unusual dreams. He knew in his heart that they were important revelation, but none of his magicians could interpret the dreams. Yet when Joseph was called for, the Lord anointed him with the wisdom to both interpret the dreams and to recommend what the nation should do to be provided for in the coming years of trouble. After Joseph had spoken, Pharaoh replied to him in verse 39, *"Inasmuch as God has shown you all this, there is no one as discerning and wise as you."* Because of the obvious anointing of wisdom upon Joseph, Pharaoh appointed Joseph as the Prime Minister of Egypt so that he could implement his wise counsel.

In this account, God gave a revelation to Pharaoh about the coming seven year famine. Yet that revelation, by itself, was of no practical value. It was as God also anointed Joseph with the wisdom to interpret and practically apply that revelation that the work of God was completed and the people found deliverance.

While this story deals with an ancient time of seven years of calamity, the message can also have present applications. Most interpreters agree that the book of Revelation warns us of a soon coming period of tribulation that will similarly last for seven years. Just as Joseph by his wisdom brought deliverance to the family of God and even to nations, even so God's people will again need the spirit of wisdom in these last days.

LIGHT FROM THE WORD OF GOD

Another example of how the two anointings of wisdom and revelation work together can be seen from Psalm 119:105. Here we read, "*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.*" From this verse we can understand that the Word of God can be illuminated in two different ways by the Holy Spirit. It can be like a nearby lamp that gives light to our present walk, as well as a more distant light that shows us the path that we are to walk towards.

We can compare the spirit of revelation to being like the light for our path, while the spirit of wisdom is like a lamp to our feet. By revelation we see the distant path or goal that we are to travel towards. Yet to assure that we will get there safely, we also need wisdom to give light to our present walk. Then we will not stumble or fall.

We had this truth graphically portrayed to us a number of years ago when my family lived on an isolated island in the Philippines. There were no roads where we lived. There was only one narrow path used by all the people and animals. Once we had a visiting pastor who was speaking at the Bible school. To get to the school we had to walk down the path a few hundred yards from our house. On one dark moonless night, our guest was to preach at the evening service. The Bible school had already turned on its generator and the chapel down the path had its lights brightly shining. Our guest wanted to go ahead of us, so I offered him a flashlight. He declined the offer, as he saw the light ahead down at the end of the straight pathway. But he soon came back to the house, needing a thorough washing for his feet before he could go on. You see, he had the light for his path, but he didn't have a lamp (or flashlight) to see where his feet were stepping. If you have never lived in Asia, you have no idea how large the dung piles can be that are often left behind on the paths by the water buffalo, but our guest soon found out! This

illustrates for us how important it is to not only know *where* we want to go, but to also see *how* to wisely get there.

THE HOPE OF GLORY

There are many other examples of how these two anointings work together, but for now let us close our examination by looking at Colossians 1:26-28 concerning “*Christ in you, the hope of glory.*” We read from there, “...*the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints. To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*”

The Apostle Paul begins by revealing this mystery about the glorious hope of the Christian. But then he changes from revelation to wisdom when he goes on to say, “*Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.*” Here we again see that after the revelation is given, wisdom then must implement the vision. This will help so that we can each become, “*perfect in Christ Jesus.*” So just as Paul used this pattern in writing by revelation and then wisdom about “*Christ in you, the hope of glory,*” we are also following this same pattern in this book explaining the glorious hope of the Christian.

HOW WE CAN OBTAIN THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM

The more mature we grow in the Lord, the more we will also see our need for wisdom. It is similar to the natural maturing of a young man. When a boy starts to grow big and strong as a teenager, he delights in his newfound abilities and strength. When faced with a problem such as a car stuck in the mud, he will be quick to charge right in and try to solve the problem by sheer muscle power. Yet as he grows older he will increasingly recognize the truth to Solomon’s proverb that “*wisdom is better than strength,*” Eccl.9:16. Instead of quickly grabbing the car and trying to move it himself, the older man will wisely examine the situation and try to find the easiest way to accomplish the task of getting it out of the mud.

As we grow in the Lord we will increasingly see our need for more of God's wisdom. Yet how can we obtain it? The main way is by prayer. When the Apostle Paul wanted the Ephesian Church to receive the spirit of wisdom, we saw that he prayed for them. When young King Solomon was visited by the Lord in a dream, he asked for wisdom, 1 Kings 3:5-12. We are told, *"And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt,"* 1 Kings 4:29-30. Through prayer we can also receive God's wisdom. As James said, *"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him,"* James 1:5.

When young Joshua became the new leader of Israel, he obtained new wisdom for his new responsibilities. Moses prayed and laid his hands upon Joshua at the ordination service. We then read, *"Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him,"* Deuteronomy 34:9. So here we see that both prayer and the laying on of hands helped impart this anointing to Joshua.

Proverbs 13:20 also tells us, *"He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."* Another important way we can either receive wisdom (or lose it) is according to what companions we choose to spend our time with. This can include not only your personal friends, but also those whom you spend time with when you watch them on television programs, listen to their music, or read their writings.

In the Book of Proverbs we can read many sayings about one who is personified as wisdom. She cries out such sayings as, *"turn at my reproof," "listen,"* and *"receive my instruction,"* Prov.1:23, 8:6, & 8:10. We must turn our hearts to the wisdom of God, and turn to the Word of God, if we would receive further wisdom. So prayer, keeping wise fellowship, and following the Word of God are all valuable ways in which we can grow in wisdom.

THE TRIADS OF SCRIPTURE

An important source of wisdom in the Scriptures that we earlier mentioned concerns the triads or triplets in the Word of God. Each of these triads teaches us wisdom about the progressive stages of spiritual growth and maturity. On the following chart we have a list of the more obvious of these triads.

STAGE OF MATURITY	1	2	3
1 JOHN 2:12-15	LITTLE CHILDREN	YOUNG MEN	FATHERS
REVELATION 17:14	CALLED	CHOSEN	FAITHFUL
REVELATION 12	REMNANT (vs.17)	WOMAN	MANCHILD
JOURNEY OF ISRAEL	EGYPT	WILDERNESS	PROMISED LAND
FEASTS OF ISRAEL	PASSOVER	PENTECOST	TABERNACLES
MOSES' TABERNACLE	OUTER COURT	HOLY PLACE	HOLY OF HOLIES

Perhaps the simplest triad to understand was penned by the Apostle John in 1 John 2:12-15. There he wrote three different messages to three categories of believers: the little children, young men, and the fathers. John was obviously not writing to these groups according to their natural age or maturity, but according to their spiritual development. Yet just as we can easily categorize a person's natural development by whether they are children, teenagers, or adults, in our spiritual growth we can see corresponding parallels, 1 Corinthians 15:46.

Our second triad is taken from Revelation 17:14, where we are given a title for the saints who return from heaven with our Lord as He returns to establish His millennial kingdom. These overcomers who will reign with Christ are titled the "*called, chosen, and faithful.*" We will study this triad in some detail in the next chapter of this book.

Next we have listed the triad mentioned in Revelation chapter twelve that we have already studied. Again, these three stages of spiritual maturity correspond to their same stage in the other triads. The triumphant 'manchild' therefore corresponds to the most mature level referred to in 1 John 2:13, the 'fathers.' The woman corresponds to the 'young men,' while the remnant of her offspring corresponds to the 'little children' that John mentioned.

Another clear triad that can teach us much wisdom concerns the journey of the Israelites. Their natural journey from Egypt to the Promised Land is also a spiritual allegory for the New Testament Christian. It shows how we saved from sin to begin a spiritual journey that will be completed as we come to full maturity and inheritance. For an insightful exposition of these truths we recommend the book *The Journey of Israel* by Brian Bailey. This book also explains the fifth triad in our chart concerning the Feasts of Israel.

Our last triad concerns the three sections of the Tabernacle of Moses: the Outer Court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies. The Outer Court was open for all the Israelites to enter as they offered their sacrifices to God. This corresponds to the 'little children' that John wrote of, who have their sins forgiven by the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. The Holy Place was a much more selective section of Moses' tabernacle, where only the priests could enter and serve. This parallels to the second stage of spiritual maturity, where believers are maturing to become the servants of God. Yet the Holy of Holies was very selective, being only entered by the High Priest. This corresponds to the highest stage of maturity, which is entered by those who become conformed to the nature of Christ, our High Priest. To study this in detail, *The Tabernacle of Moses* by Brian Bailey is recommended reading.

These triads can each teach us wisdom concerning how we can spiritually grow, step by step, to arrive at full maturity in the image of Christ. We will now look at one of these in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

CALLED, CHOSEN, AND FAITHFUL

An important key to unlock God’s wisdom from the Scriptures is shown to us in Revelation 17:14. We see three requirements listed there for those who will be with Christ when He returns from heaven as the King of kings—“*And they that are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.*” Let us now study how this reveals a pattern or guide that can lead us into Christian maturity, and enable us to join these triumphant saints who will reign with Christ.

1. CALLED OF GOD

Our first step towards spiritual maturity is to understand how we are called of God. Our Lord has created every life with a plan or purpose that they are called to fulfill. Even the length of our lives has been planned. As the Psalmist said in praise to his Creator, “*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be,*” Ps.139:16 NIV. There is a calling and inheritance, or a ministry and reward, for each one of our lives—both here on earth and in the coming ages. This is why the Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers that they would know “*what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance,*” Eph.1:18.

Some of God’s plans are the same for every Christian, as we are all called out of sin into the kingdom of God. This is shown to us by the New Testament word for *church*, which is *ekklesia* in the Greek language. This word means ‘a called out group.’ In this sense, Paul could write that every Christian is “*called in one hope of your calling,*” Eph.4:4.

Our Christian life begins when we hear this call of God and begin to follow Him. As our Lord Jesus said, He *“calls his own sheep by name...and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice,”* Jn.10:3-4.

Yet while it is true that every Christian has this similar calling, it is also true that we each have our own individual calling, or special place of service in God’s kingdom. We can see the two sides of this truth more clearly by considering God’s Old Testament people, the Israelites. They were all collectively called out of Egypt to go to the Promised Land, but then they were each individually given a different place or inheritance in the land. In a similar way we are all called to be members of the Body of Christ, yet each different member of the body has their own special or ‘specific’ calling.

Once we hear the call of God to become a Christian and follow Him, we need to further hear from God as to what our individual calling is. Just as each member of the human body has a different position and purpose, we need to learn what our placement and function should be in the Body of Christ. Then as we grow in the Lord we can prepare to serve in that correct role we were designed to fulfill.

When I was a young boy, scientists thought there were two members of the human body that had no purpose or function. From their wrong evolutionary philosophy they decided that the appendix and the tonsils had only been useful parts of our bodies at an earlier stage of mankind’s development. They thought that when we were all lower forms of life, the appendix and tonsils probably served a useful function, but now that we are developed humans, these members of the body were useless ‘leftovers.’ As a result, doctors were very quick to remove these members of the body whenever they became sick. In my early childhood I consequently had two visits to the hospital where my tonsils and appendix were both removed!

In the following years these ‘wise’ scientists have become a little wiser. They have found a number of ways in which these two members of the human body fulfill useful tasks. True, they are not needed to keep the human body alive, but without them a person can face some extra difficulties with infections and digestion. So the scientists declared they had ‘discovered’ that

there are no evolutionary leftovers in the human body, that each member is important! Of course, Bible believing Christians have always known that, because God directly created us, and our God does not make useless things.

Similarly, there can be Christians who appear to have no obvious purpose in the Body of Christ. An ignorant church leader may tend to overlook them, or not mind if they drop out of the church. It would seem as unimportant as when a surgeon used to remove tonsils or an appendix! Yet the Lord has called each believer to function and contribute to the growth of the body of Christ. Paul spoke of this when he wrote that we may “*grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love,*” Eph.4:15-16. Pastors and Christian leaders should be very diligent to encourage all believers to discover, develop, and use the gifts and ministries that the Lord has called them to. A Christian will remain as a spiritual baby or “little child” until he discovers his own individual calling and starts to grow up to develop and use it.

SCRIPTURAL MINISTRIES AND GIFTS

The Scriptures reveal to us many different ministries and gifts that various Christians will be called to. These include the following:

1. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - Ephesians 4:11
2. Prophecy, ministry (or serving), teaching, exhortation, giving, ruling, giving mercy - Romans 12:6-8
3. Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues - 1 Corinthians 12:8-10
4. Apostles, prophets, teachers, miracles, gifts of healing, helps, governments, tongues - 1 Corinthians 12:28
5. Bishops (or elders, comparing Titus 1:5 & 7), deacons - Philippians 1:1
6. Intercessors - Isaiah 59:16, 62:6,7
7. Raising a child for the call of God on his life - Judges 13:3-5, Proverbs 22:6

8. Called to government position and rulership, now or in the millennium - 1 Samuel 16:1,12; Matthew 19:28
9. Missionary -Acts 16:9-10; Jonah 1:2
10. Martyr - Matthew 24:9; John 21:18-19
11. Celibacy - Matthew 19:11-12; 1 Corinthians 7:7-8
12. Singers and Musicians - 1 Corinthians 14:26; Chronicles 15:16

Some of these ministries and gifts can include several more specific works. For example, you could include under the gift of helps (which means “*to assist, support, or succor*”) such works as hospitality, making clothes, feeding the poor, and visiting the sick and those in prison. A deacon (or servant) can be a pastor’s assistant, a church secretary or treasurer, or could have many other works. Someone with a gift of government could function in such positions as Church Administrator or Sunday School Superintendent.

The above is not suggested to be a complete list of all of the callings of God. The Lord may speak very specific and unusual callings to some that will not follow a normal pattern, such as when Noah was called to build an ark. Reading through the Heroes of Faith in Hebrews 11 shows us how God can speak and lead in many various ways.

HOW CAN GOD REVEAL OUR CALLING?

As we learn about these many different ministries and gifts, we become more personally interested to know what God has specifically called us to. How can God reveal our calling to us? First, we must seek the Lord. By His Spirit, God reveals what we cannot naturally see, hear, or understand, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10. The Apostle Paul prayed for the believers at Ephesus that God would give them the spirit of revelation so that they would know what is the hope of His calling.

The Lord may choose to speak directly to a person through a word, dream, or vision. This is how Jeremiah, Joseph, and Ezekiel heard from God about their callings. Another way is that a man or woman of God may first discern and reveal another person’s calling. This is why the prophet Samuel anointed David the shepherd boy, and also why Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha the farmer.

At other times natural signs or circumstances can help to show us God's call. In a time of need, you may discern that you have "*come to the kingdom for such a time as this,*" as Esther did, Esther 4:14. Your natural talents may help prepare you to enter into similar spiritual works, as when Peter the fisherman was called to become a "*fisher of men,*" Matthew 4:19 & 1 Corinthians 15:46. Sometimes the desires of our heart are placed there by the Lord because we are being formed for a call of God, Psalm 37:4, 1 Timothy 3:1.

Names can be prophetic of our calling or inheritance. Abigail correctly discerned how her husband's name corresponded to his character when she said, "*For as his name is, so is he,*" 1 Samuel 25:25. If we find out what a name's meaning is, we can often gain understanding about God's calling from its meaning.

When I was a young Christian I would occasionally wish that my parents had given me a Bible name. Something like John, or David, or Joshua could inspire me in the Lord, but Norman? That name does not mean anything, or so I thought. Then one day I found out that 'Norman' comes from the two words 'north' and 'man.' My name means, "*man from the north.*" When I learned that, the Lord spoke to me and reminded me how I had been called of God to go south as a missionary to the nations of Asia and Central America. As I have lived and traveled for the last fourteen years in these nations, I now enjoy hearing my name. I have been called by the Lord to be a "man from the north," a missionary from North America!

Not only do individual Christians have a specific calling, but groups of people can also have a specific calling. If we learn what God's plan is for the group, then we can also discern more clearly what is the calling upon the members of that group.

For example, the Lord often places a calling on a family line. In the Old Testament the priestly ministry given to Aaron was hereditary, just as the kingship was given to David and his sons. This is why missionary children often will also become missionaries, and why an evangelist's son may also become an evangelist (such as Billy and Franklin Graham). To discern a person's calling it can be very helpful to investigate the lives and works of their forefathers. This does not

have to include only the forefathers who served the Lord, because someone who is not saved will often still use their giftings from God in a natural way. For example, my family line includes authors such as Robert Louis Stevenson. He was not a Christian, but that gift of writing has been a family inheritance passed down through the generations, until I took up that gift and used it for the glory of God! On the mission field I have often seen the pattern repeated that when a family line has had many spiritists or pagan priests, and a younger member of the family turns to Christ, they often become aware of a calling to preach or to a prophetic ministry. This is because the Lord placed the spiritual capacity within the family line for them to be spiritual vessels, although the Holy Spirit could not properly use this capacity until they turned to Christ to become His servants.

A church will often have a specific calling or vision to accomplish. We can read in the Scriptures how the church of Smyrna was called to endure suffering, while the church of Philadelphia was given an ‘open door’ of victory and protection. And just as the twelve tribes of Israel each inherited a different calling, both natural groups (such as tribes and nations) and spiritual tribes (such as denominations and fellowships) can partake of various calls from God.

The people living in a geographical area such as a town or nation can also have a call. For example, I can remember when I was first invited to preach at a young church that had just bought a building. As I was preaching, the Lord repeatedly impressed the scripture “*they are beloved for the sake of the fathers,*” Romans 11:28, on my heart. In the middle of the message I stopped and told the pastor that he had to investigate the history of his town. While the church was young, the town was old, and I felt there was a spiritual inheritance given by the founding fathers of the town that the church could enter into.

When I returned to preach in that church the next time, the pastor was excited to tell me what they had discovered. They found that their town was established by godly people, and had been a missions center for traveling preachers who spread the gospel. So many preachers and missionaries lived there that the town was originally called Priestville! When the pastor had discovered this, he felt the Lord show him that his church was to take up the missionary inheritance that had been planted by the town’s founders.

THREE CATEGORIES OF BEING CALLED

We must also consider the danger of responding to a call that does not originate from God, but from men. There are three categories or classes of being called: by God, by men, or by yourself.

The call of God is given according to the will of God, not by our choosing the honorable positions that we may selfishly desire. As Hebrews 5:4 tells us about the calling of the High Priest, “*And no man takes this honor to himself, but he that was called by God, just as Aaron was.*” However, there are times when men may call us to join works that will advance merely human plans and ambitions. If a group or organization is building a ‘tower of Babel’ out of their people, they will always be looking for more people to help build their tower higher!

A second type of calling is to be called of men instead of being called by God. Jesus said that the Pharisees loved to be “*called of men*” to respectable titles and positions, Matthew 23:6-7. Israel called for a king when it was not the perfect will of God, and the Lord allowed them to have King Saul. When we are offered a position of ministry or a title we need to inquire of God: Is this from God, or only from men?

The third category of calling is to be called by yourself, or self-appointed. Uzziah was a king who in pride also tried to be a priest. As a result, he was struck with leprosy for his presumption, (see 2 Chronicles 27:16-21). Adonijah “*exalted himself*” to become the new king when God had already chosen Solomon, (see 1 Kings 1:5-14). It can be dangerous to try to do what God has not called you to do. If you use the wrong tool for a job, the job might not get done or you might break the tool. Don’t use a screwdriver to cut firewood, and don’t use an ax to repair a radio! Similarly, don’t let a deacon try to do the works of an apostle, and don’t let an apostle use all his time doing the works of a deacon! Find the spiritual call of God for your life, and then “*let each one remain in the same calling in which he was called,*” 1 Corinthians 7:20.

2. CHOSEN OF GOD

This is when God chooses you to begin to do the works you were called to. First we must be called of God; then we must prepare ourselves to become ready to fulfill that call. After we are ready the Lord can then choose us to start functioning in our calling or ministry.

“Many are called, but few are chosen” is the warning of our Lord Jesus in Matthew 22:14. This is because many who have the call of God do not prepare themselves to become chosen of God. An example is Gideon’s army, which had 32,000 soldiers called, but only 300 chosen, Judges 7:1-7. There were also over 600,000 Israelite men who were called out of Egypt under Moses’ leadership. But because of their rebellion and unbelief, only two of these men were chosen to enter into the Promised Land.

We must prepare our lives to fulfill the call, or God will not choose us! In natural callings (such as a doctor or lawyer) it takes many years of careful preparation before someone will be chosen. The greater the vocation or job, the greater the preparation must be. With spiritual callings (such as to become an ordained minister) it can take years of preparation before we are ready to be chosen. Also, the higher the call of God, the greater the preparation must be.

There are two opposite ways that the Lord often uses to prepare our lives so that we are ready to be chosen. One of these ways is that He often must first humble us from our pride and our trusting in our talents and abilities. As Isaiah 40:3-5 declares, to prepare the way of the Lord every mountain and hill must be brought low.

We see this exemplified in the life of Moses. He was called of God when he was the educated, mighty, noble son of Pharaoh’s daughter. When he was 40 years old he already knew that he was called to deliver the Israelites. Yet as he tried to step out and fulfill God’s call in his own wisdom and strength, he failed (study Acts 7:22-29). He was not ready to be chosen until after another 40 years, when in the wilderness he had been humbled and stripped of his worldly honor, talents and training. This is in line with what 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 teaches us: *“For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble,*

are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things that are mighty...to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.” God does not need the rich, famous and talented to build His kingdom—in fact, He chooses the opposite.

Once, in a dream, an angel took me to heaven. There I was shown several lessons on how heavenly things are different than the earthly. I was taken to a place that might humanly be compared to a museum. I have been at military museums in different nations, and have examined the mighty tanks, airplanes, artillery, and other powerful weapons on display. But in heaven I was shown a place that displayed God’s mighty weapons: the wooden staff of Moses, the donkey’s jawbone of Samson, the tent peg of Jael, and even the sword of Goliath. Naturally speaking, none of these things look like mighty weapons of God. Goliath’s sword even appeared to be a weapon of evil until it was in David’s hands. However, our God specializes in choosing humble and foolish weapons—and people—to accomplish His great works.

Another angel showed me a number of books. One of them was entitled, “Great Acts of the Saints,” but everything I read in there would have gone unnoticed by the historians on earth! The acts of kindness, forgiveness, and of prevailing prayer honored in heaven’s eternal records would have rarely even been mentioned in a local newspaper. Yet if we desire to become chosen of God it is important that we learn what the Lord declared in Isaiah 55:8-9, “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’”*

Many times God casts down the mountains of pride and self-sufficiency in our lives to prepare for His glory to become revealed. However, Isaiah 40:3-5 also declares at times the Lord will cause every valley to be lifted up. The Lord often works in this opposite way to prepare our lives by lifting us up from our discouragements, inabilities, and failures.

This was how the Lord prepared Simon Peter to become a great apostle. He was called of God when he was an uneducated, unworthy fisherman. Peter made more than his share of blunders, and after denying Christ was ready to give up on ever being able to fulfill his call. Yet Christ

patiently kept lifting him up from his weaknesses and failures until he was prepared and chosen for a great ministry. Every low place in Peter's life—every failure, sin and inadequacy—was forgiven, cleansed and lifted up, until Peter was able to confidently stand as a man of God throughout the Book of Acts.

A modern-day example of the same grace of God is a Korean brother. He was such a poor speaker when he was a Bible school student that many people advised him to quit trying to prepare for the ministry. But he continued to prepare for the ministry he felt called to, until today Pastor Yong-gi Cho has the largest church in the world!

After a time of preparation the Lord will test us, to see if we are prepared to be chosen. Yet we will not always know when or how the Lord will give us our 'final exam' to see if we are ready to 'graduate,' or be chosen. Gideon's soldiers were tested by how they drank water. Almost all of the soldiers went down on their knees to put their faces to the water. Only the few who brought the water to their mouths with their hands, to remain vigilant soldiers, were chosen. Their preparations of character were revealed by how they drank water!

In a different test, Abraham was chosen because he was willing to sacrifice his son, Isaac. We must be careful not to selfishly keep anything in our life as an 'idol,' even the blessings and callings of God, that we may become fully prepared for His choosing.

Rebekah was chosen to marry Isaac in Genesis 24 by how she volunteered to water the ten camels of a stranger. She may have had to draw up to 1200 quarts (or liters) of water from the well for these thirsty beasts! Yet the ten camels were a secret test or trial (the number ten in the Bible often speaks of trials, see Numbers 14:22, Daniel 1:12, & Revelation 2:10). These ten 'trials' that she cheerfully accepted soon became the vehicle that brought her to the Promised Land and her bridegroom! Many times the trials in our lives are the secret tools of God that draw us closer to Him and prepare us for His glorious purposes.

When schools give final exams, they usually concentrate on testing the mental or educational preparation of the students. However, God's tests in the 'school of the Spirit' usually concentrate

on checking the character and spiritual development of the believer. The Lord rarely tells us when the ‘final exam’ will take place, or how. The Israelites in the wilderness were given ten tests through such circumstances of life as water shortages, complaints against leadership, and a boring diet. They did not even know they were being tested until they had failed and disqualified themselves (study Numbers 14). When the Lord is seeking for a ready vessel to use, may He help each one of us to be found as a vessel of honor, prepared for every good work, 2 Tim.2:21.

3. FAITHFUL

We have seen how a believer going on towards maturity must first respond to the calling of God. After he has finished his preparations, he can be chosen by the Lord to function in his ministry. Yet even after that second step of being chosen, to complete our calling we must go on to become faithful to fulfill that ministry. This is the third step that must be accomplished before we ‘hit the mark’ and enter into full maturity and fruitfulness.

Our Lord Jesus said, “*Many are called, but few are chosen.*” It can truthfully be further said that many are called, few are chosen, and fewer are faithful! We will now consider three people who qualified to become called and chosen, but did not go on to become faithful to their calling.

In 1 Samuel chapters 2-4 we read Eli had been called and chosen as the high priest of Israel. However, he was not faithful to properly complete the ministry that he had been called and chosen to perform. He did not correctly discipline his immoral sons or remove them from the ministry. He let them corrupt the House of God, and he died under God’s judgment for his lack of faithfulness. From this story we learn the lesson that we are responsible not only for our own life, but also for the natural and spiritual children that the Lord has entrusted to our care!

Samson was a man of great faith, called and then chosen of God as a judge over Israel. Nevertheless he did not remain faithful to his calling as he committed fornication, lost his consecration, and became a blind prisoner. Sin can also blind us if we do not walk in the fear of God!

Saul was the king of Israel; yet he was rejected when he became proud, and through fear obeyed the voice of the people instead of the voice of God, 1 Sam.15:24. His failure teaches us that we need to be faithful to the Lord when people try to influence us to disobey the will of God.

THREE KEYS FOR FAITHFULNESS

Three keys for learning faithfulness are taught us by the Lord Jesus in Luke 16:10-13. We read from there: *“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in what is another man’s, who will give you what is your own?”*

In verse 10 the Lord Jesus gave us the first key when He said that we must be *faithful in what is least*. It is important that we do not despise small responsibilities. They can build within us the wisdom, character and perseverance through which we will become ready for much greater things. Pride, however, will demand that we are worthy of something bigger and more important. Naaman felt that way when he did not want to obey Elisha’s simple instructions to go wash in the river and be healed. But little beginnings can be the seeds that will grow into something great. Young David had already learned this, as he knew that his slaying the lion and the bear had prepared him to be able to kill Goliath! Our Lord said that the servants who are faithful in their small responsibilities will be given cities to rule over, Lk.19:17-19.

A pastor friend of mine told me how a visitor came to his church one Sunday. Afterwards he introduced himself as a new Bible school graduate. He enthusiastically said that he liked the church, and wanted to become a member and serve the Lord there. Then he gave the pastor a paper, listing all the ministries that he was qualified to fulfill—even to be the senior pastor! My friend then told the visitor that they had been praying for more help for the church, and invited him to start out as the church janitor. While he had much higher ministries in mind, he first wanted to see if the young man would be faithful in this little task. However, the young man never came back.

In the next verse Christ gave us a second key when He said that we need to be “*faithful in the unrighteous mammon.*” The ‘unrighteous mammon’ He was referring to means the goods of this world, or natural possessions. The key we are taught here is to be *faithful in natural responsibilities*. This can build the godly character within us that will prepare us to be ready for spiritual responsibilities. Throughout the Scriptures, those who were called by God were already being faithful and diligent in their natural responsibilities. David was tending the sheep when Samuel called for him and anointed him as the next king. The Lord Jesus called Peter and Andrew while they were busy fishing, and Matthew while he was at his job collecting taxes. Elisha was plowing with his oxen when Elijah cast his mantle upon him. Moses was pasturing the flock when the Angel of the Lord appeared to him at the burning bush. They were not being lazy or slothful when they were called by God. We do not even read that any of them were praying, although of course that is good to do. What we do read in the Bible is that they were being faithful with their natural responsibilities.

In Luke 16:12 our Lord then teaches us the third key of being *faithful with the possessions of others*. This can include both natural and spiritual things. If you serve under a Christian leader who has a vision of the direction the work should go, as long as you work under him you should be faithful to help fulfill his vision. This will help qualify you for the day when the Lord will give you your own vision and work. Joshua, Elisha, and Timothy all began their training by being servants who were faithful to help the calling and ministry of their leader. Yet after they were faithful to help another man’s ministry, they were then given their own!

I can remember a service at the Bible school I attended when I was young. A prayer request was announced for a Bible school in the Philippines. Muslim rebel troops had advanced to near the school, and the people there, especially the missionaries, were in great danger. Most of the students prayed for a short time and then left. A few of us, however, were determined to ‘pray through’ for this Bible school. I prayed until I was certain that the Lord had intervened and driven the rebels away.

I had sought to be faithful to defend some missionaries I had never met, at a Bible school I knew very little about. Little did I know that as I was faithful to support another person’s ministry, I

would later be given the same support in that same ministry. Ten years later I found myself to be a missionary at the same school in the Philippines, facing the same danger. The Muslim rebels had again advanced, and we were the only foreigners left in that area who had not been kidnapped! Yet I was assured by the Lord that He had raised up the prayer support that we needed. I had been faithful to help protect the other missionaries and their Bible school ten years before, so the Lord gave me both the same ministry and their same protection!

SAINTS WHO WERE CALLED, CHOSEN, AND FAITHFUL

To hit the mark for our life, we have mentioned that we need to enter and fulfill all three of these stages of Christian growth. We have looked at the lives of some in the Bible who only got to step one or step two. Yet God wants each of us to fulfill our purpose in life, and He can give us the grace and the guidance to complete it triumphantly. To encourage us to run our race well, the Bible contains many life stories of men and women who were called, chosen, and faithful. Some of the clearest examples are shown in the following chart:

PERSON:	1. CALLED	2. CHOSEN	3. FAITHFUL	LIFE KEY:
MOSES 3 periods of 40 years:	after 40 years in Egypt	after 40 years in the Wilderness	after 40 years leading Israel	Humility, Num. 12:3
JOSEPH 3 positions in life:	called as a son	chosen as a servant	faithful as a ruler	Forgiveness to fruitfulness, Gen. 41:50-52
JACOB 3 names:	named Jacob at his birth	named Israel after his charac-ter was changed	named Jeshurun after his death	Purged through suffering, Heb.12:5-11
DAVID 3 anointings:	anointed by Samuel at Bethlehem	anointed King of Judah by men of Judah	anointed King of Israel by the elders of Israel	A man after God's own heart Acts 13:22
ESTHER 3 houses:	1st house (by adoption) house of Mordecai	2nd house (of preparation) house of women	3rd house (for rulership) house of the king	Submissive, Est.2:15 & 20

MOSES

Moses' life can very clearly be organized into three forty year periods. By the end of each of these periods he had entered into being first called, then chosen, and then was faithful.

During the first forty years of his life, Moses was the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. At the end of this forty years Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster. His reason for this was that, "*He supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand, but they did not understand,*" Acts 7:25. At this time Moses knew he was called of God, yet the Israelites did not know it! While Moses was called of God, he was not yet ready to be chosen. He had the best training that Egypt could give. But more importantly, Moses still needed the preparations that only God could give him. Instead of using his sword and royal leadership abilities to deliver Israel, he needed to learn that it is "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,*' says the Lord of hosts," Zech.4: 6.

Moses had to go through a second forty-year period before he was properly prepared by God. He was stripped of his great abilities which had made him, "*mighty in words and deeds,*" Acts 7:22. He was no longer of royalty, but was a humble shepherd. In fact, the Scriptures record for us, "*Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth,*" Num.12:3. This was all that Moses had acquired during these forty years in the wilderness, but it was exactly what he needed to do the work of God! When Moses had become a humble, broken man, then the Lord was able to choose him at the burning bush, Acts 7:30-35, Mt.5:5.

In our day, there are also many gifted people who have been called by God, as Moses was. Yet our own giftings and abilities, in themselves, are not able to do the miraculous works of God. Until we pass through a "wilderness" experience in our life where we become humble and broken before God, we will not be ready to be chosen and used of God for His great purposes. Remember the saying, "No cross, no crown."

After Moses was chosen by God, he went through a third and final period of forty years in his life. During this time he led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness. He died at the

age of one hundred and twenty years old, at which time he had obtained the following testimony:
“And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house,” Heb.3:5.

We can see in Moses’ life that he knew he was called of God when he was forty years old. However, it was only when he was eighty years old that he was chosen by God because he had gained his life-key of humility. Furthermore, Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he had fulfilled his ministry, and died with the testimony that he was called, chosen, and faithful.

JOSEPH

Joseph was another man in the Bible that went through three very clear stages in life. The social positions he held during these three periods speak of how he was also called, chosen, and faithful.

When he was young, Joseph held the position of being a beloved son. His father favored him and gave him a coat of many colors. While he was the beloved son in his father’s house, it was revealed to him through two dreams that he was called of God to rulership. His jealous brothers tried to stop his calling from being fulfilled by selling him to merchants who took him down to Egypt.

In the second period of his life, Joseph was a servant. First in Potiphar’s house, and then in the prison, Joseph was faithful to his responsibilities and to his God. At the end of this time, Joseph was chosen by Pharaoh to become the Prime Minister of Egypt because of the wisdom and blessing of God upon his life.

During the third period of his life, Joseph was exalted to become a great ruler. All had to bow their knees to him, even his brothers who had years before tried to prevent this from happening! All the surrounding nations came to Joseph as he brought them salvation in the time of calamity. Joseph was faithful to fulfill his calling to rule and protect both his brethren, and also the nations.

Joseph's life shows us the same pattern that Christ fulfilled. The Second Person of the Trinity had always been the beloved Son of God the Father. He then left His heavenly home to become a suffering servant, rejected by His brethren. After His earthly ministry was complete, He was taken from the prison of death. Christ was then exalted as a great Ruler to sit at the right hand of God, to whom every knee shall bow. Like Joseph, Jesus Christ was called as the beloved Son, chosen as a suffering servant, and faithful as Savior and Lord!

A very clear life-key that shows us how Joseph was able to fulfill God's will for his life is shown to us in Genesis 41:51-52. There we read about the two sons that were born to him: "*Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: 'For God has made me to forget all my toil and all my fathers house.'* And the name of the second he called Ephraim: '*For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.*'"

The names of Joseph's two sons speak of the spiritual experiences that he had gone through in his own life. His first son, Manasseh, means *Making Forgetful* in the Hebrew language. Joseph had to forgive and forget the wrongs done against him and the sufferings that they caused. But because he did this, he was also able to enter into the spiritual experience revealed by the name of his second son. His name, Ephraim, means *Fruitfulness*. Because Joseph had learned how to forgive those who had wronged him, God could then bless him with great fruitfulness.

There are similar times in many of our lives where we will only be released into the blessing of God after we have learned to forgive others. Job was given a double portion when he prayed for his friends who had so insensitively insulted and accused him, Job 42:10. We need to be able to say, like Joseph, "...*you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good,*" Gen.50:20. Moreover, we need to recognize that "*all things work together for good,*" Rom.8:28.

JACOB

The testimony that Jacob was called, chosen, and faithful, is indicated by the three names he was given in the Scriptures. At birth he was named Jacob. This name means "*supplanter,*" or "*one who takes another's place.*" It speaks of Jacob's natural character, for he schemed how to take

his older brother's birthright blessings. By first tricking his brother, and then later by deceiving his father, Jacob received the prophetic blessing and inheritance that should have been given to his brother, Esau (see Genesis 25:27-34; 27:1-36).

Because of his deceit, Jacob had to flee away from his angry brother. Nevertheless, even in his flight, God gave him a dream and confirmed that he was indeed called of God to become a great nation, Gen.28:10-16. Remember, Jacob had just lied to his father, stolen from his brother, and was running for his life! Can God call a man like Jacob, who is a deceitful supplanter? Yes, God can place His calling upon the most crooked, deceitful person, but that person will have to be thoroughly changed before he can be chosen!

God began this transformation when Jacob became the employee and son in law of Laban. Just as Jacob had deceived his father, Laban deceived Jacob. Many sufferings came into Jacob's life because of the deceit of Laban, Gen.31:39-42. Yet the Lord was using this to get at the root problem in Jacob's own life, which was also deception (study Obadiah 15, Psalm 18:25-26, Gal.6:7-8).

After many years of suffering, the Lord told Jacob to return to his father. As Jacob traveled homeward, he was afraid for his life when he heard that his brother was coming out to meet him with four hundred men, Gen.32:3-23. At first Jacob tried again to gain his brother's favor by sending many expensive gifts. But in his heart, Jacob knew he could not again manipulate his brother. Jacob knew that when his brother arrived, he was a dead man!

In this desperate moment, Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord to gain God's blessing, Gen.32:24-28. How did the Angel of the Lord bless him? Jacob's thigh was dislocated, so he could not even run away from his brother! All of Jacob's schemes and dreams were shattered—except his faith in God. In his extreme desperation, repentant of all of his crooked past, Jacob called on God with all his heart. In reply, the Lord gave Jacob a new name and character. His second name, Israel, means "*Prince of God.*" As his name and character was changed, Israel was able to be chosen of God to enter into God's promises and be made a great nation.

After his death, Jacob / Israel was given a third name (see Deuteronomy 33:5 & Isaiah 44:1-2). He was named Jeshurun, which means “*upright*” or “*straight*.” This third name speaks of how his character was changed from a crooked, deceitful man, to become a straight, righteous saint. It also speaks of how he became faithful to hit the mark and raise up the nation of Israel. He was called as Jacob, chosen as Israel, and declared faithful as Jeshurun.

Jacob’s life key that enabled him to fulfill all of God’s call upon his life was that he was cleansed and purged through the sufferings that he endured. Galatians 6:7 warns us that we will reap what we sow—and we usually reap much more than we sow! But God allows this for our benefit, that as we suffer from our sins, we will learn to hate these sins and desire righteousness. As Hebrews 11:5-11 explains, the Lord loves those He chastens, and does it so that we will grow up into His holiness through the disciplines we receive.

DAVID

David is another clear example of someone who entered into these three stages in his spiritual growth. His three anointings brought him into the same experience of becoming called, chosen, and faithful.

David’s first anointing occurred when he was a shepherd boy living at Bethlehem. The prophet Samuel was sent there by the Lord to anoint young David to become the next king, 1 Sam.16:1 & 11-13. Through this first anointing David knew that he was called of God. Yet it took many years and experiences before he was prepared to be chosen. This began to be fulfilled when the men of Judah gave him his second anointing to make David king over Judah, 2 Sam.2:4.

David’s third anointing, as king over all Israel, enabled him to capture Zion and rule over the surrounding nations, 2 Sam.5:1-10. While David stumbled badly through his sin with Bathsheba, he repented and gained a full restoration. The fact that God accounted him faithful is confirmed by two strong witnesses. First, it is indicated by God’s own testimony that he had found David, “*A man after My own heart, who will do all my will,*” Acts 13:22. And secondly, as we have previously studied, David has also been chosen by God to be the king of Israel during the Millennium.

ESTHER

Esther is another clear example of someone who was called, chosen, and faithful. It is the three houses in which she lived that help reveal this to us.

As the Book of Esther begins, we see her living in the house of Mordecai, her father's uncle, Est.2:5-7. This first house could be called her *house of adoption*, because she was an orphan. In a similar way, when we are first saved we are adopted and brought into God's house, the household of faith.

While living in this house of adoption, Esther received an unusual calling. The king's servants called her to join the contest in search of a new queen. She was called to leave Mordecai's house to enter the king's house of women, Est.3:8-9. This second house could be called her *house of preparation* because it was where many ladies were preparing for their presentation to the king. Because of Esther's submissive spirit, she let the king's servant prepare her to be presented in the clothes that would be most pleasing to the king, Est.2:15. In a similar way, King Jesus is now searching for those who will be His Bride, to reign with Him. How can we best be prepared to be chosen? We must submit to the preparations of the Holy Spirit, because He knows best how to make us beautiful in the eyes of our King!

When Esther was chosen to become the queen, she was then brought to the third house that she lived in, Est.4:13. This was the house of the king, which we can call the *house of rulership*. It was here, as the queen, that Esther was faithful to bring deliverance to her people from the schemes of evil Haman. Similarly, when we are chosen by the Lord to enter into His authority, we must be faithful to use that authority, not for our own gain, but to help the rest of God's people. And just as Esther's life-key for victory was her lifelong attitude of submissiveness, so will many of us be similarly tested.

These lessons learned by Esther and the other overcomers we have just looked at will at times be very specific keys that can help us along in our Christian development. I can remember praying for one Filipina sister in the Lord some years ago. She faced a difficult decision concerning

whether she should submit to the elders of her church and live in a certain house. In many ways the house was not an ideal place to live. However, the Lord gave me a prophecy for her. The Lord said that if she would submit to her elders and live there, then that house would become a house of preparation, and from there the Lord would promote her to the house of the king. This sister submitted and went to live there. In less than one year, the Lord gave her a very unusual promotion as a fulfillment of that word. She became the leader of a weekly prayer meeting held in the ‘house of the king’—in the Malacanyang, the Philippine presidential palace! She also went on to found a national prayer movement as an “Esther” for her people.

Along with these saints who we have just studied, there are a multitude of other Bible men and women who were called, chosen, and faithful. Together they comprise the “*great cloud of witnesses*” of Hebrews 12:1, whose triumphant faith can now encourage us along as we run our own Christian race.

Let us seek to follow the testimony of all of these overcomers! Then we will also finish our lives to hear the Lord greet us with the words “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord,*” Matthew 25:23. Praise the Lord! We will then be qualified both to be with, and to rule with, the King of kings when He returns to establish His kingdom over all the earth!

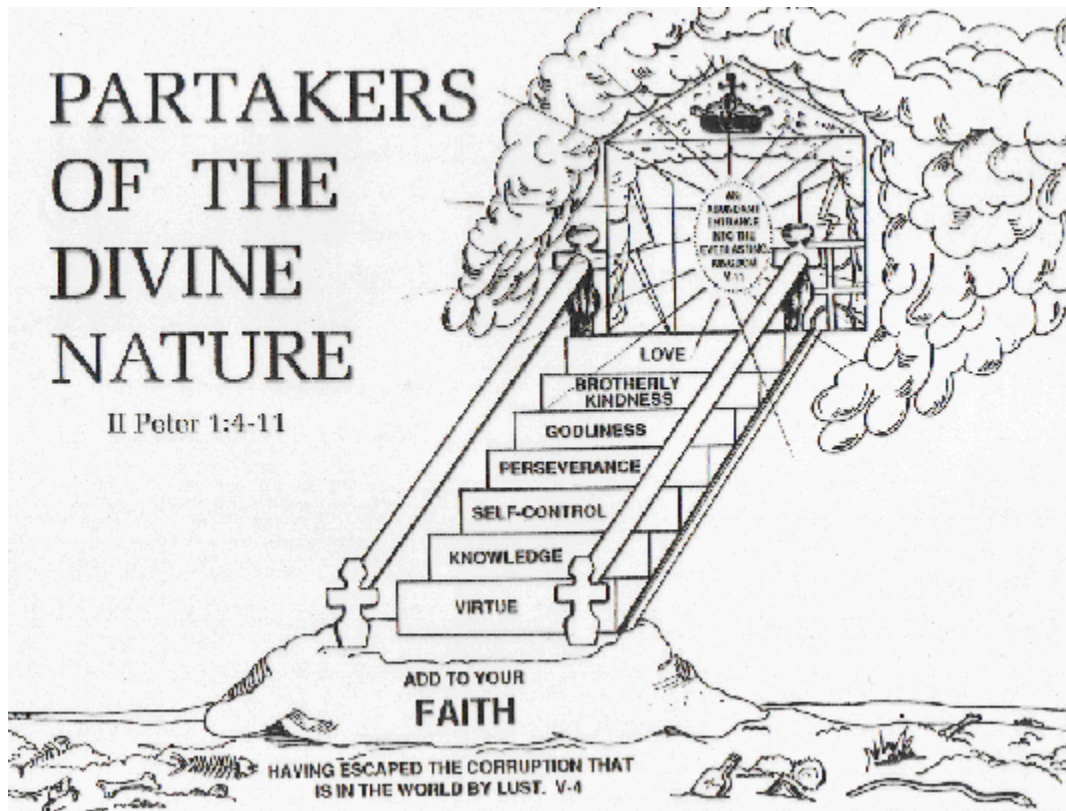
Chapter 7

PARTAKERS OF THE DIVINE NATURE

As we learn more about the greatness of the hope of our Christian calling, our consuming question becomes, “How do I enter in?” Our goal is so glorious, but how do I get there? In 2 Peter 1:4-11 we are given instructions on how to reach our desired goal and be partakers of the divine nature. We read: “...*That through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love...But he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness... Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things you shall never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

In 2 Peter 1:4 we begin our walk with the Lord by having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. As we ascend up the seven steps listed in verses 5 through 7, we arrive at an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord. And as we follow these steps, we are promised in verse 10 that if we are diligent to do these things we shall never fall. What a precious promise this is, for in these last days God is beginning to shake all things and many are falling. Nevertheless as we ascend up these steps to partake of Christ’s nature, our calling (or eternal placement) among the sons of God will be secured.

This gives us step-by-step instructions on how to partake of the divine nature so that we can enter into the hope of the Christian. These steps are pictured below as a stairway from the earthly to the heavenly.



FAITH OUR FOUNDATION

Faith is revealed in verse 5 of this scripture as our foundation, the beginning of our Christian experience. Christ is the rock of our salvation, and by faith we can escape the corruption that is in the world to stand secure upon Christ. David spoke of this when he wrote, *“He brought me out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay; and He set my feet upon a rock making my footsteps firm,”* Ps.40:2 NASV. However, 2 Peter 1:5 says to be diligent to *“add to your faith.”* In a similar way, Hebrews 6:1-3 says that we need to keep our foundation of faith and then *“let us go on to perfection...if God permits.”*

It is God’s purpose that we learn to partake of His divine nature, go on to perfection, and become conformed to the image of Christ. However, God is the judge of whether we are prepared to go to the next step from ‘glory to glory.’ Just as a teacher will give tests to see if a student is prepared to graduate to the next level of instruction, so the Lord will test us to see if we are prepared for Him to lead us higher. If we fail our tests, we will not be permitted to go on. The people of Israel disqualified themselves from going on into the Promised Land, and wandered in

the wilderness for 40 years until they died. God blessed them with supernatural protection, miracles, healing, and provision, but God did not let them go on to perfection! Just because the Lord is blessing us with provision, healing, and miracles does not guarantee that we are moving on with God. Like the Israelites in the wilderness, we may be spiritually wandering in circles instead of going on to enter into God's full plans for our life.

Some years ago I was one of the directors of a fellowship of 50 churches, at a time when some of the pastors did not set their hearts to fully follow the Lord. During this time of struggle, the Lord showed me an angel that He had sent from heaven to examine the hearts of each of the ministers. The angel was holding a book, and was writing the names of some of the pastors inside it. The name of the book was "Those Whom God Will Permit To Go On." (To see some scriptural examples of angels recording facts and about the many books in heaven, study Malachi 3:16-17, Ezekiel 9:1-6, Daniel 12:1, and Revelation 7:2-3 and 20:12) As I realized that the name of each minister had to be written in this book for God to allow them to go on in their spiritual growth, the spirit of the fear of the Lord fell upon me and I cried out to the Lord, "Write my name in the book, too!" Yet sadly, a few of the ministers did not have their names written down in the book by the angel.

Within a short time of when I had received this revelation, this handful of ministers not approved by the angel broke away from the fellowship to go their own way. They started a Bible school and attempted a big work for God. However, the Lord did not bless their works, and in a few short years their school was closed, their works had crumbled, and even their main church had disbanded. These ministers all had faith in God; but they had not properly added to their faith. Therefore the Lord did not permit them to go on in their spiritual lives and ministries into the abundant kingdom life offered in 2 Peter 1:11. May we all learn to fear the Lord, and be diligent to "*add to your faith*" the following seven steps:

Step #1 VIRTUE or MORAL EXCELLENCE

We are told that we must add virtue (or moral purity) to our faith, to ascend the next step. The Holy Spirit places in the heart of every born-again Christian the desire for virtue. Then we must

purpose in our heart to embrace this step in our Christian growth. We read how Daniel did this as a young man when he “*purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself*” with the food of the king of Babylon, Daniel 1:8. Today we live in a world filled with the spirit of Babylon, and we must also purpose in our heart not to defile ourselves with the evil things that surround us.

Samson is an example of a man who had faith, but did not add virtue to his life. He had faith in God’s power and had a great ministry of deliverance. However, he loved many women, broke his vow of consecration, and found that his faith was not enough. As 2 Peter 1:9 warns, because he did not add virtue he became blind.

Christians today—even Christians with powerful ministries—can become spiritually blind and fall if they do not add virtue to their faith. Ministers are in danger if they trust in their faith or in the power of their ministry, like Samson. Just because God is blessing a ministry is no guarantee that He is pleased with the life of the minister!

Step #2 KNOWLEDGE

A desire for a virtuous life is not enough. We must also gain a *knowledge* of how to lead a virtuous life. On Good Friday, people in many countries will carry a heavy cross, crawl on the ground, or whip themselves, seeking to be virtuous Christians. But because they do not have the knowledge from God of *how* to live virtuous lives, their works are vanity and bondage.

This was the problem of many of the Pharisees. Paul wrote of them that they had a zeal for God, but it was not in accordance with knowledge. Many had a desire for a virtuous life, but those who did not go on to gain the knowledge of who Jesus was, became spiritually blind. They fell from grace to become the enemies of true virtue and faith! Let us be transformed by the renewing of our mind that we may be filled with the knowledge of His will, Rom.12:2.

Step #3 SELF CONTROL or TEMPERANCE

As we come to know how to lead a virtuous Christian life, we must *apply* this knowledge

through self-control or temperance. It is possible for a person to know that he is not leading a virtuous life, yet not exercise the discipline needed to obey his knowledge of how to be virtuous! 2 Timothy 2:3 reminds us that we have to learn how to “*endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.*” We can become entangled with the world and be useless in God’s army; wounded, weak, or a deserter. In 1 Corinthians 9:25 Paul also reminds us how an athlete needs to discipline his body to win a contest. We need strong self-control to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil. This includes disciplining both our natural habits (such as eating, sleeping, and working) and our spiritual habits (such as daily prayer and Bible reading). It takes much daily exercise and self-control to become a champion!

Solomon is an example of one who fell because he lacked self-control. He began with true faith and virtue, and went on to add great wisdom and knowledge to his spiritual experience, 1 Kgs.3:3-12. However, Solomon never added temperance! Near the end of his life he wrote, “*Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure,*” Eccl.2:10. His many wives, riches, and unrestrained life led him to idolatry and judgment. Let us all be careful to obey what we know is right, and practice what we preach!

Step #4 PERSEVERANCE or PATIENCE

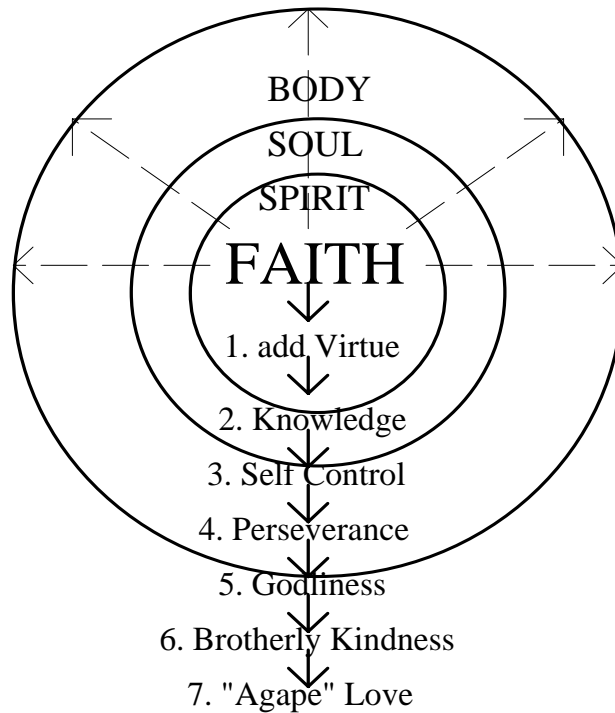
We must learn to patiently continue to discipline our lives and obey our knowledge of how to be virtuous Christians. The prize is not given to a person who starts a race well. It is for the one who runs with patience and perseveres through the entire race to finish triumphant. We must not grow discouraged and let our self-control fail, for in God’s time, we will reap the rewards if we patiently continue until the time of harvest, Gal.6:9. It takes many years for some kinds of fruit trees to grow and produce their fruit. In a similar way, it can take years of patient work for some spiritual fruits to develop in our lives.

Step #5 GODLINESS

By the time we reach this step, we begin to reap the harvest of our diligence in the first four steps. Let us review how these first steps all work together to bring us to godliness, with the following:

Step # 5 to become GODLY
 Step # 4 we must PERSEVERE
 Step # 3 to have SELF-CONTROL
 Step # 2 to obey our KNOWLEDGE
 Step # 1 to be VIRTUOUS
 FAITH - Christian BELIEVER

True godliness is not simply an outward form or ritual, but it is produced by the power of a growing inner spiritual life. We can understand this clearer by considering our next chart on the outworking of the divine nature:



When we are first saved, Christ comes to dwell in our heart (or spirit) by faith. This is where the process begins whereby we can partake of the divine nature and become conformed to the image of Christ. Yet the new Christian may still have much mixture and sin in his life (see Jeremiah 17:9 & Romans 7:15-24). Christ in us wants to arise and scatter His enemies—He wants to renew and sanctify us spirit, soul and body, 1 Thess.5:23. The first step of adding virtue begins this process by causing our spirit to become pure and undefiled. As we add knowledge, our mind becomes renewed by the outworking of Christ's nature from our spirit through our soul. Then with the next steps of adding self-control and perseverance, our body is led by the spirit and becomes sanctified.

As we continue to allow the outworking of the nature of Christ by these first four steps through our spirit, soul and body, the work of God will continue to step #5. This is where we begin to shine out to others the testimony of a life of godliness. This cannot be accomplished by our self-righteous works or by religious rituals. It is His divine power that makes us godly as we become partakers of the divine nature. Yet this Christian character of godliness is so desirable, that the Apostle Paul warns us that many in the last days will seek to have a form of godliness by following religious forms, 2 Tim.3:5. However, true godliness is only available for those who have been diligent to step by step add to their faith a growing inward spiritual life.

As we add these first five steps to our Christian development, the divine nature has transformed us spirit, soul, and body, so that we appear as godly to those around us. This speaks of our maturing into the character of Christ. Nevertheless, this is not yet the fullness of the life of Christ, because there are two parts to the Christian life: character and ministry. We must first concentrate on receiving the Lord's character, but we must also go on to share His ministry with others. This has been the plan of God from the beginning, when He said, "*Let Us make man in Our image*" (speaking of character), "*...and let them have dominion...over all the earth*" (speaking of ministry), Gen.1:26. We will see this divine order also displayed in the steps outlined by 2 Peter 1:5-7. For while the first five steps of 2 Peter develop our inward character, the last two steps we will now study concern the development of our outward ministry.

Step #6 BROTHERLY KINDNESS or 'PHILEO' LOVE

In this further step of the outworking of Christ's nature, we see the outflow of the divine nature expressed in brotherly love (*phileo* from the original Greek New Testament). Here we channel the outflow of our godly character into a ministry that reaches out to others. We must continue on into this step so that the work of God's Spirit within us does not become a stagnant pool; but a flowing, living river. This is the difference between the Sea of Galilee (which is full of life) and the Dead Sea. Both receive the same water from the Jordan River, but only the Sea of Galilee has an outlet that gives out what has been placed inside it. The Dead Sea has no outlet or overflow, and has become so stagnant and salty that nothing can live in it. If we become self centered Christians that always seek blessings but never give them to others, we can become

stagnant like the Dead Sea. So let us add to our growing Christian lives this next step of reaching out to others in brotherly love!

Step #7 ‘AGAPE’ LOVE

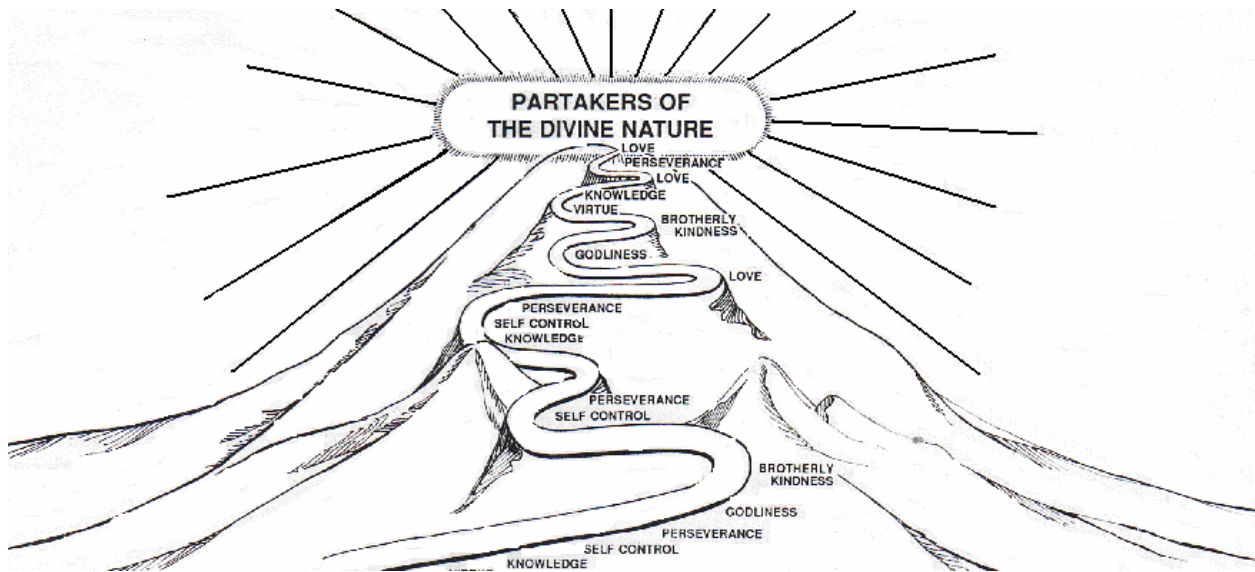
This is the final step of our development, the perfection of the life of Christ within us. As the love of God is poured out of our heart and through our life into a ministry to both God and man, we become conformed to the nature of Christ, for “*God is love,*” I Jn. 4:8. We will become full partakers of the divine nature, will make our calling and election sure, and will be prepared for an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord, 2 Pet.1:4 & 10-11. Praise the Lord, these great and precious promises are for every Christian!

BE DILIGENT

In verses 5 and 10 of 2 Peter chapter one, we are encouraged to be diligent in all these steps. A Christian who is not diligent to add all these steps to his Christian life can still attain to great heights, like Samson and Solomon. However, he is in danger of developing blind spots in his spiritual vision and of falling into grievous ruin. Let us seek for the grace of God that we may be diligent in all these steps, so that we can be confident in the Lord that we will never fall.

ASCENDING THE HILL OF THE LORD

In the beginning of this chapter we saw how there are seven steps that all follow a clear order. As we follow them they will lead us step by step into becoming partakers of the divine nature, into our hope of glory. Yet there is another way to view this truth that will also teach us wisdom. As well as like climbing stairs, these steps of Christian growth are also similar to climbing a high hill or mountain. This is illustrated for us on the next page.



Just as a road is not built straight up a mountain because it would be too difficult to ascend, so we cannot learn all about each of our steps at once. Time after time, line upon line, the Lord will teach us more about these seven steps of partaking of His divine nature. At different seasons He may lead us back to reemphasize certain steps that we have learned at a lower level. For this reason we cannot say that we will always have only seven distinct steps towards our full maturity (or only the three distinct steps of being called, chosen, and faithful), because the Lord takes some believers through these steps in many progressive levels. Yet God’s purpose is to build us up to become balanced, mature Christians; with each step taking us higher towards the glorious goal of partaking of His divine nature.

“Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.” - Jude 24-25.

Chapter 8

BALANCED CHARACTER AND MINISTRY

(THE FOUR FACES OF A SERVANT OF GOD)

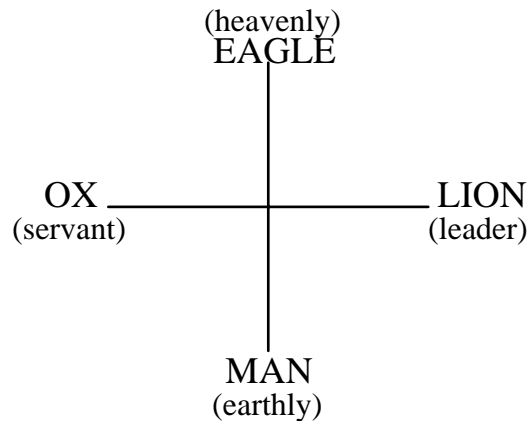
We read in the book of Ezekiel about the heavenly creatures called the Cherubim. We can study how the Cherubim are among the greatest, most exalted servants of God from out of all the created beings:

- 1.) Cherubim carry the throne and glory of God - Ezekiel 1:26-28, 10:1,18-20; 11:22-23.
- 2.) God dwells between the Cherubim - Psalm 80:1, Numbers 7:89.
- 3.) Cherubim guarded Eden - Genesis 3:24.
- 4.) They are similar or identical to the Seraphim in Isaiah 6 and the 4 beasts in Revelation 4:6-9.

The Cherubim can teach important lessons to each of us who desire to live close to the Lord, and be His servants. As we learn the secrets of their character and become like them, the Lord will also be able to entrust us with a ministry similar to theirs.

An important key which unlocks these secrets is shown to us in their faces. Ezekiel 1:10 tells us, *“As for the likeness of their faces, each had the face of a man; each of the four had the face of a lion on the right side, each of the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and each of the four had the face of an eagle.”* Here we see that each Cherub has four faces, one on each side of their head. These four faces of the man, lion, ox, and eagle teach us how we can become servants of God with balanced character and ministry. This is because a face often reveals character. The

easiest way to see if a person is happy, sad, or angry, is to look at their face! The four faces of the lion, ox, eagle, and man each speak of opposite types of character. Yet when they work together in balance, a powerful, godly ministry will result. Our following diagram shows the relationship among these four faces, and the character they reveal.



The natures of these four creatures are very opposite. The lion is a leader, the bold king of the animals. The ox has the nature of a servant as it patiently works for its master. The eagle can fly into the heavenlies, while man lives by his earthly works. Yet when these four opposites work together, we find that they compliment or balance each other. And like the Cherubim, when any servant of the Lord has balanced character, then the Lord can entrust them with a great ministry that will bring the authority and glory of God!

THE LION

The lion is a leader, known as “The King of the Jungle.” He is strong, bold, and is not afraid of anyone, Prov.30:30, 28:1, & Is.31:4. The scriptures tell us that the roaring of a lion is like the fear of a king, and also like the proclaiming of God’s word with authority, Prov.20:2, Hos.11:10, & Rev.10:3. From this we can see that to have the character and ministry of a lion, we need to be bold leaders, speaking God’s word with the kingly authority of a lion’s roar. This is like when Nathan the prophet exposed the sin of King David, saying, “*You are the man,*” in 2 Samuel 12:7.

King Saul was lacking in the characteristics of a lion. Therefore, God rejected him from being king. When Saul should have led the people into obeying the word of God, he instead feared the

people, obeyed their voice, and rejected the word of the Lord, 1 Sam.15:24-26. There are times when sin and defeat rule over Christians and entire churches because the leadership is weak and lacks the roar of a lion.

This was graphically illustrated to me when I was invited to be the guest speaker at a certain church. The worship held at the beginning of the service was nice, and the presence of the Lord was there. Then before it was my turn to preach, the pastor asked the members if anyone had a testimony. An older woman stood up in the back and began to speak.

She started out by telling about some recent crimes in her neighborhood. She talked on and on about thieves, rapists, and murderers, but never mentioned the Lord. As this went on for 20 and then 30 minutes, I was getting more and more concerned about the spiritual atmosphere of the church service. The sense of God's presence had disappeared, and instead was being replaced by spirits of fear and uncleanness. I began to look more and more at the pastor, who was just smiling and nodding his head to encourage the woman in her testimony.

Finally I was looking at the pastor with my eyes bulging wide open. I was trying to tell him that I thought that something very wrong was happening! I was concerned for the church, because the service was not only becoming boring, but also very oppressive. I would have enjoyed preaching right after the worship when the Lord's presence was manifest, but now I knew that it would be an uphill battle to accomplish anything in the Spirit. I was also thinking that the Devil was being allowed to speak to the congregation for 30 minutes, while I would perhaps have only an equal time to preach and seek to let the Lord speak to His people!

Then a lady in the church stood up and began to prophesy. She had a good strong anointing, and with the roar of a lion she prophesied that the evil spirits working through the other woman were to keep silent and not speak in the church services. I then tried to get the attention of the pastor, to confirm to him that the prophecy was from the Lord. But he ignored the prophecy, and stood up to take the microphone. The pastor then said, "Brother Holmes has never visited our church before and may not understand what has been going on. We are a church of love, and we let that

older sister in the church speak every service to share her concerns with us. We let her speak for a half hour, sometimes even for 45 minutes, to show her our love.”

I could not believe what I was hearing. A woman with spirits of fear and uncleanness was allowed to “preach” every service, while the other lady with the anointed word of the Lord was ignored! After the pastor defended the woman with the evil spirits, there was very little that I could do to help the service. I tried to privately talk to the pastor afterwards, but he would not stop letting the older lady speak in the services, all in the name of ‘love.’ What I felt was possibly the real motivation behind not wanting to correct the woman was that she was wealthy.

Every leader will face situations where they will have to choose between pleasing God and pleasing man. When God gives us a message to speak, will we try to change it if a wealthy or important person may be offended? God wants to give us each the face of a lion to boldly declare His word!

Yet a lion can do much more than only roar. With his strong teeth and claws he is able to tear his enemies into pieces, Mic.5:8. A leader must have more than strong words—he must also have strong actions. When sin is seeking to rule over God’s people, it is our responsibility to act with God’s authority. Enforcing righteousness and church discipline can at times even reach the point of excommunicating someone (Matthew 18:15-17 & 1 Corinthians 5:11), prophesying judgment (study Acts 5:9-10, 2 Samuel 12:10-11, & Acts 13:9-11), or delivering someone to Satan (1 Corinthians 5:3-5 & 1 Timothy 1:20). Our Lord has given us the responsibility to execute his judgments and use the keys of the kingdom to bind and loose (see Psalm 149:9; Matthew 18:18-19). Do you know how to use the authority of a lion in your ministry? As you learn to have the face of a lion, sinners will begin to fear the Lord, and the people will submit to your leadership.

When I was an assistant pastor many years ago, we had a church member who would periodically backslide into sin. Time after time he would live a consistent Christian life for a few weeks or months, only to always go back to gambling and drinking. When he would backslide, the senior pastor and I would spend hours and days trying to help him get back to the Lord. This kept going on for years with no final victory in sight, until finally we felt that a change of battle

plans was in order. The next time the man backslid, he was “*delivered over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh,*” 1 Corinthians 5:5. We prayed, “Lord, let him suffer in his body to learn to fear You and hate his sin.”

That night he was drinking and gambling. As was usual, he won a lot of money playing cards, and as the evening wore on his gambling companions lost all their money. He finally started gathering all the money on the table and said that he had better be moving along. Before he could leave, the men who had lost all their money stood up and took out knives. Our backslidden friend was stabbed several times, and had to leave the money behind as he staggered out of the bar and managed to get home.

For several weeks he stayed at home, recovering from the wounds. While he was in bed and suffering, he had a lot of time to consider the folly of his ways. The pain from his wounds preached to him louder than any of our sermons ever had! This event became a turning point in his life. For many years he has now lived a spotless life as a beautiful Christian. It was not the roar of a lion that helped turn him around, but the lion’s bite!

THE OX

However, the ‘lion’ ministry alone can be unbalanced. If you are a pastor or elder standing at the door of your church on Sunday morning, should you roar and bite like a lion at all the members of your church as they try to walk in? If you want to try this, let me assure you that by the next Sunday you will have removed all the problems from your church, and all the people too!

Our Lord Jesus declared how the ministry of the servant must balance the ministry of the leader. He declared, “*whoever desires to be the greatest shall be the servant of all,*” Mk.10:44. This is shown in our previous diagram by the face of the ox balancing the face of the lion.

The ox is a servant, a domesticated animal that works for its master. It is strong to work and brings forth an increase by its labor, Ps.144:14 & Prov.14:4. The Apostle Paul refers to the ox as being a type of a minister who spiritually labors in the work of the Lord, 1 Cor.9:9-11 & 1 Tim.5:17-18.

A servant of the Lord must learn to patiently work day after day, carrying the burdens and serving the needs of the people, Gal.6:1-2 & 2 Tim.2:24. Service after service, work upon work, we are to patiently plod on without complaint. This nature of the ox is the opposite of the lion, who will quickly roar, attack, and rule. Yet together these opposite natures can bring balance to our character and ministry.

THE LION AND THE OX

We can see the faces of the lion and the ox in the ministry of Christ when He cleansed the temple. We read in Matthew 21:12-14:

“Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. And He said to them, ‘It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” Then the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.”

In this story Jesus came in with a lion’s roar, casting out the merchants and moneychangers, and rebuking them with the Word of God. Then just after this, we see Him like an ox patiently ministering and helping the people by healing all the sick. Like a lion and an ox, as both a leader and then a servant, these two ministries together accomplished a full and balanced work.

THE EAGLE

The third face of the Cherubim we will look at is the eagle. As we look into the Scriptures we see an exalted, heavenly character revealed in the eagle. Job 39:27 tells us that the eagle makes “*its nest on high,*” even as we are to dwell “*in the heavenly places in Christ,*” Eph.2:6. Then Proverbs 23:5 says, “*They fly away like an eagle toward heaven.*” We can learn to do this also, for “*those who wait upon the Lord...shall mount up with wings as eagles,*” Is.40:31. The eagle also has remarkable vision and can see afar off, just as we need to be men and women of

spiritual vision, Job 39:29, Prov.29:18, & Eph.1:17-19. May the Lord help us all to have the heavenly character and ministry illustrated by the eagle!

THE MAN

The last face that Ezekiel saw, which was opposite the eagle, is the man. The character of man is portrayed in the Scriptures as being earthly. We read that from Adam, “*we have borne the image of the earthy,*” 1 Corinthians 15:49 KJV. As long as we remain here on the earth in this present life, we will have to concern ourselves with the things of earthly life like food, shelter, work and sleep. We need to be practical ‘down to earth’ people not only to exist, but also to relate and minister to other people. As Romans 12:15 tells us, “*Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.*”

We know that God Himself became a man to relate and minister to the sons of men, Phil.2:5-8, Lk.19:10, & Heb.4:15. The Apostle Paul said, “*I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some,*” 1 Cor.9:22-23. We must also learn that it is proper to have the face of a man so that we can relate and minister to the needs of humanity.

THE EAGLE AND THE MAN

These two faces of the eagle and the man are to balance each other in our character and ministry. An ‘eagle saint’ will be visionary and spiritually minded. Yet most of us have heard the saying, “He’s so heavenly minded that he’s no earthly good.” A person may soar in the heavenlies, yet not know how to relate his experiences into giving any practical benefit to others. To the opposite imbalance, a Christian can be excessively absorbed in the things of this life, always facing the situations around him as a natural man. While they may be “down to earth” practical people, they will not be able to minister anything of spiritual benefit to others because they lack the face of an eagle.

Jesus illustrated how these opposite faces of the eagle and the man could work together to bring balanced ministry when He met the woman at the well in John 4:6-26. At the beginning of this

story we see how Jesus first related to her with the face of a man: *“Now Jacob’s well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied from His journey, sat thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’”*

The first thing that this Samaritan woman probably noticed about Jesus was that he was a tired, thirsty man. However, there was something more about this man that caught her attention. We read in verse 9, *“Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”*

This Samaritan woman began to quickly see that Jesus was not an ordinary man. She saw that He was an unusual Jew who was above the usual prejudices that the Jews had against the other nations of Gentile ‘dogs.’ As she began to look up to Jesus, He lifted her higher with the following reply: *“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, Give Me a drink, you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.’ The woman said to Him, ‘Sir, You have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do You get that living water? Are You greater than our father Jacob?’”*

Here we see Jesus becoming much more than a tired, thirsty man to this woman at the well. As Christ began to use the face of the eagle to soar into the heavenlies, He started speaking to her about spiritual things. The Samaritan woman began to have her vision lifted higher and understood that Jesus might be greater than Jacob—and Jacob was one of the great Patriarchs! As the woman became spiritually thirsty and asked Jesus for the water of eternal life, the Lord then looked at her with the piercing vision of the eagle to see what hindered her from receiving His living water. When Jesus so accurately exposed her immorality, the woman had her vision lifted higher to declare in verse 19, *“Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”* As their conversation was lifted up higher and higher into the heavenlies, Christ began to prophesy in verse 23, *“But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.”* Finally the woman’s vision was lifted up high enough for Jesus to be able to share with her the revelation that He was the Christ, in verse 26.

Jesus did not first approach the woman at the well with the face of an eagle to declare He was the heavenly Christ. She would not have known how to relate to Him, and would have probably

thought Him to be insane! Christ first related to her as a thirsty yet unprejudiced Jew, and spoke to her about a subject she understood well—water. However, by the end of their conversation she was able to see Him as the exalted Christ of God. A skillful use of these two faces of the man and eagle caused a great work of salvation to start among the Samaritans (study John 4:39-42 & Acts 8:5-25).

THE FOUR FACES OF THE CHERUBIM ARE THE FOUR FACES OF CHRIST

As we study these four faces of the Cherubim, we can see how their balanced character and ministry enabled them to be such great servants of God. However, their four faces actually have a deeper significance. These four faces reveal the nature of Christ! We can see this as we study how the four Gospels portray our Lord. Each Gospel actually reveals a different side or face of Christ's character that corresponds to each of the four faces of the Cherubim.

The Gospel of Matthew reveals Christ as the King. In the first verse of the Gospel, the first thing we are told is that Jesus is the Son of David, of royal lineage. At the beginning of chapter two we can read about the wise men from the East who came to worship the King of the Jews. All through the book we see Christ revealed as a king, as the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

The Gospel of Mark was written to reveal Christ as the Servant. A key word used more in Mark than in the rest of the New Testament combined is 'immediately,' showing Christ's ready service to the needs around Him. This Gospel also has the least amount of Christ's own sayings recorded, instead emphasizing His miracles and works of service. In the Gospel of Mark we see Christ with the face of the ox.

Luke reveals the character of Christ in a different perspective as the Son of Man. His humanity is emphasized, beginning with the first two long chapters about the circumstances around His birth. The genealogy in chapter 3 points us back to His human nature as being a descendant of Adam. Christ's favorite title that He repeatedly used to describe Himself in this Gospel is "*The Son of Man.*" Here we see the Lord presented to us with the face of a man.

The Gospel of John portrays the Lord as the heavenly Son of God. Here we immediately see His deity in the beginning as the Word Who was God, Who later descended to also become flesh as a man. John describes Christ as *“He who came down from heaven...who is in heaven,”* Jn. 3:13. Christ is called the bread of God who comes down from heaven in John 6:33, as the Light of the World in John 8:12, and as the Resurrection and the Life in John 11:25. Throughout this Gospel we see Christ as the Heavenly One with the face of an eagle.

So as we complete this study of the four faces of the Cherubim, we see how their faces actually reveal how they partake of the nature of Christ. Our Lord obviously does not have four faces on His head, yet He clearly has these four aspects of personality as shown to us in the four Gospels.

This teaches us how we need to also have each of these four faces, or characters, in our own lives. As we are trained and balanced by the Spirit of God, these four opposite personalities can build the character of Christ into us. Together they can then reveal the power and glory of God through our lives, to the praise of His wisdom and grace!

Chapter 9

SPIRITUAL MIXTURE IN MINISTRY

Our Christian life develops through the deepening work of the Holy Spirit within us. This is so basic to our calling that even the word *Christian* means that we are followers of Christ, “*The Anointed One.*”

However, as we grow in Christ we begin to see that there can be different sources of spiritual power. These are used not only by evil persons, but also by well-intentioned Christians. And unless we learn when spiritual mixture is operating we can find that this mixture will hinder our spiritual growth.

First Thessalonians 5:19-21 tells us, “*Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Test all things, hold fast what is good.*” We need the powerful workings of the Holy Spirit, yet spiritual manifestations need to be tested before they are received and repeated. Otherwise the mixture often produced can be damaging. Because of mixture and abuse many Christians are overly cautious about spiritual gifts and ministries. Some sincere Christians even despise prophecy. It is not necessarily because they are carnal or hardhearted towards the Holy Spirit—sometimes it is because they desire a purity and accuracy in ministry that is lacking among those who attempt to function in these Pentecostal ministries! Yet if we will “*test all things*” and only “*hold fast what is good*” then the workings of the Holy Spirit among us will grow in purity and power. This will encourage even the skeptical (but sincere) Christians to receive more of the Spirit and grow in Christ.

THREE SOURCES OF SPIRITUAL ANOINTINGS

Before we can test spiritual manifestations and prophecies it is important to understand the different sources that can produce these effects. The scriptures teach us there are three different types of spirits that can function through a ministry. These are: 1) the Holy Spirit, 2) demonic spirits, and 3) the human spirit.

When the Holy Spirit flows through a person's spirit he can release godly ministry. This is how a true prophet functions. Second Peter 1:21 tells us that the prophecies of Scripture were brought forth when "*holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*"

However, it is also possible for an evil spirit to work through a person's life. This is how a false prophet functions. We can read in 2 Chronicles 18 of when Zedekiah and the 400 prophets of wicked King Ahab prophesied by the anointing of a lying spirit. In Acts 16:16-18 we can also read about the slave girl at Philippi who prophesied by the power of a spirit of divination. Evil spirits anointed these false prophets to have power in their "ministry" but it brought forth deception, evil, and death.

When I was a young believer, a Mormon evangelist once visited our house. I already knew that the Mormons were a cult which, among many heresies, rejected Christ's atoning work upon the cross. So as this "evangelist" was "witnessing" to me, I was trying to witness to him about the true gospel! When he grew frustrated at my knowledge of the Bible, he intensely pointed his finger at me and declared with authority, "In the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit," and at that moment a strong demonic power hit me. However, at the same moment the power of the *true* Holy Spirit rose up from within my spirit, to reject and repel this demonic attack. As Isaiah 59:19 declares, "*When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him.*" While this Mormon evangelist had quoted a good scriptural phrase—in the name of Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit—it was actually the power of a deceiving spirit which was released by his false ministry (study 2 Corinthians 11:3-4 & 13-15).

There is still a third spiritual source that can release ministry. This does not come from the Holy

Spirit or evil spirits, but from the release of the human spirit of the person who is attempting to minister. This can unintentionally happen when Christians and ministers try to be channels of the Holy Spirit. If the Holy Spirit does not choose to move and empower their ministry, the minister may try to “stir things up” or “get things moving” by their own human strength. This can be released from a person’s spirit, for part of our human nature is that we are each comprised of spirit, soul, and body, 1 Thess.5:23. From their own heart (or spirit) a person can seek to release ministry—although of course the strength and wisdom of our own human spirit is very inferior to the working of the Holy Spirit!

As a scriptural example of this, we find that foolish prophets try to function by the power of their own spirit. The Lord told Ezekiel, “*Say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, ‘Hear the word of the Lord!’ Thus says the Lord God: ‘Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!’*” Here we see a group of prophets who were not categorized as true or false, but as *foolish*. They did not function in their attempted ministries by the Holy Spirit, or by a demonic spirit, but instead by the leading of their own human spirit.

A few modern-day illustrations can help us to understand how this can operate. One example would be when a group of young ladies have been praying that God will show them their future marriage partners. If the Holy Spirit does not give them a revelation, there are times when they, from the motivation of their own heart or human spirit, will feel moved about someone. Perhaps a burden grows in their heart that they mistake for the burden of the Holy Spirit, or perhaps they have a natural dream about a young man that they foolishly attribute to be a revelation from God. Sometimes two or three ladies each receive a “word from the Lord” that they will marry the same man! Now, probably none of them were deceived by evil spirits. Yet at the most, only one of these ladies had received a true revelation from the Holy Spirit. The others were foolishly misled by their own hearts into believing that they had a prophetic word from the Lord.

Other topics about which Christians commonly prophesy out of their own human spirit are that someone will become blessed with wealth, be elected or promoted to high position, or be miraculously healed. While the Lord can prophetically declare any of these things and bring them to pass, we need to be careful that the Holy Spirit is motivating a true prophecy and that we

are not simply declaring only our own human hopes and dreams. This is because prophetic declarations and spiritual ministries can create powerful blessings when they are released by the Holy Spirit, but they can also discredit a ministry and cause much heartache and disappointment if they are only the product of a person's human hopes.

Another way in which the human spirit can seek to create spiritual manifestations can be shown by something I observed some years ago when I was attending a convention. The pastor of a large church had come from another nation to conduct a large gathering. After the message this pastor invited the local delegates up to the front so that he could bless them with personal ministry. When they had lined up in front, the pastor went down the line and blew into each of their faces. However, nothing visible happened to any of the delegates.

Then the visiting pastor lined up on the platform a row of people who had come with him from his own church. While people waited behind them to catch them, the pastor went down the line and blew into each of their faces. This time, when he blew upon his own church members, they each fell over backwards.

After seemingly demonstrating what should be the result of his "ministry," the pastor then returned to the original line of local delegates. This time as he blew upon them they also fell over backwards. However, this new response of the local delegates was not a true reaction to the release of the Holy Spirit. Instead, it was a learned response or ritual that the pastor had taught them. Out of his own spirit the pastor may have wanted to give them a good spiritual blessing, or perhaps from the pride of his heart he may have wanted to demonstrate to everyone that he was a mighty anointed man of God. Whatever his human motives may have been, I felt that this was not a true ministry by the Holy Spirit, or a false ministry by an evil spirit—it was a foolish ministry produced by the human spirit of this pastor.

I have seen this same dynamic at work in many similar ways over the years. While we should pray for and rejoice when the power of the Holy Spirit is revealed, it is easy to develop a ritual of what should happen when we seek to release the moving of the Holy Spirit. I have seen churches that have been seemingly trained that when the preacher is concluding his message, the people

should always start whimpering and crying. Other groups have been taught that when everyone starts laughing then the Holy Spirit is moving. Some churches are taught that everyone should fall over backwards every time they are prayed for—and if they don't, the person praying for them might help by pushing them over! While weeping, laughing, and falling over as dead are all scriptural manifestations of how the Holy Spirit can work, unless He comes and moves among us all these activities can degenerate into merely becoming dead rituals. And if the Holy Spirit is not moving but the people expect some action, it can be a temptation for the leaders to act as though God is moving in power while it is only their human spirit, not the Holy Spirit, which is orchestrating the show. What is the result of this impure ministry? Instead of the Christians being built up in God by the increasing work of the Holy Spirit, they become sidetracked into spiritually unprofitable works that can actually hinder them from becoming conformed into the image of Christ.

MIXTURE IN A CHRISTIAN'S HEART AND MINISTRY

Sometimes Christians find it difficult to understand how a believer can be a channel of any of these three spiritual forces. Is it possible for a Christian to be deceived by his human spirit, or by a demonic spirit, into flowing in wrong areas of spiritual declaration or impartation? Some people will say “No.”

However, the Bible is full of warnings that we need to keep ourselves from deception and its resultant mixture. This deception can first come from our own human heart, or spirit. Obadiah 3 says that *“the pride of your heart has deceived you,”* while Jeremiah warns that *“the heart is deceitful above all things,”* Jer.18:9. A New Testament example of this is when Peter zealously declared at the Last Supper that he would never deny Christ, only to find to his shame that he denied Christ that very night. In a similar way we can declare foolish prophecies out of our own human heart, while later finding out that the Holy Spirit may choose not to work or enable us to fulfill that zealous prophecy.

Another area that can bring spiritual deception is through demonic spirits. Christ and the apostles clearly warned us that we must keep ourselves from false ministers and satanic deception, even

more so just before the Second Coming of Christ (study Matthew 24, 1 Timothy 4:1-3, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, and Revelation 13). An example of how an evil spirit can deceive a believer can also be seen in Peter's life from Matthew 16 in verses 17 and 23. A short time after Jesus commended Peter for receiving a revelation from God, the Lord then rebuked him for speaking the words of Satan. And if the Apostle Peter could be satanically deceived, it can also be a danger for us!

The Scriptures clearly show that there can be many attitudes at work in a person's spirit or heart. Some of these characteristics include being contrite and humble (Is.57:15), meek and quiet (1 Pet.3:4), guileless (Ps.32:2), refreshed (1 Cor.16:18), troubled, (Jn.13:21), wounded (Prov.18:14), evil (Jer.3:17), hardened (Mk.6:52), adulterous (Ezek.6:9), deceived (Is.44:20), foolish (Rom.1:21), quickly angered (Eccles.7:9), and unrepentant (Rom.2:5).

These varying attitudes of heart can cause us to be influenced by, and then become channels of, the Holy Spirit or of evil spirits. And even when neither of these supernatural anointings is upon someone, that person can still influence or manipulate others by the strength of their own human spirit. That is why the Scriptures encourage us that if we want to become wise we should associate ourselves with wise people and avoid having foolish friends, Prov.13:20. In a similar way Proverbs 22:24-25 says do not associate with angry people because you may become like them! The attitudes of heart among the people you surround yourself with will help mold the attitudes of your own heart.

For these reasons we need to protect the spiritual condition of our heart. The Scriptures exhort: "*Guard yourself in your spirit,*" Mal.2:15-16 NIV, and "*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life,*" Prov.4:23. As we keep our own heart pure it will protect our own spiritual development as well as the purity of our ministry to others.

A CHANGED LIFE RECEIVES A NEW ANOINTING

The Scriptures contain many examples of people whose changing character also brought about a change of their anointing. We can see this in the life of the Apostle John, who Christ referred to

as a “Son of Thunder.” As a young man John had a judgmental, harsh spirit that wanted to call fire down on the Samaritans. John thought that they had God’s anointing to accomplish this, but the Lord Jesus corrected him and said, “*You do not know what kind of spirit you are of,*” Lk.9:55. Yet as John continued to walk with Jesus we find that John’s heart was changed until he was eventually entitled by the Church as “The Apostle of Love.” From being a zealous destroyer with a wrong spirit, John became anointed by God as a healer and builder.

Saul of Tarsus was another young man who thought he was serving God with a righteous heart. However, his heart was proud and self-righteous, and was probably motivated by evil spirits while he was persecuting and imprisoning the Christians, Acts 9:1 & 26:9-11. Yet in the midst of this evil, Christ met with him and changed Saul. After years of preparation he became the humble Apostle Paul who received a mighty anointing of the Holy Spirit, Acts 13:9-11.

Samson had an unstable life that caused him to gain, lose, and then finally regain the anointing of the Holy Spirit. As a young man God anointed him with the spirit of might. However, to his surprise, he lost that anointing. He fell into repeated immorality and had his Nazarite vow of consecration to God broken when his hair was cut off. While he thought he would still keep his anointing, in Judges 16:20 we read, “*But he did not know that the Lord had departed from him.*” Samson lost the anointing and became a blind slave of the Philistines. However, as his hair began to grow again, so did his faith and consecration. He then regained the anointing of God’s Spirit to achieve his greatest victory, Jud.16:21-30.

BACKSLIDERS CAN RECEIVE EVIL ANOINTINGS

Christians usually understand the truth that a newly consecrated life can receive a new anointing of the Holy Spirit. As Acts 5:32 declares, God gives the Holy Spirit “*to those who obey Him.*” However, the opposite side of this truth is less commonly understood. God can also allow evil spirits to attack those who *disobey* Him. This is shown to us by the life of backslidden King Saul, where 1 Samuel 16:14 tells us “*But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from God tormented him.*”

The Bible gives us many warnings about disobedient servants of God who found that their anointing from God became replaced by an evil spirit. This can happen to anyone—even great kings, prophets, apostles, and holy angels—as we can see from the lives of King Saul, Balaam, Judas, and Lucifer.

The resulting mixture of anointings that can come upon a person’s life and ministry can be very confusing. Think of how difficult it must have been for the people under King Saul’s leadership to evaluate his ministry. He started out anointed by the Holy Spirit in 1 Samuel 10:9-12. Saul prophesied with the prophets, and the people who were watching started saying, “*Is Saul also among the prophets?*”

But after his repeated disobedience to God, the Lord removed the anointing of His Holy Spirit from King Saul and instead sent an evil spirit upon him, 1 Sam.16:14.

The next time we read about Saul prophesying, we find that he was under the anointing of an evil spirit. First Samuel 18:10 says, “*The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house....*” Saul then tried to kill David while prophesying under the anointing of this evil spirit.

After this, David escaped from Saul and went to the prophet Samuel for protection. First Samuel 19:18-24 tells us that King Saul sent men to arrest David, but the Holy Spirit fell on them and they did not fulfill their orders. So Saul himself went to arrest David, but the Spirit of God also came upon Saul so that he began prophesying under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Again the people said, “*Is Saul also among the prophets?*”

While Saul was prophesying again under the true anointing of God, the people could have become very confused. Was Saul still a man of God—perhaps even a prophet? Only when we study about the rest of his life does it become clear that Saul’s prophesying was not a sign that God was pleased with him and was restoring him. No, it was only because God was pleased with *David* that Saul was anointed again—to keep him from killing David! After that, Saul was continually under the influence of evil spirits, such as when he killed the priests of God,

repeatedly hunted David, then inquired of a witch, and finally committed suicide. But even during these backslidden years King Saul still led God's people and often spoke like a good religious man. It must have been very difficult for the people to decide whether Saul was still a man of God or was a backslidden leader. However, many times this same kind of mixture and confusion exists in the body of Christ today. And if we allow sin to creep into our own life, we are also personally in danger of losing the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Instead, we may become troubled by evil spirits which will try to tear down every good thing that God has been building in and through us!

Over the years I have had the privilege of working with many great men and women of God. Most of them have been a joy to know and minister with. However, I have also known mighty ministers that left the paths of righteousness, to instead become anointed by demonic powers. One of Satan's temptations of our Lord Jesus was that He was offered the power and glory of the kingdoms of the world if He would worship Satan. Since this tactic was used to tempt the Lord Himself, we should be warned that Satan will also tempt God's servants in similar ways.

Twenty-three years ago my family moved to an obscure area of the island of Palawan in the Philippines. There were no roads, electricity, telephones, or other modern conveniences available there. The people lived in small villages or out in the jungle. There were also no doctors or medical treatment available, so the local people usually relied upon witch doctors when they needed healing.

Several evenings after we had arrived there, a local tribal chief came down the path from the jungle to the house where I was staying. Hundreds of his followers walked behind him. As he came to visit me, he placed a stone with many facets in my hand. On each side of this stone there were strange pictures or writings. Then he spoke his only words to me: "If you will accept this, I will give you the power to heal every sick missionary that you pray for."

At that moment the Lord opened my eyes to understand that this local ruler was not a person, but a spirit. I also understood that the stone was an *anting-anting* or magic charm that could give me demonic power. The spirit of the fear of God fell upon me, and I threw away this charm with all

my strength, as I howled “No!” in reply. The fear of God that gripped my heart was that there might have been something in my human, greedy desires which would have welcomed this satanic opportunity to become honored and powerful among the missionary community!

Each of our human natures has areas of weakness and sinful desire. Yet as we follow the Lord this sinful adamic nature will progressively become crucified with Christ. The purity of Christ’s growing nature can make each of us to become an overcomer, but until that work of transformation is completed the fear of the Lord can help keep us away from falling into temptation and sin.

RECOVERING THE ANOINTING

As we have seen, believers can lose the anointing of the Holy Spirit upon their life. Yet if this happens, the Lord will often use judgment to encourage them to repentance and restoration.

We have already considered how Samson lost God’s power and became a blind slave in the Philistine prison. What a great humbling came to Samson! He was helpless and was mocked while the god of the Philistines was declared triumphant. However, Samson allowed this humbling experience to work repentance and rededication into his life. As his hair (the symbol of his consecration to God) began to grow again, so did his faith and consecration. He regained the anointing of God’s Spirit at the end of his life and achieved his greatest victory as he pulled down the temple of Dagon, Jud.16:21-30. Samson had not only regained the anointing, but also secured an eternal place for himself in the “Hall of Fame” of the Hebrews 11 heroes of faith. Out of failure he was still able to salvage a noble testimony.

David fell into sin and spiritual mixture during the season of his life when he had become a middle-aged king. He was probably motivated by evil spirits when he had Bathsheba’s husband killed, and clearly had this motivation when Satan moved him to take a census of Israel in 1 Chronicles 21:1. But he recovered his leadership and his standing before God through these difficulties.

When Nathan the prophet first exposed David's sins and prophesied the judgments of God, David responded with confession and repentance, 2 Sam.12:5-20. As we read Psalm 51 we can further see how he sought for a clean heart and pleaded that God would not take His Holy Spirit from him. We can also study how David responded to God through the next years of judgment through humility, accepting the punishments, and through seeking God, 2 Sam.12-19 & 1 Chron.21. The result was that spiritual mixture was purged out of David's life. He not only kept his leadership and anointing until the end of his life, but even into the ages to come. For when we study the prophecies about the coming millennial kingdom of Christ upon the earth, we find that David will again rule as the king of Israel, Jer.30:9 & Ez.37:24-25. While David suffered much for his sins, as a man after God's own heart he was still able to hit the mark of the high call of God for his life and for eternity.

The Scriptures compare our hearts with gardens. We must be careful what we plant, for we will reap a harvest, whether good or evil. Galatians 6:7-8 declares, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that will he also reap. For he who sows to the flesh will reap corruption...*" We can see how this principle worked in the life of King David. He only committed adultery once, yet it fell back upon him ten times, 2 Sam.12:11-12 & 16:21-22. He only killed one man, yet two of his sons were murdered while war spread throughout his kingdom, 2 Sam.12:9-10, 13:28-29, & 18:5-15. David reaped a multiplied harvest of punishment and pain, yet these judgments of God were also His mercy to help bring full repentance and cleansing to David.

KEEP A PURE HEART

While judgment can help bring repentance and restoration to a disobedient believer, God has a better plan for those who will follow Him fully. His plan is that we never have a season of backsliding. The Lord wants to take us onwards throughout our life "*from glory to glory*" and "*from strength to strength,*" 2 Cor.3:18 & Ps.84:7. The Lord has made available to us all that we need to be overcomers through every battle of life. We can keep a pure heart and keep the pure anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord Jesus said in John 14:30, *“the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me.”* If we have a pure heart, like Jesus, then the Devil will find nothing in us that he can control. Even on the day of the cross the Lord Jesus was still in control as He willingly laid down His life to bring salvation to mankind. We likewise can always be more than conquerors through all of life’s difficulties if we will only maintain a pure heart that is filled with His Spirit.

Hebrews 1:9 mentions two reasons why Christ was given a great anointing. We read there, *“You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than all Your companions.”* The Lord Jesus had this superior anointing because he both loved righteousness and hated wickedness. These are also important keys for us to be greatly anointed and have the joy of the Lord as our strength. It is not just enough to love righteousness. Many people love righteousness but also love sin! For example, Samson and Solomon both loved God, but they also loved ungodly women. We must love righteousness and also hate wickedness if we want to gain, keep, and develop the workings of the Holy Spirit within our lives.

Chapter 10

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

Because of the spiritual mixture that permeates the body of Christ it is crucial for our Christian growth that we mature in spiritual discernment. God gives us the time that we need to fulfill His will and develop into the image of Christ. However, if we are sidetracked by fruitless spiritual activities we can lose invaluable time that may hinder our ability to develop into 100-fold fruitful and mature Christians.

The first key towards discerning spiritual mixture is to understand that we are to spiritually test all things. First Thessalonians 5:21 tells us to *“Test all things, hold fast what is good.”* First John 4:1 also declares, *“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are from God.”* Hebrews 5:14 further tells us that spiritually mature Christians are *“...those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

Some Christians do not consider it correct that they should test or judge spiritual things. One reason is that they do not feel they are spiritually mature enough. Yet Hebrews 5:14 tells us one way to become mature is to exercise discernment. Use what discernment you have, and just like exercising a muscle, it will become stronger. This does not mean that a young Christian should try to see a demon hiding behind every chair! However, we can always pray about every spiritual manifestation we see. We can search the scriptures to gain wisdom, and talk with more mature Christians to learn from their discernment.

Other Christians sometimes are reluctant to test or judge spiritual things because of the teaching of Christ when He said, “*Judge not, that you be not judged,*” Mt. 7:1. While it is true that we are not to condemningly judge people, the word of God also teaches us that “*he who is spiritual judges all things,*” 1 Cor.2:15.

As we seek to spiritually test everything we will find that various experiences of life will teach us important lessons in discernment. We can see this in the natural. A young child starts out knowing very little about his body, but a mature adult will have passed through sicknesses and accidents. These may have taught him to discern many parts of their body, such as perhaps his heart, kidneys, lungs, or kneecap. Another area where a person learns natural discernment is when they first smell something—perhaps cinnamon, or a rose, or what the dog left behind that they stepped on! After they first learn to associate a certain smell to a specific thing, they will usually be able to discern the presence of that thing even years later when they next smell the same odor.

In a similar way we can develop our spiritual discernment through our varying situations of life. Perhaps you attended a wonderful service where you felt an unusual presence and where someone had a vision of angels. If you learn that the unusual presence you felt was angelic, then the next time you feel the same presence you may discern there are angels there, even though no one had a vision of them. Perhaps you begin to learn about different anointings of the Holy Spirit as you develop your prayer life. You may learn about various types of demonic spirits from meeting demon-possessed people, or from times of spiritual warfare.

A second key towards discerning spiritual mixture is that we must learn to judge spiritual ministry by its fruit, not its gifts. In Matthew 7:15-17 the Lord Jesus told us that we would know false prophets by their bad fruit. A good ministry that releases the Holy Spirit will produce good fruit, while those who minister from only the human spirit or from demonic spirits will bear bad fruit such as confusion, division, oppression, and sin. So we need to first look at the lives of the ones who are ministering—are they righteous, loving, and properly submitted in the body of Christ? Are their finances and family in good order? Then we should also check out the fruit of their ministry. What has been the result of their ministry in their own local church? Is their

preaching doctrinally sound? When they travel to other places does their ministry leave a lasting blessing, or problems?

It is very important that we judge ministers by their fruit rather than gifts because some spiritually gifted people may seem to have very impressive ministries. But gifts do not tell us about the person who *has* them as much as the gifts tell us about the person who *gave* them! Spiritual gifts tell us about the goodness of the God who gave them, whereas the fruit that is grown from the person's life tells us about the goodness (or evil) of their own personal character. If a person's character is flawed or sinful, no matter how impressive their giftings may seem they will release spiritual mixture through their ministry. In the Scriptures we find powerful prophetic giftings and anointings in men like King Saul, Balaam, and Samson, yet we also find character deficiencies that were dangerous or even deadly.

In Matthew 7:21-23 the Lord Jesus spoke about a large group of many people who prophesied, cast out demons, and worked many miracles. However, on Judgment Day, the Lord will tell them *"I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!"* Here we see that the Lord judges by character, not giftings, and if we want to be like Christ then we should do the same.

However, judging the fruit of a ministry will not always give us our needed help towards discerning spiritual mixture. This is because it can often take a long time for fruit to grow and become observable. So a third key towards discerning spiritual mixture is that we must become sensitive to the witness of the Holy Spirit within our heart. Colossians 3:15 tells us, *"let the peace of God rule in your hearts."* The word translated here as *rule* can also be translated as an *umpire* or *referee*. The Holy Spirit, who dwells in the heart of every born-again believer, is to act as an umpire or referee. And how does an umpire function? While the sports event is being played properly, the umpire will be silent as he oversees the game. Yet when a rule is broken, the umpire will disturb and stop the game. He will blow a whistle, raise a card, or throw a flag. When he interrupts everything stops while the umpire explains what went wrong and then corrects it. After this the game can again proceed as long as the umpire remains quiet.

In a similar way the Holy Spirit gives us peace in our heart as long as everything is correctly

proceeding. But if something goes wrong- if an evil spirit is manifested, or if someone wrongly ministers out of his or her human spirit without the release of the Holy Spirit—then the Holy Spirit removes His peace in our heart. This troubling of our spirit is to tell us that something is wrong! And if we will be sensitive to this guidance, find out what went wrong, and correct things, then the Holy Spirit will again fill our heart with peace.

An illustration of this can be seen in Acts 16 when Paul and his team were evangelizing the city of Philippi. We read in verses 16-18, *“Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, ‘These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation.’ And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, ‘I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.’ And he came out that very hour.”*

The message that this girl prophesied seemed to be very accurate, and Paul and his evangelistic group could have welcomed the good advertising. But while everything on the natural level seemed good, we see that Paul began functioning on a different level. His spirit was troubled by what this girl was saying. The Holy Spirit had removed His peace from Paul’s heart and warned him that something was wrong. It took Paul *“many days”* before he fully understood and dealt with the problem, but when he did, the deliverance of the girl from that evil spirit became a turning point towards establishing a church in that city. It especially removed the danger that this girl and her counterfeit gifting might have been welcomed into the young church, which after the departure of Paul could have caused much destruction.

Years ago the Lord taught me a similar lesson on how the witness of the Holy Spirit’s peace can be useful in detecting spiritual mixture. I was invited to preach at a church where the pastor was boasting that one of the church members was a great prophetess. She would write down prophecies, have someone put it in their bank lock box, and then after a certain time have them unlock their box and read the prophecy after it had just been fulfilled. After hearing this I was interested in meeting this gifted person so I talked with her after the service.

From our conversation I could tell that she was a spiritual woman, yet the Holy Spirit within me

was very troubled. I felt that something about this woman was very wrong. Her words all seemed spiritual, and her prophetic accuracy was proven—but the Holy Spirit was “blowing the whistle” and saying that something was wrong! So as we were talking, I began praying in my heart, and then silently from my heart commanded the evil spirit in the name of Jesus to reveal himself. Just then she changed what she was talking about, and began to speak about her late husband who had died about six months earlier. She said that she went to his grave every day, where she would talk to him and then he would talk back to her! At that moment the Holy Spirit witnessed in my heart that the evil spirit at work in her “ministry” had just been revealed, and that she was a spiritist medium, not a prophetess of the Holy Spirit. Yet while I was warned and then protected myself against her spiritual mixture, the pastor did not listen to several warnings about her. The result was that this lady later caused great damage in the church.

A fourth key towards discerning spiritual mixture is the Holy Spirit’s gift of the discerning of spirits, 1 Cor.12:10-11. This is a charismatic gift of the Holy Spirit that is given to some, whereby they can discern what is the source behind a spiritual manifestation. While this gift is operating a person can see, hear, feel, smell or taste something that will reveal the spiritual source at work in a situation. Perhaps a dream or vision may visually reveal a spiritual power at work, such as in 2 Chronicles 18:18-22 and Zechariah 4. Perhaps they will audibly hear a word from the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit, or what a person is silently saying in their human spirit, Mk.2:6-8. Sometimes people can feel the hair on the back of their head stand up when an evil spirit is present, as in Job 4:15, or they will taste or smell something very bad or sulfurous. On other occasions people have tasted or smelled something wonderful, which has indicated the work of God, Ps.34:8, Heb.6:4, & Ps.141:2. These revelations can come through having the gift of the discerning of spirits anoint a person’s natural five senses to give them supernatural perception.

Many times the gift of the discerning of spirits has helped me to understand the spiritual powers which are a work behind different situations. At times I have had that gift function in my own life, or I have received a revelation from someone else whom I know has that spiritual gift. Sometimes the Holy Spirit has been discerned at work like a dove, fire, or wind. At other times angels or demons have been seen. Occasionally my human spirit will directly hear what another

person is silently saying in their heart (read Mark 2:6-8 and Luke 9:47). Each of these times when I have been made aware of the spiritual forces at work in a situation it has helped me to be much more effective in ministry—whether to help release the work of the Holy Spirit, hinder the works of demons, or help correct the problems in a person’s heart.

After giving us a list of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30, the Apostle Paul tells us “*earnestly desire the best gifts*” in verse 31. The discerning of spirits is a valuable gift for our spiritual growth, and is worthy for us to seek the Lord for it. While it is still God’s sovereign choice as to what gifts are given to which Christians, it is also true that the Lord usually gives his treasures to those who will most fully appreciate and utilize them.

A fifth key towards discerning spiritual mixture is that we should let the spiritual leaders involved in the situation give their consensus, or their collective discernment, about the spiritual manifestation that is being examined. In 1 Corinthians 14:29 Paul wrote, “*Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge,*” while Proverbs 24:6 tells us, “*in a multitude of counselors there is safety.*” If a prophecy or spiritual manifestation is released in a service it is the responsibility of the leaders there to approve or question its source and accuracy. This could take place by the silent approval of the leaders, or by their saying “amen” or “praise the Lord.” A mild questioning of the situation could be done by having the leaders check with each other and then say into the microphone “let us pray about that” or “perhaps that is from the Lord.” If the leaders feel very troubled about a spiritual manifestation that occurred, they might steer the service into a different direction and then later (perhaps privately) have a counseling or a deliverance session with the person who released the manifestation.

In Ephesians 4:11-14 we are told that Christ has placed ministries in the body of Christ to help the church to mature, “*That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men.*” The word *wind* in this scripture can also be translated as *spirit*. Now when we look at the possible spiritual sources of these winds of doctrine, it is clear that the wind of the Holy Spirit is not being referred to. These doctrines instead could be anointed by Satan, who Paul had called “*the prince of the power of the air*” two chapters earlier in Ephesians 2:2. These winds of doctrine could also merely be unbalanced

teachings wrongly promoted by the human spirit of men, as the phrase *“by the trickery of men”* could suggest. Yet it is the ministries of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and the pastors and teachers that can help us to mature so that we will not be deceived by every wind, or spirit. We do not want to be like a ship that is moved by every wind, yet only wanders and never arrives at its destination. We want to become like a skilled pilot who knows how to navigate against the winds to bring the ship (the church) to its desired goal of maturity and victory.

Our sixth key is that we should test all spiritual things by the Scriptures. In Isaiah 8:19-20 we are told, *“And when they say to you, ‘Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,’ should not a people seek their God?...To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”* The ‘law and testimony’ referred to here are the Old Testament writings of the word of God that were already available in the times of Isaiah. If a spiritually gifted person does not speak according to the Scriptures, it is because there is no true light of the Holy Spirit working through them. It will be other spirits who are at work.

As an example of this, in recent years there has been a book spreading around the world that has even become a best seller in some nations. It is the testimony of a woman who claims to have been taken to heaven many times. She also claims that Jesus visited her every week for many years, and that the Holy Spirit has been controlling her body in unusual ways. But when you compare her visions to the Scriptures, we find they do not match up.

This middle-aged woman claims that for years the Lord Jesus has taken her in a transformed body to a beach every Monday morning. Throughout the book she says that in her transformed body, as she walks with Jesus, she is about 15 to 16 years old. They walk down the beach, often holding hands, while the Lord repeatedly calls her, “Sweetheart.” The Lord touches her hair and tells her she is beautiful. Every Monday at the beach she dances for the Lord, and “after the dancing is finished, the Lord pays so many wonderful compliments to me that I always feel embarrassed.” Then before the Lord sends her home each week, they always part with a big hug.

When we consider the Scriptures, are there any accounts of people who see Jesus every week in

a vision, to hold His hand, be called “Sweetheart,” and to part with a big hug? Paul saw Christ on the road to Damascus once—and fell down, blinded and repentant, Acts 9:3-9. The Apostle John saw the risen Christ, and fell at His feet as dead, Rev.1:17. All the divine encounters in the Scriptures revealed a glory and awe that brought the people down flat on the ground, not holding hands and hugging a “Heavenly Sweetheart!”

This woman also wrote extensively about how her body would become controlled by the “Holy Spirit.” However, her descriptions about how she loses control of her body show that she becomes demon-possessed. Again, her descriptions do not follow any biblical patterns of how the Holy Spirit works. Yet multitudes of Christians are reading her book as a divine revelation from Jesus instead of perceiving it as a demonic counterfeit! In the last 35 years I have seen a number of similar cases where people wrote testimonial books about heaven, hell, or various other spiritual experiences they claimed to have experienced, only to have their claims later proven to be fraudulent or demonic.

So the first thing we must do in judging spiritual things is see whether they are scriptural. This is how our Lord Jesus defeated the first two temptations of Satan, as recorded in Luke chapter 4. Christ rejected these suggestions (to turn the stones into bread and to worship Satan) as unbiblical, while citing scriptures to the opposite.

However, in the third temptation the devil tried a different tactic. When he tempted Christ to jump off the temple, he then quoted two scriptures that would suggest that Christ would be protected by the angels. So while Christ defeated the devil in the first two temptations by quoting scriptures, we now see that the devil is also quoting the scriptures while seeking to defeat Christ!

The way that Christ overcame this third temptation was by replying with a scripture that was the correct verse for that specific situation: “*You shall not tempt the Lord your God,*” from Deuteronomy 6:16. In this way we see that we need to not only know if something is scriptural, but also if it is a balanced application of the Scriptures. That is why the Apostle Paul told young Timothy, “*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,*” 2 Tim.2:15. If we wrongly balance and apply

specific Bible verses, as the devil did during his third temptation of Christ, we can find ourselves disapproved of God and ashamed. This is why we must be diligent in studying the Bible, so that we will never be deceived as we ask the two questions, “Is it scriptural?” as well as, “Is it the balanced application of the Scriptures?”

In line with this need for us to remain balanced, a final seventh key for developing spiritual discernment is that we should not focus our attention on the “dark side” and always look for demons. Some people are looking for demons behind every chair or every tree—but a person growing in God should always be looking for more of Jesus! Christ should be the focus of our life, and while He may occasionally turn our attention to something that is evil, yet our abiding is to be in Him. As our hearts expectantly wait for the Holy Spirit to move, we will not be disappointed or unbalanced. However, if someone is always looking for evil spirits, there will be plenty of demons that will volunteer to distract them!

Churches and ministries that regularly hold deliverance services often find the same people repeating the same deliverance again and again. Many times the people are not being progressively delivered from their former demonic problems, but they are instead only repeating the same deliverance, or are even adding new demonic problems to be dealt with.

Our Lord Jesus taught in Luke 11:24-26 that when an evil spirit leaves a person it may return later. If the person’s life has not been filled with God—if the person’s life is still the same as when they were delivered—then the evil spirit may return and even bring more demons with him. But if a person focuses his life on becoming increasingly filled with Christ and His righteousness, then many times the demonic troubles in a person’s life will permanently depart, not because of a deliverance session, but because there is no room left for an evil spirit to remain in the person’s life!

A relative of mine worked in a bank for many years. When she was first employed she spent one week learning what real money looked, felt, and sounded like. She was not taught what counterfeit money would look and act like—she was only to concentrate on the real. Then the more she understood the real, the more natural it was for her to spot counterfeits when they

would later arrive. This same wisdom will do us well in developing our spiritual discernment.

In 2 Kings 6:15-17 we can read about Elisha's servant who became afraid because he saw how the enemy had surrounded them. Instead, we need to have Elisha's balanced vision and faith. *"And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, 'Alas, my master! What shall we do?' So he answered, 'Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.' And Elisha prayed, and said, 'Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.' Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha."*

Elisha knew that his angelic reinforcements were much greater than the enemy, and in quiet confidence he could see God's power bring the victory. In the same way we need to remember that we are on the victor's side! And as we fully follow our triumphant Lord He will lead us into a pure spiritual life and ministry that will build the nature of Christ in our lives.

Chapter 11

THE FELLOWSHIP OF HIS SUFFERINGS

Another important aspect of our becoming conformed to Christ's image concerns our suffering with Him. We read in Romans 8:16-18: *"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

For us to enter into our inheritance as the sons of God, we are given a requirement here. Our inheritance is conditional—the hope of the Christian has not yet been obtained. The requirement is *if* we suffer with Christ. *If* we enter into His sufferings, then we will also become joint heirs that will be glorified with Christ. Our entering into this hope of glory is dependent on this.

The work of the cross within our life is a crucial preparation to gain spiritual maturity and enter into our eternal inheritance. The Apostle Paul desired to know *"the fellowship of His sufferings"* so that he could enter into his high calling in God. We read in Philippians 3:10-14, *"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward*

to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul wrote about how he was pressing on for the prize of the upward call of God. He had already entered into the calling of becoming a great apostle who had brought revival to the nations. However, Paul knew there was a higher call than what he had yet entered into in his earthly life. He wanted to qualify for the resurrection from the dead.

Paul was not speaking here about the general resurrection of the dead on Judgment Day, at the end of the millennial reign of Christ upon the earth (see Revelation 20:11-13). At that time all the dead will be raised to stand before God, both the wicked and the righteous. There are no special qualifications needed to be a part of that resurrection. The New King James Version of Philippians 3:11 that we quoted above says that Paul wanted to qualify for the resurrection *from* the dead, not *with* the dead. The original Greek makes this clearer when it states that Paul wanted to attain to the *out*-resurrection from the dead. He was stating that he wanted to enter into the first resurrection that will take place at the beginning of the millennium. We read of this in Revelation 20:4-6, *“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.”*

The Apostle Paul knew that he was running a race, seeking to enter into higher and higher callings as part of his Christian hope and inheritance. After he had fulfilled his earthly life and ministry, he wanted to qualify for the first resurrection. He did not merely want to enter into his Christian reward after the Millennium at the time of the second general resurrection. As we have studied earlier, all Christians will be called the sons of God during the new heaven and earth, after they are all resurrected by the end of the millennium. But Paul was not content to be among

the last to win the race and cross the finish line. He wanted to qualify for the out-resurrection so that he will be among the first resurrected, glorified sons of God who will reign with Christ during His millennial kingdom upon the earth! However, Paul made the qualification clear as to how this high calling could be attained: it is by entering into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings and being conformed to His death, Philippians 3:10.

The Christian who desires a speedy and abundant entrance into the hope of the Christian needs to learn to embrace the work of the cross within their life. As our Lord Jesus declared in Matthew 16:24-25, "*If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*"

The Apostle Paul learned how to take up his cross. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:31, "*I die daily.*" In Galatians 2:20 he wrote the immortal words, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*" Even during his earthly life Paul had entered into a mighty experience of how Christ lived in and through him, because he had learned how to abide in being crucified with Christ.

THREE TYPES OF SUFFERING

When we consider how to enter into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, we need to first distinguish that there are different types of suffering. They are not all the sufferings of Christ! Many of the afflictions that we endure in our earthly pilgrimage are the results of our own sin and disobedience. Others can be the work of the enemy, who often opposes the work of God within the lives of Christians.

The first type we will consider concerns suffering for our sins. Much of the suffering that we experience comes from this. It can be as natural as the process of sowing and reaping. Galatians 6:8 warns us that, "*He that sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption.*" If you repeatedly have committed a sin, it will often result in a corresponding affliction. Smokers often get lung

cancer, while gamblers can suffer from poverty. Gossips will often be gossiped about, and violent people often suffer from violence!

Enduring these sufferings reaped from our sin will not assure us of any guaranteed reward or righteousness. They can encourage us to seek the Lord and gain repentance and restoration; yet in themselves these sufferings have no power or grace to transform us.

Another type of suffering comes from satanic oppression. Every Christian will face opposition from the forces of the devil. Evil spirits can seek to attack us in every realm of our natural and spiritual life. When we suffer from satanic oppression, we should not submit to every attack and just weakly say, "The will of the Lord be done!" It is true that the Lord often wants to show us the reason why He has allowed these attacks to fall upon us. The first thing we should do in these circumstances is submit ourselves afresh to God. However, after we submit ourselves to God, then James 4:7 tells us that we are to "*resist the devil and he will flee from you.*" We are not to be passive towards the devil, but are to "*be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,*" Eph. 6:10-11. This type of suffering again has no inherent power to make us godly. Yet if we arise to these attacks and resist them properly, then the aspect of Christ's nature as a "*Man of War*" will be built into our character (see Exodus 15:3).

Partaking of the sufferings of Christ is a third and very different type of suffering. This results from carrying our cross to follow the Lord. We enter into this type of suffering, not as something forced upon us from our past or from the devil; but as a choice that we volunteer to accept. We can choose to deny ourselves by the Spirit and enter into the sufferings of Christ, or reject these glorious opportunities and thereby remain a carnal Christian.

Whenever we embrace the sufferings of Christ, our own self will is 'crossed.' This is because we choose to follow the Spirit of God as He leads us onward towards fulfilling God's will. Deciding in every circumstance that "not my will be done, but Thine," is our Gethsemane that will lead us onward to the cross, Mark 14:36.

This third type of suffering, the fellowship of Christ's suffering, is the most difficult and painful of all. This is suggested by the natural sufferings of the cross, which was the most painful form of Roman execution. It is not a suffering that we justly deserve. It is not an oppression that we can resist. Yet the results are glorious as the grace and power of God are released through our voluntary obedience.

When we choose to accept the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, incomparable results are yielded in our lives. In God's economy, the cross always prepares the way for the resurrection! Some scriptures that help explain this include the following:

** "For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection," Romans 6:5.*

** "Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body...So then death is working in us, but life in you...For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," 2 Corinthians 4:10, 12, 17.*

** "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us," Romans 8:18.*

** "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him," 2 Timothy 2:12 KJV.*

** "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you," 2 Corinthians 13:4.*

** "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead," Philippians 3:10-11.*

The more we understand the eternal work of grace and glory that is accomplished in our lives by our embracing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, the more we will esteem and covet this great

privilege. During the first centuries of the early Church, there was no higher honor among Christians than to be a martyr. In our modern, prosperous society, too many Christians would conclude that nothing could be as foolish or wasteful as to die for the cause of Christ! Yet the magnitude of our eternal inheritance, the measure with which we will enter into the hope of the Christian, is determined by how fully we embrace the cross and enter into the fellowship of His suffering.

HOW TO ENDURE THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

While any kind of suffering is a trial that can make us grow weary and discouraged, we are given several keys in Hebrews 12:1-3 how we can victoriously endure the sufferings of Christ. We read from there, *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”*

The first key mentioned in these verses concerns this *“cloud of witnesses.”* These are the great men and women of faith mentioned in the previous chapter of Hebrews 11. They encourage us to run our Christian race with endurance, just as they did. Most of them endured incredible hardship, yet overcame to enter into a glorious eternal inheritance. The first one, Abel, died as a martyr. The third one, Noah, endured mocking and danger for many years from his sinful, violent generation. The next hero of faith, Abraham, became a pilgrim and a stranger as he followed God. We also have Joseph, betrayed by his brothers and his employer’s wife to become a slave and then prisoner. All of these past heroes of faith overcame great sufferings to enter their reward. Now, like the spectators at a sports event who cheer the contestants along, their victorious example can encourage us as we run the race that is set before us. The trials that we have to endure often seem much smaller and easier when we consider their overcoming triumphs!

Next, we are encouraged to look to Jesus. This will give us several keys to release God's grace afresh in our lives. The first key can be seen when we consider how Christ overcame. We read that "*for the joy that was set before Him,*" our Lord endured the cross. There was nothing joyful about the day when Christ was crucified. However, our Lord was able to look *beyond* the suffering and shame to see a joyous result. He could see the multitudes that would be saved through His sacrificial death. Christ could see how the power of Satan would be destroyed by the work of the cross. He knew that He would take the keys of death and of hell, to ascend back to heaven and sit triumphant on His glorious throne! Because His vision looked beyond the sufferings of His death to see the joyful results, Christ gained the needed strength to endure the cross.

There are also times in our lives when we suffer, and our present circumstances hold no joy. This is when we also need to lift our vision higher and see beyond our present hardships. Nehemiah 8:10 tells us that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Like Christ, we can also gain the strength to endure the cross when we see the joyful future results of our present sufferings.

When we are told to be "*looking unto Jesus,*" another key is given to us when we understand the customs of the races back in the times of the Roman Empire. When the runners were approaching the finish line, they would see the judge of the contest standing there, holding the winner's reward. So when the Christian keeps his eye on the finish line, he will see the Lord standing there to reward the winner. And what is His reward? Here Christ is called "*the author and finisher of our faith.*" He will complete His work within us when we cross the finish line from earth to heaven. Our hope of glory shall be obtained!

Chapter 12

BEHOLDING THE LORD

We concluded our previous chapter by considering the importance of “*looking unto Jesus.*” Our understanding of this truth can be greatly expanded as we study further concerning beholding the Lord. We will find that this area of wisdom is another of the crucial preparations for us to enter into the hope of the Christian. However, there are several different perspectives through which we can see the abundant resources contained in this truth.

Perhaps the simplest way to understand the power of this truth is to look at 1 John 3:2. We are told there, “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” Here we find that the way that we become like Christ is when we see Him. When Christ is revealed in His glory and power, that revelation has the transforming power to change us to be like Him!

AT THE SECOND COMING

One main fulfillment of this verse will take place for those who see Christ returning at His second coming. The Scriptures tell us how this event will change the saints who meet Him in the air. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 we read, “*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.*” Also from 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 we further read, “*We shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound,*

and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

When Christ is revealed at the second coming, all the living saints will be caught up to meet Him in the air, and will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. The power of the resurrected Christ will change their natural bodies into immortal resurrection bodies. The Son of God’s glory will also transform their spirits, and bring the sons of God unto glory! As the Apostle John said, “*When He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,*” 1 John 3:2.

LEARNING TO BEHOLD THE LORD NOW

However, there is another very important fulfillment of 1 John 3:2 which does not have to wait until the second coming. We can see Jesus now! The more we see the Lord, the more we are changed to be like Him—right now. As we read in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*” This is something that should be presently taking place in our Christian development as we learn to walk with the Lord day by day.

We are changed more and more into the image of Christ every time that we behold Him. In our private devotions, during church services, and anytime that we look to the Lord, we want to see Him in a clearer and greater way. This will in turn transform us “*from glory to glory.*” This is because when His glory is revealed, it can permeate and transform our spirit to become like Him.

When 2 Corinthians 3:18 tells us that we are transformed as we see His glory, the word for ‘transformed’ from the original Greek is ‘*metamorphoo.*’ From this we get the English word ‘*metamorphosis.*’ This word is used to describe a caterpillar being changed to a butterfly. Just as a lowly caterpillar can be transformed into a beautiful butterfly, we can be transformed from the earthly nature of Adam into the heavenly nature of Christ!

This same word translated in 2 Corinthians 3:18 as ‘transformed’ is also the same word translated in Matthew 17:2 as ‘*transfigured.*’ There we read about Christ on the Mount of

Transfiguration, “*And He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light.*” So it is not only scriptural to say that the saints undergo a metamorphosis as we more fully behold Him, but we can also say that we will be transfigured into His glorious image!

In Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah was changed when he saw the Lord in His glory. His sinful lips were cleansed, and he was changed to become a prophet. This was a portion of the image of Christ that he entered into at that time, because Christ is *the* Prophet.

In Luke 5:4-11 we can read the story of when Christ gave His disciples their first miraculous catch of fish. When Peter saw a greater glimpse of who Jesus is, he fell down at His feet and said, “*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!*” The Lord then spoke graciously to Peter, and changed him from a fisherman into a fisher of men! Here Peter was changed by *the* Evangelist, to partake of a portion of His nature and become an evangelist.

In the Gospels we read how the Apostle John was originally called a ‘Son of Thunder’ to describe his natural character (see Mark 3:17). Yet as John walked with Christ his character was changed, until the Church later gave him the title, ‘The Apostle of Love.’ John entered into this portion of the nature of Christ, because he had seen that Christ is God, and that “*God is Love,*” 1 John 4:8.

The Lord may decide to reveal Himself by the Spirit whenever He chooses. It could be in our times of worship and prayer. As with Peter, it could be when we are out fishing! Whenever He chooses to appear to us we want to be sensitive to see Him, and respond to what He wants to do in our life.

However, a very common way that the Lord reveals Himself to us is in our private devotional life. We do not want to merely have a formal time of daily prayer and Bible reading. We want to see Jesus! Yet high above our desire to see Him, is His desire to reveal Himself to us. Whenever He knocks on the door of our heart and invites us to have communion with Him, we should learn to respond quickly. We should not be like the bride who slowly responded to her beloved’s

invitation to meet with him. She said in Song of Solomon 4:2-6, *“I sleep, but my heart is awake; It is the voice of my beloved! He knocks, saying, ‘Open for me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is covered with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.’ ‘I have taken off my robe; how can I put it on again? I have washed my feet; how can I defile them?’ My beloved put his hand by the latch of the door, and my heart yearned for him. I arose to open for my beloved...but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My heart leaped up when he spoke. I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer.”*

Here we can see that the bride responded too slowly to her beloved when he came to visit her. Because of this, he withdrew before she invited him in. This contains a valuable spiritual truth for us. Christ our Beloved is not under any obligation to meet with us on our time schedule, or on our own terms. We are not the Master, and He is not our servant! It is true that He is very gracious to meet with us regardless of our weaknesses and shortcomings. Nevertheless, He is the Lord, and we are the ones who need to learn to respond to Him! If He calls for us in the middle of the night, we should not be like the bride and say, ‘Lord, it’s the middle of the night and I need my sleep! How can I get out of my warm bed and spend time with you now?’ If the Lord stirs our spirit in the middle of the day, to draw us aside to spend time with Him, we should not reply, ‘Lord, my normal time to pray is just before I go to bed!’ Our developing communion and union with Christ depend on our responding to Him when He chooses to come to us. Learning this lesson quickly will help us to meet with Him in greater ways that will change us to become more like Him.

DISCERNING THE LORD IN HIS BODY

Moreover, there are still other ways that we can see the Lord and His transforming glory. In John 17:22 the Lord Jesus said to the Father, *“And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one.”* Just as Christ’s glory can unite us with Himself, it can also unite all the Body of Christ together. So where can we see this unifying glory? We can see it in each other! As we see the glory of Christ within each true believer, that vision will change us to all become more like Him.

In Proverbs 17:6 we read that, *“The glory of children is their father.”* One interpretation of this truth is that our spiritual fathers are our glory. As we see Jesus through their lives and ministry, we are changed to be more like the Lord.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 the Apostle Paul also said about his converts, *“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”* Here we can understand that our spiritual children can also be our glory. Every mature Christian who is a spiritual father or mother receives a measure of glory through the disciples who follow them.

THE BODY OF CHRIST, UNITED AND MATURE

At the very end of the Old Testament, there is a prophecy about how the Lord will prepare His people for His visitation. In Malachi 4:5-6 we read, *“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”* This was partially fulfilled at the first coming of Christ. As the angel Gabriel prophesied about John the Baptist, *“He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, ‘to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,’”* Luke 1:17. John was anointed with the spirit of Elijah to preach repentance. This repentance united the people of God, as the hearts of the fathers and children were turned back to each other. Then what was the result? According to Isaiah 40:3-5, it was to reveal the glory of the Lord!

However, the prophecy of Malachi 4:5-6 will find a more complete fulfillment just at the end of the Church Age. This is because ‘the great and dreadful day of the Lord’ spoken of by Malachi is not the first, but the second coming of Christ. To prepare the people of God for His second coming, the Lord will again raise up the prophetic ministry with the spirit and power of Elijah. Throughout the earth, the message of repentance and restoration will prepare the Church for the glory of the Lord to be revealed! As the hearts of the spiritual fathers and children are turned towards each other, there will be no more schisms, jealousy, pride, or strife among the believers.

The body of Christ will be united to strengthen itself and arise to full maturity, conformed to the glorious image of Christ.

As the Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:12-14, the ministers (or spiritual fathers) will labor, *“For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”* The Body of Christ will arise to full maturity and the glory of God will be revealed! Every believer will obtain the hope of the Christian. Christ in you (which is presently only our hope of glory) shall become Christ revealed in glory, throughout eternity, in the life of each redeemed saint! Towards this vision may we each fully dedicate our lives to the Lord. Through His wisdom may each one of us also prepare for a speedy and abundant entrance into the glorious hope of the Christian.

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ...For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.”

- Romans 11:33, 36